Tourism Certification and Community-based Ecotourism as Tools for Promoting Sustainability in the Greek Tourism Sector - the example of Zagori

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Submitted by: Athanasia Drakopoulou
6 Kitheronos Str.
145 78 Ekali
Athens, Greece
athanasia.drakopoulou.089@student.lu.se

Supervisor: Dr. Stefan Gössling
Department of Services Management
Lund University
Helsinborg, Sweden
stefan.gossling@msm.hbg.lu.se


www.wwf.gr
ABSTRACT

Tourism certification has attracted a great deal of attention during the past few years both within the academic community and the tourism industry. Although it is mostly used as a voluntary mechanism, it is regarded as one of the most promising of its kind. Notwithstanding, the potential benefits of certification for achieving sustainability in tourism should not be overestimated. Moreover, community-based ecotourism is often praised for the significant benefits it delivers to local people and is considered as a form of small-scale development which complies with the fundamental principles of sustainability. This, however, does not imply that careful and integrated planning and management are not necessary for the success of any ecotourism project. This paper focuses on the issues of tourism certification and community-based ecotourism and examines whether and under what conditions these tools can help promote sustainable tourism development in Greece.

Keywords: community-based ecotourism, sustainable tourism, tourism certification, tourism ecolabels, Greece
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH METHODS USED ..................................4

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT TOURISM IN GREECE - STRATEGIC WEAKNESSES OF THE GREEK TOURISM AND LIMITING FACTORS FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY ........................................5

3. DEFINITION AND DISCUSSION OF BASIC CONCEPTS .....................8

4. OVERVIEW AND ASSESSMENT OF THREE REPRESENTATIVE CERTIFICATION SCHEMES FOR TOURISM - WHICH COULD SERVE AS A MODEL FOR GREECE? ...........................................................................15

5. MAJOR ISSUES RELATED TO COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM 22

6. THE CASE STUDY OF ZAGORI .............................................................25
   6.1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT ZAGORI ..............................................................................................26
   6.2. A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE WWF PLAN FOR ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ZAGORI ..............................................................................................28
   6.3. ASSESSMENT OF THE WWF PLAN AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT ........................................................................................................31
   6.4. CONCLUSIONS AND PROJECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF ZAGORI AS A TOURISM DESTINATION ................................................................................34

7. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION ........................................35

8. LIST OF REFERENCES ...........................................................................38

9. APPENDIXES ......................................................................................43

   I. PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS THROUGH INTERVIEWS: ..................43
   IIA. MAP OF EPIRUS ..............................................................................ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
   IIB. MAP OF ZAGORI ...........................................................................45
   III. CHECKLIST FOR ECOTOURISM PROJECTS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES ..... ERROR! BOOKMARK NOT DEFINED.
1. INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH METHODS USED

During the past few decades, tourism has become one of the world’s most profitable industries but, in the same time, one of the most harmful human activities in terms of environmental degradation. However, tourism itself depends largely on the existence of unspoilt environment, which stresses the growing need for tourism to find more sustainable paths of development in all aspects (environmental, economic and social). This is of even greater significance when it concerns ecologically and culturally sensitive areas, where conventional (mass) tourism\(^1\) has a heavy impact. The growing concern for the adverse environmental effects of mass tourism, coupled with the emergence of alternative forms of tourism such as ecotourism, has initiated an immense debate on whether the latter could, indeed, lead to greater sustainability in the long term. As a matter of fact, ecotourism is an alternative form of tourism that has been constantly gaining ground at a global scale during the past few years. Its fundamental principles refer to minimizing negative impacts on the environment, respecting the local cultures and actively contributing to the economic and social well-being of host communities, as well as conserving the natural environment. Certification within the tourism field, whether referring to conventional tourism, sustainable tourism or ecotourism, is another issue that has attracted a great deal of attention both among tourism experts and the public during the last years. There is, however, some skepticism concerning the tangible benefits that certification can provide in the direction of sustainable tourism development. In fact, even if tourism development within destinations becomes sustainable, the problem of unsustainable transport and traveling to and from these destinations remains unresolved. Although this is a very critical matter in itself, it is outside the scope of this work. The main focus of this paper is the achievement of sustainable tourism development at the local and regional scale and, therefore, the analysis of tourism sustainability issues and concerns on the global level will be left out.

After providing an overview of the current state and particular features of the tourism industry in Greece, two main research objectives can be identified within the scope of this thesis. The first is to analyse a number of representative and well-recognized tourism certification schemes used at the global scale, as well as to come up with the one that would be most appropriate to take as a model for Greece, after considering the special characteristics of the country’s tourism sector. The second objective of this paper is to investigate the concept of community-based ecotourism and its potential to become a driver of tourism sustainability in Greece, which, until today, is a country largely dominated by mass tourism. An example of a rural area in the north-western part of the country (Zagori) will be taken for this purpose. In brief, this paper seeks to investigate whether and how developing community-based ecotourism and certification systems for tourism can be beneficial from the environmental, economic and social point of view.

Different qualitative methods have been used in order to collect the data that will be presented in this paper. In particular, two types of primary research were carried out. The first one comprised six semi-structured interviews with equal number of agencies, companies, organisations and institutions located in Athens and relevant

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\(^1\) The term “mass tourism” denotes “the services – basically accommodation, catering and entertainment – that are low cost and low added value, and that involve poorly educated employees and that freely consume natural resources” (Spilanis & Vayanni, 2004, p.282).
to the issues discussed in this paper\(^2\). During these interviews, a wide range of issues regarding past, present and future tourism development in Greece were raised. The questions posed were open end, but their nature varied according to the type of agency, company or institution they were addressed to in every case. All the interviews were made during the period June - August 2004 and they were conducted in Greek. Also, different methods were used: three of the interviews were conducted electronically and another three were made face-to-face. One of the interviews was conducted through telephone. The interviews that were conducted face-to-face were tape recorded, with the exception of one case where the person interviewed objected to being tape recorded.

The second type of primary research that was undertaken is a case study, based on a four-day visit to the study area (Zagori, 18-21 August 2004). During this visit an extensive semi-structured interview was conducted with the head of the local office of WWF\(^3\). This interview provided important information about the plan for community-based ecotourism development for Zagori, elaborated by the national office of WWF in Greece (WWF-Greece). In particular, the interview was based on a large number of open end questions, covering both the current status of tourism in Zagori and the aforementioned plan for ecotourism development. The interview was conducted in Greek was tape recorded. Finally, photographic material from the study area was gathered by the author. In addition to the primary research, a comprehensive review of relevant literature sources has been conducted in order to provide the background information that will constitute the theoretical framework of this paper.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT TOURISM IN GREECE - STRATEGIC WEAKNESSES OF THE GREEK TOURISM AND LIMITING FACTORS FOR ACHIEVING SUSTAINABILITY

Tourism constitutes one of the most significant and potent sectors of the Greek economy. This is not only due to the considerable inflow of foreign currency that is connected with tourism, but also to the contribution of tourism to the country’s overall development, both on central and peripheral level (SETE\(^4\), 1998). In fact, tourism is, currently, one of the most essential components of the Greek national economy, accounting roughly for 8% of the country’s GDP (Greek National Tourism Organization, 2002). The World Travel & Tourism Council (WTTC) calculations about the contribution of the tourism industry to the Greek GDP are more moderate; in particular, the WTTC (2004) has estimated it to be 5.7% for the year 2004. According to the same source, 16.5% of the total employment in Greece (or 1 in every 6.1 jobs) is currently related to tourism. Moreover, the WTTC forecasts that the tourism demand in Greece will rise by 4.5% annually during the next decade. Despite the apparent importance of tourism for the Greek economy, a number of serious problems are connected with the tourism sector in Greece and these will be discussed in detail as follows.

Tourism in Greece is highly seasonal, since most international tourists (35-40%) visit the country in July or August and the high (peak) tourism season lasts for three months (Tsartas, 2004). This fact also explains why most hotels in Greece only

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\(^2\) For more details concerning the interviewed agencies and organisations see Appendix I, p.43.

\(^3\) For more details concerning the interviewed agencies and organisations see Appendix I, p.43.

\(^4\) Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises
operate for six months every year (Buhalis, 1999, as cited in Bramwell, 2004). High tourism seasonality can be largely attributed to the fact that tourism in the Mediterranean, in general, has been strongly linked to the “sea, sand and sun tourism”\(^5\) and the demand for this type of tourism occurs, naturally, during the summer months. This, however, implies that the Greek tourism product is one-dimensional and results in a “tourism monoculture” (Greek National Tourism Organisation, 2002). In ecological terms, this may have a positive impact, especially for the heavily visited ecosystems that, during the low season (October – April) are given the opportunity to rest and recover from the massive concentration of tourists experienced during the high season (May – September) (Swarbrooke, 1999; Bramwell, 2004). None the less, tourism seasonality is very inefficient from the economic point of view, since it takes longer to achieve full return of the investments made in tourism infrastructure (Swarbrooke, 1999). In addition to the high seasonality of tourism in Greece, spatial concentration patterns are also very unequal. More specifically, the greatest tourist activity is focused on the insular and coastal areas (Bramwell, 2004). This unequal spatial distribution of tourism leads to a similarly unequal pattern of infrastructure development. As a result, two extreme situations can be encountered in Greece: certain areas, particularly coastal and insular, are saturated with tourism activity and infrastructure, while other areas, especially rural and mountainous, suffer from underdevelopment and abandonment (Greek National Tourism Organization, 2002).

In many cases it could be argued that the tourism development mistakes of the past are still noticeable in the present. Actually, the fast and intense tourism development that occurred in Greece in the past decades was often not coupled with adequate development of public infrastructure and was not accompanied by proper planning and management policies. The inadequacy of planning and management, together with the inefficiency of the enforcement mechanisms has generated a series of problems in the Greek tourism sector (Buhalis & Diamantis, 2001). In particular, transportation, telecommunication systems, police and health services, water supply and sewage systems are inefficient and unable to satisfy tourism demand during the summer months, when tourism concentration reaches its peak (Konsolas & Zacharatos, 1993, as cited in Buhalis, 2001).

According to Buhalis & Diamantis (2001), the inconsistent political approach has been, so far, the principal obstacle in the process of developing a competitive tourism product in Greece. This is mostly due to the fact that tourism has been often used in the past by various governments as a means for accomplishing their goals and exerting political pressure. This lack of political commitment has led to the adoption of highly inconsistent tourism measures and regulations that changed together with the political leadership, resulting, thus, in general confusion and incompetence of tourism policies. In this sense, tourism patterns adopted in Greece for the past decades were largely driven by political interests, lobbying and short-term profitability and failed to establish a long-term vision for sustainable tourism development (Buhalis, 2001).

An additional problem closely linked to the prevailing model of mass tourism development in Greece that dominated for decades is the increasing pressure for construction of buildings that are intended for use as hotels, restaurants and other tourism facilities. These constructions often ignore the existing land-use and urban planning regulations and tend to expand in an anarchic way, thus creating a mixed and

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\(^5\) Also known as “the 3S tourism”
overcrowded built environment that often lacks aesthetics (Tsartas, 2004). Further, the tourism industry in Greece is largely comprised of small and medium-sized tourism enterprises (SMTEs). These tend to deliver low quality tourism services in an effort to minimize their operational costs (Hatzidakis, 2004, personal communication). For instance, they often employ unspecialized and inexperienced personnel, mostly family members that lack or have very limited training skills, knowledge and competence (Buhalis, 2001).

Moreover, the extensive degradation of the natural environment constituted an inevitable side-effect of the rapid mass tourism development that occurred during the past decades. This model of anarchic tourism development, combined with the high seasonality of the tourism demand as well as the spatial overconcentration in certain areas, has extremely negative repercussions on the natural resources of the country, especially in the most popular tourism destinations. In these areas, inappropriate waste management and excessive use of natural resources constitute the most significant factors of environmental degradation. Other significant sources of environmental damage are connected with coastal pollution, sewage treatment, traffic congestion and noise pollution. These issues are largely generated by the structural problems discussed above and have their roots in poor planning and management (Buhalis, 2001).

To date, the Greek tourism industry has shown little will to undertake voluntary initiatives and the improvement of its environmental performance still relies heavily on governmental control. For instance, the adoption of ecolabels for tourism in Greece has been rather disappointing until now. Many hotels tend to implement some kind of environmental-friendly practices, such as the use of energy-saving light bulbs or appliances, because of their direct financial payoff (Chatziathanassiou et al., 2004). Likewise, the use of water-saving devices has increased significantly in the accommodation sector in Greece. Nevertheless, the number of hotels that have put in place an integrated strategy for improving their environmental performance as a whole is still very limited, with the exception of few large hotel chains, such as Grecotel (Valerga, 2004, personal communication). The main reasons responsible for this seem to be the failure of small and medium-size hotels in Greece to perceive the consequences of their activity in the long run, their ignorance with regard to the existing “green” practices, as well as the cost of implementation of such practices (Chatziathanassiou et al., 2004).

In total, perhaps the weakest point of the Greek tourism is that it has become entirely reliant on the “sea, sand and sun” model that Greece has adopted during the past decades. This has led to a very limited diversification of the experience that is offered to tourists and, hence, to a loss of its appeal, especially within the context of international tourism market that tends to become more diversified and competitive (Greek National Tourism Organization, 2002). In other words, the intense competition that is developed among different regions of Greece that are offering the same or similar type of tourism, as well as the competition with other countries providing a very similar product (such as other Mediterranean countries) is largely responsible for the decrease of Greece’s popularity as an international tourism destination. Moreover, the identification of tourism in Greece with a cheap and unsophisticated destination has been detrimental for the image of the country abroad. For these reasons, the potential and competitiveness of the Greek tourism industry in the future is highly doubtful if it continues on the same path of development (Buhalis & Diamantis, 2001; Tsartas, 2004). In other words, unless a number of critical issues are addressed
and tackled immediately, the future of tourism in Greece becomes highly questionable and this might have disastrous consequences for the Greek economy (Buhalis, 2001).

The aforementioned problems have generated an extremely harsh critique against the prevailing policy of tourism development that was followed in Greece for decades, not only by tourism experts but also by the Greek public. The most important points of this critique referred to the inadequacy of the State to set limits to and manage the growth of mass tourism, the increasing dissatisfaction of people because of the numerous local problems created by mass tourism and the fact that tourism planning and development in Greece has, so far, failed to include alternative forms of tourism such as ecotourism. This growing critique has stressed the need to implement more diversified and sustainable patterns of tourism development in Greece. In fact, during recent years, the focus of tourism development policies has been expanded, in an attempt to provide support (both in financial and institutional terms) to small-scale tourism development on the local and regional level throughout the country (Mintsidi, 2004; Papantou, 2004, personal communications). Moreover, new tourism products other than mass tourism are gradually being integrated in the official tourism planning (Greek National Tourism Organization, 2002). This, nevertheless, does not imply that the focus has been - or is expected in the near future to be - entirely shifted away from the development of mass tourism, since the latter is still one of the major sources of revenue for the Greek economy. The pressure for tourism development in the conventional sense continues to be high; hence the crucial point is how to develop tourism in a way that takes into more consideration the issue of sustainability.

In this context, the development of ecotourism in Greece constitutes one of the major challenges for the country’s future as a tourism destination. This is because ecotourism is not only perceived as a tool for reinforcing conservation of vulnerable ecosystems, but also as a means of relieving the intense tourism pressure exerted on coastal and insular destinations. In addition, ecotourism together with rural tourism, is perceived as a potential solution to the problem of depopulation of the rural and mountainous regions of the country (Mintsidi, 2004; Papantou, 2004, personal communications). Finally, another critical issue that Greece, as a tourism destination, is facing at the moment is the introduction of certification for tourism products and services as a means of exerting some control on the performance and quality of tourism services and facilities (Drakopoulos, 2004; Hatzidakis, 2004, personal communications). This matter will be discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

3. DEFINITION AND DISCUSSION OF BASIC CONCEPTS

In order to approach in depth the concepts of sustainable tourism and ecotourism, which are of major interest within the scope of this paper, it is vital to begin by presenting their most relevant definitions and clarifying them, as these particular concepts are often a source of confusion. This is because the concepts of sustainable tourism and ecotourism might share some common characteristics, especially when compared to mass tourism, but they also have substantial differences (Dawson, 2001).

An important concern within the actual context of tourism development is sustainability. Yet, this has not always been the case, as tourism in earlier times was not considered as detrimental for the environment as other human activities (Garrod and Fyall, 1998). The concept of “sustainable tourism” is closely linked to that of sustainable development, which was recognized for the first time in the Rio
Conference in 1992. In fact, “sustainable tourism” is a term used to denote the adoption of the principles of sustainable development by the tourism sector (Fennel, 2002). In this sense, it could be argued that “sustainable tourism refers to meeting the needs and rights of present tourists and host communities and regions, while protecting and enhancing opportunities for the future” (Bendell & Font, 2004, p. 25). According to Toth (2002), “sustainable tourism is about creating a balance between social, environmental, cultural and economic interests” (p.75). The notion of sustainable tourism, hence, encompasses three dimensions, namely environmental conservation, economic efficiency and social equity, as illustrated in figure 1:

![Fig. 1 The three aspects of tourism sustainability](Source: Swarbrooke, 1999)

Although these are all of equal importance, the first dimension is the one most often discussed by researchers whereas the other two are given less attention. This is especially the case when environmentalists and conservationists are called to define sustainable tourism (Sirakaya et al., 1999). Moreover, according to Beioley (1995, as cited in Hobson & Essex, 2001), sustainable tourism can be recognized by four essential features: first, the integration of the economic, social and cultural interests of host communities; second, the consideration of the local environment’s potential to regenerate itself; third, the minimization of its impact in terms of natural resource depletion and pollution; and finally, the provision of meaningful and rewarding experiences to the tourists.

Other authors, though, claim that more emphasis should be given to identifying the necessary conditions that will help implement sustainable tourism in practice than to merely defining it (Garrod & Fyall, 1998). Indeed, sustainability has become an attractive ideal for both tourism scientists and consumers but its operational details, principles and objectives still remain vague and far from providing a sustainable tourism model that could be practically applicable and viable (McCool, 1995; McMinn, 1997). This is largely due to the fact that the tourism industry is far too diverse to develop a set of sustainable tourism performance criteria that is both applicable at the global scale and meaningful in the same time (Hobson & Essex, 2001; Bendell & Font, 2004).
Many scholars have also attempted to define ecotourism, which explains the large number of definitions given by different scholars so far. In earlier years there has been some uncertainty and confusion regarding both the definition of ecotourism and its fundamental principles (Diamantis, 1998). Some scholars contend that this confusion in defining ecotourism and its principles with accuracy is an important limiting factor for the growth of the ecotourism industry on the global level (Herbig & O’Hara, 1997). Perhaps, the most quoted definition of ecotourism is the one that was provided by Ceballos – Lascurain in 1987 (as quoted in Diamantis, 2004, p.5):

“Ecotourism is traveling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations (both past and present) found in these areas”. In addition, Wight (1993) has described ecotourism as “the tourism activities that are conducted in harmony with nature, as opposed to more traditional, mass tourism activities” (as quoted in Hawkins & Khan, 1998, p.191).

Another widely accepted definition of ecotourism is also the following: “Ecotourism is responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and sustains the well-being of local people” (The International Ecotourism Society Website, consulted on 3/11/2004). Finally, the Worldwide Fund for Nature (WWF) has provided a definition for ecotourism that is developed within or near protected areas: “Ecotourism is tourism within nature that, in contrast with mass tourism, does not exceed the carrying capacity of the area in which it is developed, while at the same time promotes the conservation of natural and cultural environment and helps sustain social cohesion” (WWF-Greece, 2000, p.12).

Although there are some differences in the way various scholars perceive the meaning of ecotourism, most researchers generally agree that ecotourism has three main pillars, namely it is “nature-based, environmentally educated and sustainably managed” (Blamley, 2001, p.6). In addition, a feature that is common in most definitions of ecotourism is that it encompasses both a strong commitment to the natural environment and a sense of social responsibility towards host communities. In this sense, ecotourism relies on the wise management and controlled use of natural and cultural resources. It also enhances the interaction between people (tourists as well as local inhabitants) and the natural environment and encourages the cooperation between visitors and locals for nature conservation purposes (Sirakaya et al., 1999).

However, there is an ongoing debate within the academic community on what constitutes the fundamental target of ecotourism. According to Orams (1995), for instance, the main goal of ecotourism should be prompting tourists to become active contributors to the health and viability of the natural environment they visit, instead of simply mitigating their adverse environmental impact. Scheyvens (1999), on the other hand, claims that the principal aim of ecotourism should be the empowerment of host communities, whereas some others consider the contribution of ecotourism to biodiversity conservation to be the most crucial element of all (Brandon & Margoluis, 1996).

Regardless of the definition that is adopted, the fact is that ecotourism has generated a great deal of interest within the academic community, as well as among the consumers (Fennel, 2002). This, according to some scholars, reflects the growing concern of tourists all around the world about the natural environment as they become increasingly aware of the heavy environmental impacts generated by the traditional

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6 By the term “carrying capacity” is generally implied “the existence of fixed and determinable limits to development and that if one stays below those threshold levels no changes or deterioration will occur” (Murphy, 1998, pp. 180-181).
forms of tourism (Hawkins & Khan, 1998). Actually, the idea of combining tourism in high-quality natural environments with protecting them has become widely accepted and marketable at the same time (Orams, 1995). Over the last few years, the increased interest for ecotourism has turned out to be one of the most significant challenges to the tourism sector. This became apparent when the demand of a part of consumers began to shift away from mass tourism and move towards new forms of more individualistic tourism experiences (Diamantis, 1998). During recent years, especially, ecotourism has been constantly gaining in popularity and this could be linked to the emergence of the new environmental paradigm during the ‘70s. As a matter of fact, some scholars, such as Lindberg & Huber (1993), argue that ecotourism has the potential to become an important instrument for both nature conservation and economic development at the same time.

This enthusiasm, nevertheless, is not shared by other experts, who express their skepticism about viewing ecotourism as a panacea (Ceballos-Lascuráin, 1996). Indeed, it would be erroneous to consider ecotourism as a remedy for all the problems generated by mass tourism, because ecotourism is not necessarily less detrimental for the environment than any other form of tourism. Actually, the risk of current ecotourism becoming the future mass tourism should not be disregarded (Swarbrooke, 1999). Moreover, ecotourism is often developed within or nearby protected areas, which then suffer from increasing pressure generated by tourism activities. This is the paradox of ecotourism, namely the fact that the more popular an ecotourism destination becomes, the more the environment on which it depends is damaged (Lawrence et al., 1997). Consequently, it is crucial to view ecotourism in its true dimensions, so as neither to exaggerate its potential benefits nor to underestimate its potential risks. After all, the development of ecotourism, like all other forms of tourism, also requires careful planning and constant monitoring in order to lead to the desirable results (WWF-International, 2001).

A critical point that distinguishes the concepts of sustainable tourism and ecotourism is that the former is much broader than the latter, since sustainable tourism concerns the tourism industry as a whole and not a special part of it. This can also be easily seen in figure 2:

![Fig. 2 The position of ecotourism within the tourism products spectrum](Source: Diamantis, 2004)
In addition, sustainable tourism covers all kinds of areas and landscapes (both urban and rural) and calls for changes in tourists’ attitude both at home and in the places visited. On the other hand, ecotourism is based on observing and experiencing the natural environment and, therefore, it can only be developed in strong connection with natural landscapes. Ecotourism constitutes, hence, the form of tourism that aims not only at minimizing its negative impact on the places visited, but also at participating in local conservation efforts and promoting the socio-economic well-being of local communities (Hawkins & Khan, 1998).

In general terms, ecotourism is considered as a form of sustainable tourism from all viewpoints, through the promotion of environmental conservation, community development and profit-making for the tourism industry. Notwithstanding, this is not necessarily the case, because although the net effect of ecotourism might in the end be positive for nature, local communities, the tourism industry as well as the consumers, the actual process of developing ecotourism is not free from negative impacts (Sirakaya et al., 1999). Small-scale ecotourism, on the other hand, is thought to be able to minimize or even avoid most negative effects, provided that it is carefully planned and managed in all the phases of its development (WWF-International, 2001).

Still, one can not neglect the fact that even if a destination is adequately managed, some major problems will remain (Gössling, 1999). In reality, all kinds of tourism, including ecotourism, are responsible for a wide range of detrimental effects on the natural environment, which is especially alarming when protected areas or other vulnerable ecosystems are involved (Buckley, 2004). Growing evidence from scientific research suggests that wildlife can be heavily disturbed or even irreversibly damaged by ecotourists who wish to watch it or pursue it very closely (Macleod, 1998). Despite such negative issues, though, the overall impact of ecotourism can be positive both in terms of environmental conservation and economic benefits for the host communities (Herbig & O’Hara, 1997).

As already mentioned, ecotourism should not be considered as equal to sustainable tourism, but rather as one of its components (Dawson, 2001). Ecotourism, in other terms, is not a panacea for environmental conservation, nor can it on its own liberate local communities from poverty. In fact, unless ecotourism is well planned and constantly monitored, it might even achieve the opposite results, namely placing even heavier pressure on the environment and exacerbating local inhabitants’ poverty (WWF-International, 2001). In contrast, if ecotourism is perceived as part of a general strategy for sustainable development, then it truly has the potential to contribute to the protection of natural environment and promote the socio-economic well-being of host communities (Muller, 2000).

There is a strong link between ecotourism and certification since the second is viewed as an important instrument for setting standards for the first (Honey & Stewart, 2002). According to Font & Bendell (2002), certification is “the process by which third-party assessment is undertaken, written assurance is given that the product, process, service or management system conforms to the standard” (as quoted in Sallows & Font, 2004, pp.92-93). Honey & Stewart (2002) also describe certification as “the procedure that audits and gives written assurance that a facility, product, process, service or management system meets specific standards. It awards a logo or seal to those that meet or exceed baseline criteria or standards that are prescribed by the program” (pp.4-5). During the past few years, certification schemes have become very popular because of their advantages for both the tourism industry and consumers; from one side, the tourism industry can minimize
governmental control by increasing self-regulation, while, from the other side, consumers are provided with useful information concerning certified tourism products and services (Issaverdis, 2001). Due to these reasons, the concept of certification has attracted significant attention both within the academic community and the tourism industry and has generated general optimism with regard to its potential to help achieve sustainability in the tourism sector (Fennel, 2002).

In particular, certification is believed to have the potential to decrease the adverse environmental and social impacts of tourism, by making the tourism industry assume its responsibilities and by providing marketing benefits to companies that meet specific standards (Font et al., 2003). However, one of the most important limiting factors for the widespread success of certification programmes is their relatively poor uptake by the tourism industry worldwide (Synergy, 2000 for WWF-UK). Further, the success of tourism certification in many countries, Greece not being an exception, depends largely on governmental support in terms of funding, assessment and recognition (Valerga, 2004, personal communication). Actually, it has been estimated that without such support from the State, two-thirds of tourism certification schemes would not even manage to survive, let alone be successful (Font & Bendell, 2002, as cited in Bendell & Font, 2004). This is because the relatively high costs make certification unequally accessible to different tourism companies. As a result, there are certain cases where the cost of certification might even become prohibitive, particularly in countries that do not have a national certification program in place (Sasidharan et al., 2002).

In total, certification constitutes an effective mechanism for the companies that wish to demonstrate high standards of performance beyond legislation, as well as a marketing advantage that allows them to stand out from the average and become more competitive. In this sense, certification is a valid instrument for defining new ways that will contribute to raising tourism standards and thus advancing towards the direction of more sustainable tourism. Some researchers contend, though, that certification is more adequate in certain cases than in others. In particular, it is a tool mostly appropriate for countries that already possess a well-established infrastructure and strong economic background in order to support and promote certification effectively. It is also an instrument especially suited for economically potent companies that wish to move beyond the level of basic needs, by incorporating sustainability concerns and enhancing their market profile (Font, 2004).

Although in some cases the terms “accreditation” and “certification” are perceived as synonymous and are used interchangeably, which only adds to the already existing confusion (Font, 2002), most experts agree that there is a clear distinction between them; in particular, the term “accreditation” is defined as “the procedure by which an authoritative body formally recognizes that a certifier is competent to carry out specific tasks. In other words, an accreditation programme certifies the certifiers” (Honey & Stewart, 2002, pp. 5-6). Another definition of the same term is provided by Bendell and Font (2004): “accreditation is the process of assessing the capacity to certify. Accreditation bodies audit the auditors and their capacity to certify companies and/or products. […] Through accreditation, certification entities can demonstrate their capacity to undertake certification and, thus, build credibility around their systems” (p. 47).

It is believed that accreditation could provide a viable solution to the confusion generated by the increasing number of certification schemes on the global level. In particular, an internationally recognised accreditation system could set global standards for making different certification programmes comparable, as well as for
creating a stronger brand that is able not only to survive but also to become meaningful and reliable for tourists all around the world (Synergy, 2000 for WWF-UK; Font, 2002).

Similarly to the definition of “tourism certification”, the term “tourism ecolabelling” refers to the creation of a certification process to be applied in the tourism sector (Diamantis & Westlake, 2001). The main objective of tourism ecolabelling is to highlight best practices in products and services within the tourism sector. Tourism ecolabels can be divided in two main categories: environmental quality labels concerning tourism destinations and environmental performance labels concerning tourism providers. Only a limited number of labels cover both categories (Buckley, 2001). In this regard, tourism ecolabelling schemes are useful because they have the potential to educate consumers and help them select tourism products that cause minimal environmental degradation. Nevertheless, some scientific evidence indicates that increased environmental education and awareness of consumers is not necessarily translated into environmentally responsible purchasing behavior (Hemmelskamp & Brockmann, 1997, as cited in Sasidharan et al., 2002).

It has been suggested that tourism ecolabels, in general, constitute one of the most promising types of voluntary initiatives, especially for small and medium-sized tourism enterprises that wish to adopt the best technical solutions available, in order to prevent or reduce their environmental impact (Chatziathanassiou et al., 2004). Actually, compared to other forms of voluntary instruments such as codes of conduct, ecolabels are considered to be more credible because the performance of ecolabelled products is assessed and verified by independent parties (Lee, 2001). When ecolabelling is adopted on a voluntary basis, it is thought to have much better results in achieving long-term commitment and improvement of the tourism industry compared with regulations and economic instruments (Hamele, 2001). Notwithstanding, ecolabels are believed to deliver the maximum possible benefit in terms of effectiveness when they are used in combination with regulations as part of a more general plan (Buckley, 2002).

Ecolabels, in addition, constitute an effective tool for the tourism industry to inform tourists about environmental issues; hence their primary role is to act as a market mechanism that influences consumers’ choice. In particular, the main target of ecolabels is to gather and summarize information about the environmental performance of different products and services into an easily recognizable and understandable symbol. Yet, the extent to which ecolabels will eventually be influential to the consumers’ choice may vary significantly because it depends on several factors, such as what is perceived by the consumers as an environmental priority or their concern about tourism impacts on the environment (Buckley, 2002). In general terms, though, ecolabels have the potential to influence the international trends of tourism demand. In fact, there is growing evidence from consumer research indicating that environmentally responsible tourists are willing to pay more for purchasing an ecolabelled tourism product or service that can help minimize their negative impact on the environment (Mihalić, 2001). Another significant benefit related to the use of ecolabels is that they help limit consumption of natural resources such as water and energy, while at the same time reducing the operational costs of tourism enterprises. This gives ecolabels a double role, namely that of a marketing and an environmental management tool. In addition, what is also of crucial

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7 In reality, there is no substantial difference between the terms “tourism certification” and “tourism ecolabelling” and therefore, they will be used interchangeably from now on.
importance is their ability to raise environmental awareness among all stakeholders within the tourism sector (Hamele, 2001).

Yet, the effectiveness of tourism ecolabels remains fairly low to date because tourism certification in its current form is still largely “resource-based and incentive-led and not market-led” (Font, 2004, p.7). In other terms, this means that ecolabels can only have a widespread impact in changing companies’ behaviour patterns once the core group of these companies has become large enough. Moreover, ecolabels have been accused by the tourism industry of being extremely costly. This is a major problem especially for developing countries that have little economic potential to support ecolabelling as part of their national strategy. Thus, small and medium tourism companies which operate in developing countries and wish to be certified, have no other option than raising the prices of their tourism services and products. This, none the less, results in benefiting unlabelled products and services or large multinational tourism firms that can afford ecolabelling without transferring the extra costs to consumers (Sasidharan et al., 2002).

Another problem often mentioned when discussing tourism ecolabelling is that it is almost entirely focused on hotels and pays little attention to other types of tourism enterprises (Synergy, 2000 for WWF-UK). In addition, it is often argued that even though most ecolabels declare protection of the natural environment to be a priority, there is little evidence proving that this is really the case (Font, 2001). Finally, some scholars regard the constantly growing number of ecolabelling programmes of varying scope, criteria and contents at the global scale as a source of customer confusion, which seriously undermines their potential (Synergy, 2000 for WWF-UK; Font, 2002).

4. OVERVIEW AND ASSESSMENT OF THREE REPRESENTATIVE CERTIFICATION SCHEMES FOR TOURISM - WHICH COULD SERVE AS A MODEL FOR GREECE?

Over the past few years, various schemes for the certification of the environmental performance of tourism enterprises have been developed, most of them in Europe. The vast majority of these schemes concern the accommodation sector, yet very few of them have been designed for ecotourism certification in particular. Although they can be a useful tool for ecotourism planning and management, their value is very often exaggerated, resulting in the common misconception that certification schemes are the only path to sustainable tourism (Sallows & Font, 2004).

Actually, certification should not be regarded as the ultimate goal; it rather constitutes a mechanism which can only work properly when combined with sound governmental policies in terms of planning and monitoring. When these elements are lacking, then certification programmes in general deliver very poor results (Toth, 2002). A relevant example of a tourism certification scheme that has been particularly successful thanks to active governmental support and involvement is the case of the CST programme in Costa Rica, which will be discussed later in this chapter. Evidence indicates that the CST program is strongly supported by the general regulatory environment existing in Costa Rica and that lack of this government monitoring would greatly lower participation in the CST. This implies that, traditional mandatory mechanisms should be used in other cases as well, in order to encourage the adoption of voluntary initiatives within the tourism industry (Rivera, 2002).
In an attempt to acquire a deeper understanding of tourism certification schemes, three well-known and representative programmes will be analysed as follows. Obviously, the vast number of certification schemes for tourism makes it impossible to discuss all of them. The selection that was made covers three different certification programmes that operate either at the international or national scale and concern different types of tourism. More specifically, an international certification scheme for conventional tourism (“Green Globe 21”)\(^8\) will be analysed first. A national certification programme for ecotourism and nature-based tourism will follow (Australian “NEAP”)\(^9\) and the analysis will be concluded with a national certification scheme for sustainable tourism (Costa Rican “CST”)\(^10\). Although it would be very interesting to compare these also with a supranational certification scheme such as the “EU-flower”, this will be avoided as the latter is used to certify a wide variety of products and services outside the tourism field as well, therefore it is not so relevant and comparable with the other three certification programmes discussed.

Green Globe 21 is an international process-based certification scheme based upon the environmental management system ISO 14001. The Green Globe 21 programme applies both to tourism organisations and destinations. Its primary objective is to provide its members with a certificate that proves their compliance with specific standards of environmental performance. The programme is open to all kinds and sizes of companies within the travel and tourism sector, as well as to hosting communities and protected areas. This scheme allows companies involved in conventional tourism, as well as hosting communities and protected areas, to obtain stepwise three different types of recognition, each one marked with a slightly different label. More specifically, the first level is affiliation, the second level is benchmarking and the final one is certifying. Affiliation is the first step for entering the programme but it does not require any actual commitment for improving environmental performance at this stage. The second level presupposes the preparation of a report on environmental performance and, at this point, the company/destination is entitled to use the “Green Globe 21 Logo” for the first time. The third level is reached after a thorough environmental performance assessment has been successfully carried out by an independent body. At this stage, every participant receives the Green Globe 21 Logo with an added tick and, from that moment, is required to undergo an annual review in order to maintain the acquired certification (Eagles et al., 2002; Griffin & DeLacey, 2002; Green Globe 21 Certification Programme Website, consulted on 3/11/2004). The different Green Globe 21 logos are presented in figure 3:

![Fig.3 The three labels awarded by the Green Globe 21 certification programme](Source: Green Globe 21 Certification Programme Website)

\(^8\)Green Globe 21 is currently undergoing major changes; hence assessment of its actual form would be impossible. Due to this reason, the former version of the programme (valid until the year 2001) will be discussed and evaluated.

\(^9\)Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme

\(^{10}\)Certification for Sustainable Tourism
It should be noted that a company/destination does not necessarily need to go through the entire procedure described above; alternatively, it is possible to enter the programme at the benchmarking, or even at the certification level. After a company or community has gone through all the aforementioned levels, regular assessment and auditing is carried out in order to make sure that high standards of performance are maintained in the long run (Eagles et al., 2002; Griffin & DeLacey, 2002; Green Globe 21 Certification Programme Website, consulted on 3/11/2004).

Evaluating the “Green Globe 21” certification scheme would be a rather ambitious task after only few years of its full operation, however, it is rather obvious that the “Green Globe 21” scheme is nowadays probably “the most global, cross-sectoral approach to industry self-regulation thus far attempted” (Griffin & DeLacey, 2002, p. 77). Actually, Green Globe 21 constitutes the largest network in the field and practically the only tourism certification scheme with a truly international coverage, although its market penetration to date remains limited (Font, 2002).

Yet, several scholars express their reserves with regard to the success of this particular scheme, mainly for two reasons: firstly, the benefits that are offered might not be attractive enough for the companies/destinations to be certified with the “Green Globe” and, secondly because in reality it might be unable to achieve any actual improvement of environmental performance. The participation of the industry is, largely, a matter of the perceived benefits from the certification with “Green Globe 21” (Griffin & DeLacey, 2002).

A feature of the Green Globe 21 programme that has both positive and negative aspects is that this particular certification scheme is designed with the perspective to cover all kinds of tourism at the global scale. From one side, this has given the Green Globe 21 logo a very high level of industry recognition and acceptance worldwide (Buckley, 2002). Yet, from the other side the technical information communicated to the public is very basic and not detailed enough for the consumers to have a clear idea on what the logo means in every case. Furthermore, Green Globe 21 seems to be rather lax in its entry requirements due to its ambition to cover the entire tourism industry and the maximum possible destinations throughout the world, which seriously undermines its value as a tool of consumers’ choice (Buckley, 2001).

In addition, very general ecolabelling schemes such as Green Globe 21 tend to have very limited practical interest for many destinations, which lowers their applicability in those areas (Diamantis & Westlake, 2001). Many tourism experts fear that international certification schemes such as Green Globe 21 are too broad and therefore fail to consider sensitive local and regional issues, unless they are customized to particular areas and activities (Buckley, 2002). Yet, the incorporation of local concerns has been recognized as extremely critical for the development of truly sustainable tourism and, hence, it cannot be overlooked. Local concerns appear to be taken more into consideration by national certification programmes than by international ones (Epler Wood & Halpenny, 2001). These issues are tackled more effectively by national, regional and local certification schemes that have the advantage of deep knowledge of the environmental, socio-economic, political and cultural particularities of every country (Sanabria, 2002). In addition, national certification schemes also tend to have more demands and entry criteria than international ones (UNEP, 1998 as cited in Epler Wood & Halpenny, 2001). Further, the environmental parameters that the Green Globe 21 scheme uses incorporate issues such as energy efficiency and waste management meanwhile other substantial issues
such as land use and biodiversity conservation at the local level are disregarded (Buckley, 2001).

Several important concerns regarding the efficiency of the Green Globe 21 certification programme have also been raised by environmental organisations such as the national office of World Wide Fund for Nature in UK (WWF-UK). In particular, Green Globe 21 has been severely criticized by this NGO for giving companies the right to use its logo simply by committing to establish an environmental management system, but without ensuring that the companies’ environmental performance will indeed be improved. Moreover, the fact that companies that wish to be certified with Green Globe 21 have to demonstrate improvement against their own internal standards only and not against external ones has received heavy criticism, since this does not allow any comparisons between companies certified with Green Globe 21. Another crucial point of the criticism addressed by WWF is the fact that even though the use of slightly different logos at each level of the certification programme can be positive for the tourism industry that is encouraged to gradually conquer higher levels of achievement, it is rather confusing for consumers who can not easily recognize the difference between similar logos. Finally, the high cost that is required for joining Green Globe 21 is a discouraging factor, especially for small and medium-sized tourism enterprises (Synergy, 2000 for WWF-UK).

It is worth mentioning, though, that the harsh criticism that Green Globe 21 received resulted in a general reform of the programme, which in 2001 gave birth to a new Green Globe 21 Standard for Certification. The upgraded Green Globe 21 scheme incorporated much of the existing criticism, which brought about improvement of many previous shortcomings (Koeman et al., 2002). As a result, the programme has gained in the fields of assessment of environmental performance, compliance with high standards and credibility of its processes in general (Griffin & DeLacey, 2002). Still, the true measurement of its success remains its ability to attract companies and destinations that are willing to exceed the stage of affiliation and proceed with benchmarking and certification. Otherwise, if most participants never reach the certification stage, the success of Green Globe 21 becomes highly questionable.

Apart from Green Globe 21, various other programmes have been developed during the past few years globally (Epler Wood & Halpenny, 2001). Especially two national certification programmes stand out and will be discussed as follows: the NEAP in Australia and the CST in Costa Rica. Australia is widely regarded as the international pioneer in the field of ecotourism certification and ecolabelling (Issaverdis, 2001). The Australian NEAP does not provide certification for destinations, nor for entire tourism companies; it is designed to certify only individual tourism products such as tours, accommodation and attractions. Moreover, the Australian NEAP encompasses both performance-based and process-based criteria for certification (Chester & Crabtree, 2002; Australian Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme Website, consulted on 3/11/2004).

Two levels of ecotourism certification are available by the Australian NEAP: “Ecotourism Accreditation”11 and “Advanced Ecotourism Accreditation” (Australian Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme Website, consulted on 3/11/2004). These represent different levels of commitment to sustainable tourism practices and they are also marked with slightly different logos, as shown in figure 4 (next page):

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11 The Australian NEAP uses the term “accreditation” instead of “certification”.

A particularity of the Australian NEAP is the recent introduction of a third category that concerns nature-based tourism operators, thus allowing the official recognition of nature-based, sustainability-oriented services that do not exactly fulfill the strict criteria for ecotourism (Issaverdis, 2001). This new level was introduced with the rationale that all forms of tourism in protected areas, whether they are ecotourism or not, ought to be sustainable. The Australian NEAP can offer certification to three different types of tourism products: tours, attractions and accommodation (Newson & Crabtree, 2001; Australian Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme Website, consulted on 3/11/2004).

The procedure followed by an operator in order to receive accreditation under the Australian NEAP includes both self-assessment and independent assessment. Furthermore, certification is based upon a wide variety of principles, namely “focus on nature, interpretation, ecological sustainability, conservation, local communities, culture, customer satisfaction and responsible marketing” (Chester & Crabtree, 2002, p. 178). After the successful completion of the process, the ecotourism product receives the NEAP certificate for three years, with an engagement for annual renewal (Issaverdis, 2001; Australian Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme Website, consulted on 3/11/2004). NEAP is considered much more efficient than Green Globe 21 in assuring that standards of certain sustainability in ecotourism and nature tourism are indeed met in practice. This is due to the fact that only the companies that can demonstrate compliance with strict environmental performance criteria can be certified under this scheme (Synergy, 2000 for WWF-UK).

Despite the fact that the Australian NEAP is widely acknowledged as one of the most successful ecotourism and nature tourism certification programmes worldwide, there are certain drawbacks to be considered. More specifically, according to Chester & Crabtree (2002), NEAP fails to address in depth a number of serious issues such as monitoring environmental performance, protecting the social structure and rights of host communities, promoting ethical business practices and ensuring fairness of local labour engagement, as well as contributing to the development and maintenance of community infrastructure.

Moving on to the third case, Costa Rica is a very good example of a country that has very successfully invested on its natural environment and has efficiently utilized its natural resources through tourism development (Mercer, 1996). Actually, Costa Rica has developed a viable certification programme as part of the country’s national strategy for the promotion of sustainable tourism patterns. It is a type of voluntary programme based on negotiated agreements between the Costa Rican government and tourism companies. In fact, the CST programme was designed in close collaboration of different stakeholders such as the State, leading academic institutions, representative part of the tourism industry and environmental organizations (Rivera, 2002).
The CST is mainly a performance-based certification system but it also incorporates process-based criteria. The programme consists of five different levels of achievement and a single label, illustrated in figure 5, is awarded to the certified members:

![Label awarded by the Costa Rican CST programme](Source: Costa Rican Certification for Sustainable Tourism Website)

Participation in the CST is voluntary and possible for all types of accommodation, regardless of their size and location, as well as for tour operators. The CST scheme takes into consideration a wide array of sustainability aspects, namely the physical-biological environment, the internal environmental management practices of hotel infrastructure, facilities and services, the interaction with customers and, finally, the socio-economic environment (Costa Rican Certification for Sustainable Tourism Website, consulted on 3/11/2004).

A considerable advantage of the Costa Rican CST is the extensive incorporation of local concerns. This specific programme is particularly sensitive concerning the support of local stakeholders and businesses. Also, issues such as training of local communities, cultural development, promotion of local health and infrastructure are viewed as priorities by the CST scheme. Moreover, the Costa Rican CST scheme seems much more extensive in suggesting ways to promote environmental conservation compared with the Green Globe 21 programme (Epler Wood & Halpenny, 2001). Another strong point of this particular programme is that it provides attractive incentives for the companies, including publicity and promotion both on the national and international level, personnel training and participation to events related to tourism. (Costa Rican Certification for Sustainable Tourism Website, consulted on 3/11/2004).

As mentioned previously, the introduction of tourism certification constitutes, currently, one of the most discussed and controversial issues among tourism agencies and institutions in Greece. Several agencies and organisations are favorable to the prospect of introducing tourism certification (Drakopoulos, 2004; Mintsidi, 2004, personal communications). This, none the less, is practically feasible only if the State decides to actively support certification as part of a serious and consistent governmental policy (Drakopoulos, 2004; Valerga, 2004, personal communications). In contrast, other agencies and institutions in Greece seem more skeptical with regard to introducing tourism certification in Greece. According to their perception, tourism certification is not likely to deliver the desirable results unless it is preceded by an overall change in mentality, which implies integrating codes of ethics in tourism, as well as fostering a sense of environmental and social responsibility in the Greek tourism industry (Petropoulos, 2004; Tziovas, 2004, personal communications).

Out of the three tourism certification schemes that have been discussed in this chapter, namely Green Globe 21, NEAP and CST, the one most appropriate to serve
as a model for Greece is perhaps the system of Costa Rica (CST). Even though one could easily distinguish that tourism in Costa Rica is largely based on the attraction of wild nature, while in Greece it is almost entirely connected to the “sea, sand and sun” model, the Costa Rican programme could still offer valuable lessons and useful insights for building a national-wide certification programme in Greece. The most important reasons for selecting CST as a model of tourism certification are the following:

1. Greece, like Costa Rica, is a popular destination for international travelers, which makes both countries’ economies largely dependent on tourism. Consequently, tourism sustainability is extremely crucial for the conservation of the rich natural and cultural environment of both Costa Rica and Greece, which will allow them to remain competitive on the global tourism arena in the long term. Developing a certification programme with focus on tourism sustainability is, hence, a high priority for Greece.

2. Tourism in both Costa Rica and Greece is primarily based on small and medium-sized enterprises, as opposed to large hotel chains that dominate the tourism industry of other destinations. Hence, a certification system similar to the Costa Rican CST is less expensive than the entirely EMS-based certification programmes, and therefore is much more affordable for small and medium businesses, that account for the vast majority of the tourism industry in Greece.

3. To date, Greece has practically not developed any real ecotourism and, unless there is a serious and concerted effort from all stakeholders, ecotourism development might still not come to realization for a long period of time in the future. This implies that the ultimate priority for Greece at the moment is developing a certification system that focuses on tourism sustainability rather than on ecotourism. The latter is more specialized and should become a concern only after general tourism sustainability has been attained in the country.

4. It would be unrealistic to imagine that a country like Greece, which has been supporting conventional tourism patterns for decades, could suddenly make a leap to ecotourism certification. It is not surprising that in countries with a long tradition in ecotourism (e.g. Australia) such certification schemes are highly regarded. Nevertheless, Greece still has a long way to go in terms of tourism sustainability and, for this to happen, one step at a time should be taken. In other words, what is urgent at the moment is establishing and implementing more sustainable patterns of tourism development. In this regard, developing a certification scheme for tourism sustainability similar to the Costa Rican CST would be very helpful.

5. The development of a national certification scheme in Greece similar to the CST would be advantageous because it could be effectively combined with a State-run subsidizing programme, in the same way that this operates

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12 Environmental Management System
in Costa Rica. As tourism experts in Greece note (Drakopoulos, 2004; Mintsidi, 2004, personal communications) governmental support constitutes a precondition for certification to be widely adopted by the Greek tourism industry. This is mainly because governmental support has the potential to motivate the large number of small and medium-sized tourism companies that are currently discouraged by the fear of high costs pertaining to certification.

6. The Costa Rican CST scheme is comprehensive but in the same time, easily intelligible by tourism professionals. This is because this particular programme avoids too much technical information that usually deters companies from using it. A similarly clear and understandable certification system would be the most appropriate for Greece, especially since the experience of the Greek tourism industry regarding ecolabelling schemes is very limited to date.

7. The way the CST scheme is organized and promoted makes it easily recognizable by the public. This is mainly due to the fact that, although CST consists of several levels of achievement, only one logo is awarded, which is not the case with Green Globe 21 and NEAP where slightly different logos are awarded at different stages of the certification procedure. A similarly clear-cut way of building and marketing the national certification programme in Greece could be very advantageous in terms of consumer recognition and acceptance, as the average Greek consumer has very little familiarization with tourism certification programmes so far.

5. MAJOR ISSUES RELATED TO COMMUNITY-BASED ECOTOURISM

Before discussing the matter of community-based ecotourism, it is essential to explain the term “community”. According to Joppe (1996), “community” is not always the same as “municipality”; it is a rather wider concept, which implies the existence of shared values and common goals among people as well as collective rights and duties (WWF-International, 2001). In turn, the term “community-based ecotourism” is used to describe the ecotourism ventures that are characterised by high environmental consideration, increased control and involvement of the local residents, as well as significant benefits for the host community (WWF-International, 2001). This concept is clearly distinguished from other ecotourism ventures that are largely or even totally planned and managed by outside operators and generate negligible benefits for local people (Akama, 1996 as cited in Scheyvens, 1999).

The most important reason for the inclusion of local inhabitants in ecotourism is equity, taken into consideration that conservation of the area through ecotourism development inevitably entails restrictions in the traditional usage of local resources by the residents (Eagles et al., 1992 as cited in Lindberg, 1998). In other terms, public participation should be incorporated at all levels of tourism development, from planning to marketing and promotion in order to fulfill the criterion of social sustainability (McCool & Moisey, 2001). If an ecotourism project is to be successful, then community support not only from the financial but also from the political standpoint is essential. In fact, numerous studies indicate the importance of
incorporating the perceptions, values and interests of the local residents when designing and implementing the strategy for viable tourism development in a region (Vincent & Thompson, 2002). The involvement of the locals should be encouraged since the very beginning, by promoting public dialogue and by enabling them to participate in the processes of decision-making and profit-sharing (Diamantis, 2004). This is only possible when ecotourism development planning takes into consideration the views, perceptions and preferences of the local inhabitants (WWF-International, 2001).

In contrast, when local people are not included in ecotourism development projects, these projects are very likely to either fail completely or not succeed to the maximum possible degree, thus remaining far away from the desired sustainability (McCool & Moisey, 2001). Indeed, several studies indicate that when people do not receive sufficient benefits from ecotourism, they are prone to develop a negative attitude towards ecotourism development and oppose to the goals of environmental conservation that are closely linked to ecotourism (Lawton, 2001). This might occur for example when indigenous people, whose survival depends heavily upon the exploitation of natural resources, perceive tourism as a threat that deprives them of their livelihood by competing with them over land and resources (Ross & Wall, n.d.). Revenue sharing, on the other hand, is likely to make local people more supportive to the conservation goals of ecotourism and help eliminate destructive activities such as poaching. However, there is no guarantee that local communities will reduce their consumption of natural resources or other unsustainable activities, even when their income from tourism increases significantly (Gössling, 1999).

Such obstacles to the success of ecotourism can often be overcome by involving local people in planning and management processes, which will give them control over the area’s natural resources. Thus, significant social and economic benefits can be derived from protected areas, provided that they are managed in a way that does not leave out the concerns and interests of the local community (Trakolis, 2001). Greater community involvement is considered to be highly beneficial for the local residents in many different ways. The main underlying concept for the development of community-based ecotourism is the empowerment of local people. In particular, the concept of empowerment of host communities can be divided into four different categories: economic, psychological, social and political. In economic terms, ecotourism generates long-term benefits that are distributed equitably within the host community and can be used for the constant improvement of the community’s infrastructure. Moreover, ecotourism can contribute to the psychological empowerment of the local people by enhancing their sense of self-esteem and by cultivating pride for their cultural and natural heritage. This happens because ecotourism reveals to the public the value of host community in terms of natural beauty or cultural uniqueness. In addition, ecotourism may strengthen social bonds within the community by promoting cooperation among its members. Finally, ecotourism brings about political empowerment, since it creates a forum for the expression of the peoples’ voices concerning issues of local development (Scheyvens, 1999).

Notwithstanding, as shown in figure 6 (next page), the economic benefits derived from ecotourism do not only depend on the tourism spending itself, but also on what part of that money in the end remains inside the area or leaks away from it through the payment of imported goods and services:
Actually, the findings of several studies confirm the fact that the leakage rate can be relatively high, especially in the case of developing countries, thus leaving very low net profits to host communities (Lindberg, 1998). Furthermore, even though the benefits of ecotourism development for local people can be considerable, host communities should not be encouraged to become entirely dependent upon ecotourism or tourism in general. Ecotourism should rather be perceived as one of the components of a broader plan for resource use and as means for further diversifying the communities’ economy (Ross & Wall, n.d.).

From what has been already mentioned, the concept of community-based ecotourism development appears to meet the majority of the targets established in the definition of sustainable tourism, since it constitutes a tool for both social empowerment and long-term economic development of the local communities (WWF-International, 2001). This is even more crucial for small, rural and remote communities that often suffer from the lack of governmental attention and assistance. Self-development through ecotourism is particularly important for these communities, since it gives people the opportunity to utilize their own internal strengths and resources in order to become more self-sufficient (Joppe, 1996).

Increased community involvement, however, does not entail only benefits, but also significant responsibilities for the local community. In this sense, every community should thoroughly examine the potential impacts, both positive and negative, in the stage of planning its ecotourism strategy. This is a fundamental part of every strategy for community-based ecotourism, whether the community is located within or near a protected area and whether tourism is intended to be the main
occupation of the local residents or just a supplementary activity (Eagles & McCool, 2002). After the potential consequences of tourism development have been identified, the tourism development plan should focus on introducing measures and policies that will maximize the positive impacts and minimize the negative ones (WWF-International, 2001). This, though, does not imply that all the potential impacts of tourism development in an area are fully predictable already in the planning process; it rather means that every possible effort should be made in order to come up with an in-depth tourism development strategy that has examined all different sides and aspects of the issue. This is of even greater significance if one takes into account that tourism development in a community located within or close to a protected area will not only affect the community itself, but probably the protected area as well. If this is not adequately considered during tourism planning, then tourism development is likely to alter the original character of the protected area, degrade its environment or even damage it irreversibly (Eagles & McCool, 2002).

In any case, increased involvement of local residents in ecotourism development does not mean that national agencies and regional authorities should not provide them adequate support in terms of organizational skills, funding and technical expertise (King & Stewart, 1996 as cited in Walsh et al., 2001). After all, the responsibility for the preservation of an area’s natural environment should not only concern the local inhabitants; it ought to be an issue of general interest and a field for constructive collaboration between the local community with all the different stakeholders involved, namely the State, the tourism industry and the visitors (Gurung & De Coursey, 1994 as cited in Diamantis, 2004). In fact, Ceballos – Lascuráin (1993) contends that the goals of ecotourism can only be reached through active participation and cooperation of all stakeholders, since they all play decisive roles in the successful development of ecotourism. Hence, although the State is, beyond any doubt, a significant stakeholder in the development of ecotourism, it should leave enough room for the community to become an equal partner when it comes to decision-making and control over local resources (Joppe, 1996).

Finally, it should be noted that communities which are located either within or close to national parks or protected areas constitute special cases when it comes to tourism development and require extremely careful planning and management strategies (WWF-International, 2001). Such communities are, in many cases, isolated from the decision-making process that takes place on national level and they are often confronted with decisions that are made with top-down procedures, thus exacerbating the discontent of the local people. Tourism can then appear as the easiest source of revenue generation for the community, but the sustainability level of the tourism development path that is followed might not always be profoundly considered by the local people (Eagles & McCool, 2002).

6. THE CASE STUDY OF ZAGORI

The case study that will be presented in this chapter is an example of a rural, mountainous area which is located within the borders of a national park and, in the same time, is one of the most popular tourism destinations in Greece. These two seemingly contradictory features make the area of Zagori a case of particular interest. Additionally, examining possible ways of achieving long-term tourism sustainability in Zagori in order to reconcile the purposes of nature conservation and socio-
economic well-being constitutes a great challenge. The case study will be divided and presented in four parts.

6.1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND INFORMATION ABOUT ZAGORI

Zagori is located within the region of Epirus, in the north-western part of Greece (see maps in Appendix II, pp.44-45). It comprises 47 villages and corresponds to an area of 1053 km$^2$. The terrain of the area is extremely diverse: Zagori is surrounded by high mountains, deep gorges, rivers and mountain lakes. All these natural elements host a very rich biodiversity in terms of flora and fauna. A special attraction of the area is the existence of some rare species of mega-fauna, such as the Balkan Chamois (*Rupicapra rupicapra balcanica*) (Papaioannou, 2003). Yet, the remarkable natural and ecological value of the area is not the only feature that attracts high numbers of visitors from Greece and abroad. The region of Zagori constitutes, at the same time, one of the most original and well preserved mountainous areas in the country. The built environment of this area is also unique, with local architecture being deeply influenced by tradition and the natural environment. The preservation of the authentic character of the built environment in Zagori is required by law, since all buildings in the area must be constructed with the use of local materials and in compliance with the local architecture (WWF-Greece, 2000).

The need to protect the natural environment of Zagori was recognized already since 1973, with the establishment of the National Park of Vikos – Aoos (WWF-Greece, 2000). The existence of the National Park makes Zagori very suitable for the development of ecotourism and rural tourism$^{13}$, which have the potential to become the main drivers of sustainable development in this area. This does not only imply more efficient environmental protection but also economic prosperity and improvement of social cohesion of the local community (Trakolis, 2001).

However, the findings of Trakolis’ research (2001) indicate that the existence of the Vikos – Aoos National Park in the immediate area is not perceived by the local residents as an opportunity for developing ecotourism, but rather as a limitation to their activities. The results of this particular study provide substantial support for the fact that people living within and near the National Park of Vikos-Aoos consider themselves left out of the processes of decision-making and management of the Park. Indeed, the general perception of the local residents is that this Park was founded with a purely top-down approach, without them ever being informed, involved or consulted in any way (Trakolis, 2001; Tziovas, 2004, personal communication).

This lack of participation of local residents in the process of planning and management of the National Park is regarded as the main reason for the conflicts that often arise between them and the management authorities. Actually, the negative attitude of the local inhabitants is reflected in a number of serious violations (such as poaching, fishing, grazing and illegal timber felling) that take place even within the Park’s core area (Trakolis, 2001). As mentioned in chapter 5, the economic well-being of a community appears to be a decisive factor for shaping peoples’ willingness to participate in the management of the protected area, as well as to support

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$^{13}$ Rural tourism is only mentioned as another viable option for regional development that would be appropriate for Zagori; however, it will not be discussed in detail since it is outside the scope of this paper.
ecotourism development. This might be even more relevant for communities that are already poor or isolated, such as Zagori. According to Trakolis (2001), the region of Epirus, where Zagori belongs, is, on average, one of the poorest and most underdeveloped regions in the entire European Union.

The development of tourism in Zagori started in the ‘70s, when the great ecological value and natural beauty of the area became widely known to mountain climbers. Intense development in terms of accommodation and tourism infrastructure followed already in the ‘80s mainly through State initiative, which turned Zagori into one of the most popular mountain destinations in Greece (WWF-Greece, 2000). Most of the tourists that visit Zagori are Greek and stay for 2-3 days in average (Svoronou, 2002). In fact, many tourists visit the area in order to practice adventure sports such as trekking, mountain climbing, kayak, rafting, mountain biking etc. Also, large numbers of tourists visit Zagori just to admire the unique natural and built environment of the area (WWF-Greece, 2000). Today, tourism constitutes the principal source of revenue for the local residents, although it has a highly seasonal character, i.e. it is not equally distributed throughout the year. In addition, even though there is a plethora of hostels and restaurants in Zagori, the tourism product offered in general shows very little differentiation (Tziovas, 2004, personal communication).

It could be argued that, in general, tourism development in Zagori was not coupled with extension and maintenance of the necessary infrastructure. Poor land-use planning was also responsible for the emergence of a series of problems that have a heavy impact on the natural environment of the area. These are mainly associated with water shortage, inefficient management of solid waste and lack of parking spaces (Tziovas, 2004, personal communication). The greatest challenge, hence, is to combine tourism development in Zagori with the preservation of the area’s rich natural and cultural heritage. This is a difficult target to reach, however ecotourism development might be the ideal solution for the case of Zagori, since it has the potential to bring about the desired balance between socio-economic development and environmental protection in the area (Tziovas, 2004, personal communication). Before presenting and assessing the plan for ecotourism development in Zagori elaborated by the national office of WWF in Greece (WWF-Greece), it is essential to mention briefly the different stakeholders of ecotourism development in the area and their roles.

The stakeholders that play a key role in the process of ecotourism development in Zagori can be divided into national, regional and local. The most significant national stakeholders are the governmental agencies and institutions related to issues of tourism development, in particular the Ministry of Tourism and the Greek National Tourism Organisation. The main role of these actors is to create the general institutional background and provide the policies needed for tourism development. Further, they are expected to provide financial support, as well as technical knowledge and expertise to the local community for the successful implementation of ecotourism projects. The office of WWF in Greece is another stakeholder operating on the national level, but is mainly exerting its influence through the local office of Papigo, in Western Zagori. The principal role of this actor in this particular area is to promote conservation together with sustainable development, as well as to raise environmental awareness both within the local community and among the visitors. Its specific role within the context of ecotourism development is providing guidance, education and training, technical expertise and, perhaps, some financial support. On the regional level, the most significant stakeholders are the regional authorities and development agencies. Their role is to set
policies and oversee the general development of the region, as well as to act as intermediate links between the State and the citizens, for issues such as regional funding distribution. A more specific task of these stakeholders related to ecotourism, is to facilitate, run and implement ecotourism projects at the regional scale. On the local level, the most essential stakeholder of ecotourism development is the local community. The role and importance of this actor has already been explained in detail in chapter 5 and it will not be repeated here.

Given the variety of tourism stakeholders in Zagori, ecotourism planners and managers should keep in mind that, dissimilar or even contradictory opinions about the way ecotourism should be planned and managed might occur, especially in the beginning. Nevertheless, this should not be seen as a source of discouragement, but as an opportunity to bring together all stakeholders and promote constructive dialogue and fruitful interaction among them. It is crucial to create since the beginning the grounds for an open exchange of viewpoints, which will help all parts understand that ecotourism development requires joint efforts and active participation from all sides (WWF-International, 2001).

6.2. A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE WWF PLAN FOR ECOTOURISM DEVELOPMENT IN ZAGORI

The area which has been selected as more adequate for ecotourism development is that of Western and Central Zagori. This particular area encompasses eleven villages (Agios Minas, Ano Pedina, Aristi, Vikos, Vitsa, Elafotopos, Kalpaki, Kato Pedina, Messovouni, Monodendri and Papigo). The rationale of the WWF strategic plan for ecotourism development in Zagori is multidimensional but the underlying concept is rather clear: sustainable development from every aspect. In other words, the primary objective of this plan is to orientate tourism development in Zagori towards more sustainable patterns than the actual ones. Thus, the already existing tourism in Zagori can become a factor of socio-economic well-being for the entire area while, in the same time, actively contribute to the protection of its natural environment (Tziovas, 2004, personal communication).

Other objectives of ecotourism development in Zagori include reviving traditional activities such as small-scale farming and stock-raising which are currently practiced to a very limited extent. This would be beneficial not only for boosting the community’s economy, but also for enhancing the visitors’ experience by giving them the opportunity to witness the traditional identity of Zagori. In addition, the plan for ecotourism development aims at a better diffusion of tourists in space and time, in an effort to avoid overconcentration of tourists in the biggest and most popular villages (such as Papigo and Aristi) during the peak season and to give smaller villages in the area the opportunity to benefit as well (Tziovas, 2004, personal communication). The plan is also designed to include interpretation of the natural and man-made environment, so as to improve the tourists’ perception and understanding of the area. In the same time, it aims at providing a model for the operation of ecotourism infrastructure and exerting pressure for resolving the problems related to the existing poor infrastructure in Zagori. The establishment of a network for the systematic collection of information that will help monitor tourism in the area is also among the

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14 Unless referenced otherwise, all the information presented in section 6.2 is extracted from the report elaborated by WWF-Greece (2004).
goals of the discussed plan for ecotourism development. Finally, educating the local residents on issues concerning ecotourism and tourism sustainability in general is one of the most essential targets within the scope of this plan (WWF-Greece, 2000).

The plan for ecotourism development in Zagori is based upon a number of concrete proposals. The first proposal refers to the creation of two “ecotourism poles” in the villages of Papigo and Kato Pedina respectively. These will constitute the central points of the ecotourism development, i.e. the core where most of the necessary infrastructure for ecotourism will be developed. Within these two poles, most of the ecotourism planning and action will take place. The selection of the villages Papigo and Kato Pedina as “ecotourism poles” is not random. More specifically, Papigo, despite being quite isolated from the other villages, is the most popular tourism destination in Zagori and already well developed in terms of tourism infrastructure. Moreover, the existence of the local WWF office makes it very important as a centre for providing information and monitoring tourism in the whole area. Finally, this particular village is located within the borders of the Vikos – Aoos National Park and even inside the zone of highest protection. On the other hand, the village of Kato Pedina is located outside the borders of the National Park, but only 3 km. away from the Park’s core zone. This makes it a crucial point for monitoring the visitor flow to the National Park. In addition, the village of Kato Pedina is, despite its strategic location, not very developed yet in terms of tourism infrastructure, which makes it appropriate for developing alternative patterns of tourism such as ecotourism. Finally, this specific village has already some experience with certain kinds of small-scale activities such as farming and handicrafting, thus it could become an efficient starting point for launching a network of local production.

The second action of the WWF plan for ecotourism development in Zagori proposes the creation of three “ecotourism chambers” in three other villages of Zagori (in particular Kapessovo, Kipi and Negades), with the prospect of incorporating another two in the near future. The role of these particular villages is complementary to the role of the two “ecotourism poles” discussed previously and it mainly includes activities such as guided ecotourism tours and other activities of special ecological and cultural interest. The establishment of the “ecotourism chambers” will also help diffuse the actions planned at the “ecotourism poles”. This will contribute to the creation of an extended ecotourism network within the area that aims at attracting visitors during a period of six months per year at least.

The third part of the WWF plan suggests the establishment of a “network of local production” in the area of Zagori, which has three components: the producers, the products and the visitors/buyers. The proposed network will be developed by organizing and marketing the first two components, namely the local producers and products. As far as the local producers are concerned, a network of cooperation among professional producers, small-scale handicraftsmen and traditional food producers will be developed. Special care will be taken to incorporate local women cooperatives, as well as young farmers and stock breeders in this network. The creation of the suggested network aims mainly at the enhancement of all types of local production and at the wider recognition of local products as a means of reinforcing the producers’ income. This can be achieved through a series of actions, for instance launching new ways of marketing for local products, setting up a common vending point, as well as organizing open fairs and exhibitions.

The fourth part of the plan for ecotourism development in Zagori that WWF has proposed contains a variety of actions that should be undertaken at a later phase. In particular, the main actions suggested in this part refer to the promotion of further
scientific research regarding topics such as the rivers and the fauna of the area that have not been examined sufficiently to date. Another action concerns reinforcing collaboration among local tourism authorities and institutions, in order to promote through common effort the acceptance of ecotourism and prevent unsustainable tourism practices in the area. This cooperation should also expand later to include the regional development agencies.

Finally, within the scope of developing ecotourism in Zagori, WWF has also suggested the establishment of a “network of communities of Chamois biotopes”. In fact, this project constitutes an attempt to initiate a network of collaboration among local stakeholders. More specifically, this plan envisions the creation of a network that will initially comprise five villages within the area of Zagori (Papigo, Vradeto, Tsepelovo, Skamneli and Vrissohori), with the potential to expand it so as to include more neighboring villages and small towns in the future (Tziovas, 2004, personal communication). The suggested legal status for this network is that of a private, non-profit organisation. The local office of WWF will be in charge of this network, but its role will be merely consultative and coordinative. The participation of scientists and other experts (e.g. coming from the regional universities and other research institutes) as consultants is also needed in this network. Yet, the local community is still the most important partner in the creation and management of this network.

The main target of this network is to highlight the existence of a natural value namely the endangered species of the Balkan Chamois, which could be thus turned into a “flag species” of the area, but in the same time, transform it into a significant driver of socio-economic prosperity for Zagori. It could be of great benefit to the local community to bring out the existence in Zagori of this rare species, which is fairly unknown to the wide public. This natural value can thus become a source of increased profit generation through tourism if marketed appropriately, since it differentiates Zagori from other mountainous destinations in Greece. Moreover, the creation of this network aims at increasing the involvement of the local community in the management of its own natural resources. The establishment of this network, finally, is expected to bring about greater awareness about the necessity to protect the Balkan Chamois, both among the members of the local community and the visitors (Tziovas, 2004, personal communication).

In any case, one should keep in mind that this project goes far beyond the protection of the Balkan Chamois. Although this is also vital and desirable, it does not constitute the only purpose of this network. In other words, its main objective is to mobilize the local community and utilize its potential so as to achieve sustainable development and management of the area from all aspects. Another goal of equal significance is to increase the acceptance of the Vikos-Aoos National Park through enhanced participatory procedures such as reinforcing the role of the local community in decision-making for the management of the National Park. Last but not least, the creation of this network is expected to strengthen the social bonds within the community of Zagori, by increasing cooperation for the achievement of common purposes and the pursuit of the community’s welfare as a whole. This is of great significance, given that the human environment of Zagori is highly heterogeneous, since it is comprised of people of varying descendance and origin (Sarakatsani, Vlachi and Gypsies). Although these groups have lived together in the area for centuries, they still preserve the special social and cultural characteristics that distinguish one from the other and avoid mingling. Hence, such projects that require local involvement are an opportunity for bringing together people who belong to different groups and, thus, promote understanding and appreciation among different groups and
strengthen social bonds within the community (Tziovas, 2004, personal communication).

6.3. ASSESSMENT OF THE WWF PLAN AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT

The assessment of the WWF plan for ecotourism development in Zagori will be based on a checklist developed by Hawkins & Khan\(^\text{15}\) (see Appendix III, pp. 46-48). This particular checklist is based on three main concepts that cover the three aspects of tourism sustainability, as shown in figure 7:

\[\text{Respect for the integrity of the ecosystems} \rightarrow \text{Local Participation} \rightarrow \text{Eco-Development} \rightarrow \text{Economic opportunities for the local community}\]

Fig 7. The three concepts for viable ecotourism development
(Source: Hawkins & Khan, 1998)

Some general comments that arise after using this checklist for Zagori are that Part II, which refers to “local participation” is the one best covered by the WWF plan for ecotourism development, which means that concerns for the social well-being of the local population were adequately taken into account while preparing the plan. In contrast, a look at Part I, pertaining to the “respect and integrity of the ecosystem” reveals an important weakness of the plan. In particular, this weakness refers to its inability to stimulate and promote issues such as energy conservation (question 6), sustainable waste management (question 7) as well as alternative technologies (question 11). These issues, nevertheless, constitute fundamental components of environmental sustainability and therefore, they cannot be left out. Hence, a revision of the existent plan in order to incorporate these issues is highly necessitated. Further, a serious lack of information is encountered when it comes to answering Part III of the checklist, related to “economic opportunities for the local community”. In particular, it is not made clear by the current version of the plan in what ways exactly

\(^{15}\) Although a plethora of similar checklists for assessing the success of ecotourism projects exists in literature, this particular checklist was selected because it encompasses in brief the most crucial points for evaluating an ecotourism development plan from all aspects (environmental, social and economic). In other terms, this is a short, yet comprehensive, checklist that considers the most important points which may help identify whether an ecotourism development plan is viable or not. In addition, a more detailed checklist would be inappropriate for the case of Zagori, since ecotourism development in this area is still in the stage of early planning, hence only general and basic information on this matter is available for the moment.
economic benefits will be generated for the local community (questions 1, 2, 3), neither how these benefits will be distributed among the local population (question 5). This implies that the economic aspect of sustainability of the discussed plan might also need to be revised in order to integrate more concrete and substantial proposals on improving the economic well-being of the local community. More thoughts and proposals on how the WWF plan for ecotourism development in Zagori could be improved in practice will follow.

Zagori, as mentioned already earlier, is an area of great ecological and cultural value due to its distinct geomorphologic features, its high biological diversity and its unique cultural elements. Notwithstanding, these exceptional characteristics of Zagori still remain largely undiscovered by the average visitor who lacks special knowledge. Thus, the tourists’ perception of the natural and cultural beauty of the area is not representative of its overall value. The local WWF office has the potential and the expertise to help enhance the visitors’ understanding of the area, by improving the role of the already existing information center located in Papigo. Moreover, the deep knowledge of local residents concerning the natural environment and cultural elements of their area (such as local customs, traditions, myths etc.) should be utilized for improving the visitors’ understanding and appreciation of Zagori. For instance, local people could start leading guided tours for visitors both inside and outside the built environment, in order to explain important points of the history, culture and nature of Zagori, which would otherwise remain undiscovered by most tourists.

In addition, a kind of local certification could complement the idea of establishing the suggested “network of communities of Chamois biotopes”, by creating a local logo/label depicting the Balkan Chamois. The adoption of this logo by the aforementioned network would help identify the Balkan Chamois with the destination of Zagori and, in the same time, differentiate Zagori from other mountain destinations with similar profile in Greece. There are two ways of utilizing this label. The first possibility would be to give it to Zagori as a whole, i.e. as a destination. Although in this case the requirements for calling this a certification scheme are not fulfilled, the advantage of this approach is that the adoption of the Balkan Chamois as the official logo of Zagori provides a special identity to all local products and tourism services, which thus become recognizable by tourists and are identified with the destination as a whole. The second possibility would be establishing a set of quality and/or performance criteria and then awarding the label only to those tourism enterprises that reach or exceed the required standards. The advantage of this approach is that it is more beneficial for the natural environment, since it constitutes an incentive for tourism business to in Zagori to operate in a more sustainable way. This could also help visitors who are sensitive with regard to environmental issues distinguish and support those businesses in Zagori that operate in a more environmentally friendly manner.

Regardless of the approach that will be adopted, though, the establishment of the “network of communities of Chamois biotopes” and the adoption of the Balkan Chamois as its official label should also be linked to the conservation of the area’s natural resources. There are various ways of redirecting part of the revenues generated by tourism to conservation purposes. For instance, a fixed symbolic amount could be added to the bill of every hotel customer who visits Zagori (either through opt-in or opt-out procedures). The total amount accumulated from all tourism businesses in Zagori within a year could be then spent on purposes such as scientific research conducted by local universities/NGOs and/or environmental conservation projects in the area. In any case, it is necessary to note that the creation of such a logo is not
sufficient for achieving ecotourism development in an area. Further, efficient communication of this effort to consumers and appropriate marketing of the label are also critical in order to make it widely known and recognizable among the ecotourist public both within Greece and abroad.

Zagori, moreover, is a small and undiversified economy. As a result, there is a rather high level of leakage since a relatively low diversity of goods is produced within the area while the rest is imported from other regions. Hence, there should be an organized effort to minimize this leakage rate and create the maximum benefit possible for the local economy. In effect, this is perfectly compatible with the essence of small-scale ecotourism, which tends to use more locally produced goods than conventional large-scale tourism. In order to achieve this leakage reduction, it is advisable to reinforce the linkages between different sectors of the economy, such as agriculture, apiculture, cattle-raising and souvenir production with ecotourism development in the area. For example, a stronger linkage should be established between local food production and ecotourism development in order to include in profit-generation not only those directly involved in ecotourism, but also the local people involved in agriculture and stock raising. In the same way, local labour and materials should be utilized to the maximum degree possible for constructing and maintaining the ecotourism infrastructure in the area. The sale of souvenirs is another good way for maximizing profits for the local people, provided that the handicrafts or food items that are sold have been produced within the community and not imported from other regions or countries.

In addition, ecotourism has the potential to create, directly or indirectly, a variety of new employment opportunities for the residents of Zagori, thus contributing to the development of the local economy. In the beginning, these employment opportunities may only refer to unskilled labour. Later, nevertheless, training programmes should be initiated in order to allow the local residents to occupy more skilled positions, such as ecotourism guides or managers.

It is also vital to put more effort into differentiating tourism in Zagori so as to provide to the visitors a wider variety of high quality experiences. For example, another form of sustainable tourism that could be appropriate to develop in Zagori is rural tourism. Actually, the agricultural background of the area, together with its traditional character and authentic culture create the necessary preconditions for the successful development of rural tourism in Zagori. This would be not only beneficial for reviving and preserving the traditional farming methods used in the past, but also for revitalizing the area from the social and demographic point of view. Further, it would give tourists the opportunity to witness and participate in traditional activities of everyday life in Zagori, while diversifying the local economy and creating an additional source of income for the local residents.

Finally, promoting environmental awareness and sustainable tourism practices in Zagori is a major imperative. This could be achieved by undertaking voluntary initiatives such as codes of conduct and codes of ethics in the context of tourism in Zagori. This effort should target two different groups: the local tourism businesses (mainly hostels, restaurants and adventure tourism companies) and the visitors. The local WWF office has the potential to play a key role both in the development and the dissemination of these codes of conduct, in order to gradually integrate ethics in local tourism and raise environmental awareness for all stakeholders involved. In addition, WWF through its local office is called to play a key role in convincing both the local authorities and the host community that ecotourism can become a ground for blending conservation and development in order to achieve a goal that is to the benefit of all.
This task is far from simple; it requires overseeing the process of ecotourism development and making sure that, in all phases, the issues of environmental conservation and socio-economic development of local people are given the necessary importance. It also implies that WWF should operate as a link between the local community and the public agencies and private enterprises. Finally, the role of WWF includes monitoring progress in order to ensure that both costs and benefits pertaining to ecotourism development in Zagori are equitably distributed among all stakeholders.

6.4. CONCLUSIONS AND PROJECTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF ZAGORI AS A TOURISM DESTINATION

From what has been discussed earlier, it is obvious that the area of Zagori fulfills the necessary preconditions for the successful development of ecotourism. This is not only due to the exceptional natural environment and cultural heritage of the area, but also to the absence of mass tourism which leaves room for the development of ecotourism. Actually, in the case of remote mountainous and rural areas such as Zagori, ecotourism appears to be a viable alternative for sustainable economic development. This should be planned and managed very carefully and with the active involvement of all parts, so as to avoid disrupting the sensitive equilibrium of the area from the natural and socio-cultural point of view. Furthermore, even though ecotourism development might have a limited effect on the elderly rural population, it could potentially act as a strong incentive for the repopulation of Zagori by opening up new options of local development that are attractive to young people. In this regard, the Vikos-Aoos National Park should be perceived by the local inhabitants as a unique opportunity for sustainable development at the local level rather than as a hindrance to their activities.

The development of ecotourism in Zagori could provide local inhabitants the opportunity to become more actively involved in decision-making, as well as to maximize the use of their capacities in order to exercise greater control on the management of their own area. Furthermore, the prevention of the economic and demographic decline of Zagori is a significant social benefit that can be derived from ecotourism development in the area. This is because ecotourism has the potential to stimulate regional development by strengthening and diversifying local economy. These benefits are of great importance to the local residents, who need strong economic and social incentives in order to remain in the area.

Yet, this does not necessarily imply that tourism in Zagori should follow the conventional development path in order to maximize the profits for the host community. The focus should rather be shifted towards the development of more sustainable tourism forms, such as community-based ecotourism that has been discussed already. In this sense, tourism development remains within the limits of what both the natural and man-made environment can sustain. This is particularly important, given that the region of Zagori is located within a highly vulnerable ecosystem that needs to be preserved. Moreover, the severe problems of infrastructure encountered in most villages of Zagori do not allow for a limitless number of visitors. Therefore, unless these limiting factors are seriously taken into consideration and confronted by taking measures to improve the existing infrastructure, it is very likely that the natural and structural limits of tourism in Zagori will be reached quite soon, thus jeopardizing the future of the area and the quality of life of the local residents.
7. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The conventional model of mass tourism based on “sea, sand and sun” that has dominated tourism development in Greece for many decades seems to have brought the country’s tourism potential to a dead end. Even though this clearly indicates that a paradigm shift towards more sustainable forms of tourism is needed, this is a long-term and difficult task and therefore, one should not assume that sustainable tourism is possible to achieve overnight. Rather than making a sudden leap, one could expect the country to take small steps towards the gradual introduction of increasingly sustainable tourism patterns. As a matter of fact, tourism development in Greece is currently undergoing a transitional stage and even though the conventional model of mass tourism is not expected to decrease radically in the coming years, the gradual integration of more sustainable tourism patterns in the official tourism development strategies could be an important step in the right direction.

In order to develop these sustainable tourism strategies it is vital to realize, first, the contribution of tourism to the restoration of regional and local balance, as well as to the preservation and management of territorial resources. Ecotourism, in particular, is a very promising alternative form of tourism that has been gaining ground in the preferences of tourists during the past years and is expected to become even more popular in the future. Ecotourism has the potential to become a driver of sustainable tourism development in Greece also, provided that it is actually implemented in a way that truly respects its fundamental principles. Especially the fact that ecotourism provides opportunities for the development of disadvantaged, marginal and rural areas is of vital importance. It constitutes, in this sense, a very promising tool for reversing the negative demographic and economic trends of these remote areas that often suffer from intense depopulation. In the same time, ecotourism might help alleviate those areas in Greece that have been saturated with mass tourism, such as many coastal and insular regions. Moreover, the development of ecotourism could help transform the traditional image of Greece from an exclusively “sea, sand and sun” destination to a more sophisticated and attractive destination that can offer a highly diversified tourism product.

Yet, the strategies for ecotourism development have to be locally planned and implemented, in order to be successful. In other words, even if national ecotourism planning incorporates sustainability issues on a centralized decision-making level, the regional and local parameters are still the most important components of the success of any ecotourism project. Moreover, the incorporation of local issues and concerns in ecotourism planning presupposes a deep understanding of every region and a thorough study of its particularities in terms of natural, economic, social and cultural characteristics. Such an approach guarantees not only the special management of particularly sensitive areas and ecosystems, but also the adoption of the appropriate tourism planning strategy according to the specific needs and dynamics of every region.

In sum, it could be argued that ecotourism development in close connection with protected areas has, indeed, the potential to contribute to the conservation of the natural and cultural heritage and, at the same time, help raise the standards of living for the local population. However, one should always keep in mind that ecotourism is not the only way for achieving sustainable tourism. In reality, this is just one of its components, which implies that ecotourism can deliver the maximum benefit when integrated in a broader strategy for sustainable development. For example, the combination of ecotourism development with the encouragement of other
mechanisms such as tourism certification schemes could turn out to be a particularly effective way to improve the overall sustainability of the Greek tourism sector.

At the current phase, the development of local and regional tourism ecolabelling programmes in Greece concerning either the accommodation sector or entire destinations within the country is advisable. In fact, there is the fear that neither the tourism industry nor the Greek public are ready yet to accept the introduction of a single national-scale tourism certification programme. From one side, the tourism sector in Greece is currently undergoing reforms and is gradually incorporating new forms of tourism such as ecotourism. From the other side, the Greek public still shows little familiarization with tourism ecolabels and tourism certification still seems to be a rather unimportant factor to most Greek consumers when it comes to selecting holiday destinations or accommodation. Consequently, the introduction of a single national ecolabelling programme under these adverse circumstances is very likely to result in a total failure, since it has little possibility of being understood and embraced by the tourism industry and the consumers.

In contrast, small-scale tourism ecolabels developed at the local or regional level are more likely to be accepted as they are more integrated and address local needs and concerns. In this way, it might be easier to raise awareness among consumers and other tourism stakeholders about tourism certification as a means for promoting tourism sustainability. Nevertheless, this does not mean that it is desirable for every single region in Greece to develop its own ecolabelling scheme, as this would create confusion to the public and, hence, undermine the value of tourism certification. Local and regional ecolabelling programmes should rather be developed where they could effectively address the needs for sustainable tourism. Further, the over-proliferation of tourism certification programmes within the country is not desirable and could be efficiently controlled by incorporating them into a national-scale (umbrella) ecolabelling scheme that could be introduced at a later stage. None the less, certain localized ecolabelling programmes, particularly the ones connected to regions of great natural and/or cultural interest (Zagori being one of them), could be left to operate in their original form as this would help enhance and preserve the exceptional character of these areas.

From what has been already discussed earlier, it is clear that any certification programme should take into consideration the specific natural, socio-economic and cultural particularities of a region or country in order to be successful. It should also be developed in close collaboration of all tourism stakeholders and interest groups, such as the State, tourism agencies and institutions, the tourism industry, host communities, NGOs and academics. In addition, credibility and transparency seem to be very critical features of any certification scheme. This is because lack of credibility and transparent procedures is translated into low acceptance both within the tourism industry and among consumers. Further, the international experience from the implementation of different tourism certification programmes has shown that the optimal solution for approaching the goal of tourism sustainability would be adopting certification systems that combine environmental management systems with performance criteria. Finally, if tourism sustainability is to be attained as a whole, certification programmes should not only focus on the environmental aspect, but also attribute sufficient importance to social and economic issues that are critical for local communities in every case.

Although the value of certification schemes as an instrument for promoting sustainable tourism is not contested in general, one should always keep in mind that tourism ecolabels on their own are not the panacea for the problems generated by
tourism, and hence, they should not be viewed as such. They rather constitute a tool that, if used appropriately and combined with other mechanisms such as regulations, education and proper land-use planning, may benefit the natural environment, the host communities as well as the tourism businesses. Nevertheless, this means that the value of ecolabelled products and services in contradistinction to the non-labelled ones should be made clear both within the tourism industry and among consumers. In the case of Greece, in particular, further studies that investigate and highlight the differences between certified and non-certified tourism products and services are an imperative. Without them, both the meaning and the success of certification schemes and ecolabels would be very limited. Another field that requires extensive study in Greece is the one concerning public attitudes for tourism certification and demand. This type of research can help reveal important information useful for outlining the profile of the Greek consumer and for clarifying public opinions towards tourism ecolabels. This knowledge is necessary in order to investigate actual tourism trends and identify the potential response of the Greek consumers to certification schemes and other issues related to sustainable tourism planning and management.

Further research is also needed in developing indicators concerning tourism sustainability in national parks and other protected areas in Greece. So far, the existing research on issues such as carrying capacity of national parks and protected areas in Greece is insufficient. However, it is impossible even to discuss tourism sustainability if the boundaries of what is or is not sustainable are not accurately determined and set in practice. The difficulty, in this case, lies in the fact that there is not one single answer of what is sustainable tourism that could be true for all areas and ecosystems, therefore, special research should be conducted in order to come up with indicators of sustainability for every area separately. This kind of study should be as comprehensive as possible and not only examine the physical and ecological parameters of the ecosystem’s carrying capacity, but take into consideration its socio-economic and cultural aspects as well.

Finally, the results and conclusions derived from the case study presented in chapter 6 indicate that there are, indeed, efficient and sustainable ways of preserving the natural environment and cultural heritage of sensitive areas such as Zagori, while at the same time, stimulating their economic development and social well-being. The challenge lies in convincing all the stakeholders to work together in this direction.
8. LIST OF REFERENCES


Eagles, P. F. J. et al. (2002). Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas – Guidelines for Planning and Management. Switzerland and UK: IUCN.


Walsh, J. A. *et al.* (2001). Sense of Place as a Component of Sustainable Tourism Marketing. In S. F. McCool and R. N. Moisey (Eds.), *Tourism, Recreation*
and Sustainability – Linking Culture and the Environment (pp. 195-216). Oxon and New York: CABI.


Websites

Australian Nature and Ecotourism Accreditation Programme (NEAP)

Costa Rican Certification for Sustainable Tourism (CST)
http://www.turismo-sostenible.co.cr/EN/home.shtml

Green Globe 21 Certification Programme
http://www.greenglobe21.com

The International Ecotourism Society (TIES)
http://www.ecotourism.org
9. APPENDIXES

I. PERSONAL COMMUNICATIONS THROUGH INTERVIEWS:

1. M. Mintsidi from *Agrotouristiki* – the major company for the promotion of rural tourism in Greece, operating in close collaboration with the Greek National Tourism Organisation and the Greek Organisation for Standardization

2. A. Petropoulos from *Ecoclub, the International Ecotourism Club* – a global ecotourism cooperative based in Athens

3. M. Valerga from *Grecotel* – a leading chain hotel company in Greece with global recognition for its pioneer environmental initiatives and high sustainability concerns

4. A. Hatzidakis from the *Greek National Tourism Organisation*

5. D. Papantou from the *Greek Ministry of Agriculture* – Department for Management of the EU CAP Initiative “Leader +”

6. G. Drakopoulos from *SETE* – the Association of Greek Tourism Enterprises

7. K. Tziovas from *WWF-Papigo* – the local office of WWF-Greece in Zagori
IIA. MAP OF EPIRUS

(Source: www.alpha-omegaonline.com/map_greece.htm)
IIB. MAP OF ZAGORI

(Source: Pindos Perivallontiki, 2003)
### III. CHECKLIST FOR ECOTOURISM PROJECTS IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

(Source: Hawkins & Khan, 1998)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part I. Respect for the integrity of the ecosystem</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>Yes / Could be improved</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>No Information</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Emphasize the importance of natural environment to sustain tourism</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Keep level of development small-scale, controlled and locally manageable</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Use site-specific development</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Plan development to be compatible with natural surroundings</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Use indigenous material, know-how and labour</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Design facilities and utilize equipment that conserves energy</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Practice recycling, reducing and reusing</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Emphasize development that is cost-effective with minimum strain on the natural resources</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Preserve vegetation, reduce deforestation whenever possible</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Multiple land-use when possible</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Use alternative technologies that are sustainable</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part II. Local participation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes / Could be improved</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No Information</td>
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<tr>
<td>------------------------------</td>
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<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Promote local participation as much as possible</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Create opportunities for local empowerment</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Convey a sense of local ownership and leadership</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Create opportunities for group projects</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Create opportunities for the locals to control and manage valuable natural resources</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Provide alternative local measures</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Promote socio-cultural pride by organizing community programmes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Use local knowledge and practices</td>
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<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Incorporate local cultural values and traditions</td>
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<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Respect local ideology and heritage</td>
<td>✔️</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Provide opportunities for hosts and guests interaction</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Part III. Economic opportunities for the local community</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes / Could Be Improved</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No Information</td>
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<td>---</td>
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<tr>
<td>1. Coordinate all elements to optimize local economic benefits</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Provide employment for local community</td>
<td></td>
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<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Provide local ownership</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Incorporate community ideas in policy decisions</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Distribute economic benefits – revenue sharing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Recognize local services/efforts</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Create markets for local products</td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. Encourage profits to be used for conservation and preservation efforts</td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Link profits to community programmes, education, environmental awareness</td>
<td></td>
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<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>10. Use local material and labour to keep money in the local economy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
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<tr>
<td>11. Keep management decentralized</td>
<td>✔</td>
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</table>