



## DESTINATION MANAGEMENT: BRIDGING SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES AND VISITORS' QUALITY EXPERIENCES

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### Abstract

Tourism management is a generic term with many approaches and meanings. For a long period this term has been identified with the public sector's intervention in the area of tourism activity development. Nowadays the term's content is much more embracing. The purpose of this study is twofold: (i) to point out the crucial importance of tourism management's contribution into sustainable tourism development of a Mediterranean destination; and (ii) to propose a conceptual framework aiming at interrelating the development potential with the offering of quality experiences to visitors. The crisis of the Ford model (4Ss - sea, sun, sand and sex) and the advent of a differentiated model (4Es - environment, education, events and entertainment) are analyzed providing a modified framework in order to differentiate tourism management, approach 'new tourist', and offer quality experiences to visitors. In the first section the evolution of tourism management's content is briefly described emphasizing on its current meaning. The second section analyses the product life cycle with regard to the two models of tourism management. It is suggested that 'tourism management', 'sustainability', and 'visitor's experience' are the three key terms which could equally contribute to sustainable destination management. Within this framework, the third section explores issues and aspects of sustainable destination management through the 4Es model's implementation. The adequate strategies to achieve main aims of destination management – i.e. development opportunities for destination and satisfaction to visitors through quality experiences - are also presented within a modified tourism management framework and a conceptual framework is proposed. The paper concludes by formulating policy and management implications.

**Keywords:** Tourism Development and Policy; Sustainable Destination Management; Models; Quality Experiences.

### Introduction

During the last three decades all Mediterranean tourism destinations adopted the mass tourism model aiming at achieving growth, despite the difficulties and the structural constraints (e.g. infrastructure). Our study highlights the requirement to improve tourism development models and management plans in the Mediterranean destinations. This paper explores issues of destination management and more particularly, the ways that an appropriate destination management might exploit sustainable tourism opportunities and provide quality experiences to visitors. Literature suggests that management tools and plans have to be approached and implemented within a long-term perspective, focusing on sustainable development. Nowadays the mass tourism model seems to face a general crisis resulting in many and diverse inadequacies and deficiencies, due to structural problems. It is suggested that the mass tourism model adopted by Mediterranean tourist destinations was based on a specific offering (4Ss; i.e. sea, sun, sand, and sex). However, a gradual deterioration of this model occurred and a new differentiated model has emerged.

In the first section the evolution of tourism policy and management's content is briefly described emphasizing on its current meaning. The second section analyses the product life cycle with regard to the two models of tourism management. It is suggested that 'tourism management', 'sustainability', and 'visitor's experience' are the three key terms which could equally contribute to sustainable destination management. Thus, the adequate strategies to achieve main aims of destination management – i.e. development opportunities for destination and satisfaction to visitors through quality experiences - are presented within a modified tourism management framework a differentiated model. The paper concludes by formulating policy and management implications.

### ***Tourism policy, management and planning***

One of the main tasks of governments and public sector is allocating and using resources; i.e. having an active role in the deployment of the three basic economic resources; i.e. capital, land and human resources. There are many definitions of policy, although probably a good working definition is 'a policy is a reasoned consideration of alternatives'. This definition has two implications: (i) Resource scarcity: all countries' resources are scarce; (ii) Opportunity costs in using resources. For instance, tourism development might require use of land, which might be used for other purposes, e.g. agriculture, constructions, etc (Hall, 2008).

Therefore, there are often alternative uses for the available development resources. Another approach to the definition of tourism policy is suggested by Goeldner and Ritchie (2003) is: a set of regulations, rules, guidelines, directives, and development/ promotion objectives and strategies providing a framework within which the collective and individual decisions directly affecting tourism development and the daily activities within a destination are taken. It is obvious the policy's main issue is the most appropriate resources allocation; consequently, it has to consider all alternatives and the subsequent benefits; evaluate various costs and benefits and make decisions. In other words, establish a sound basis for the allocation of resources or the distribution of benefits.

It should be stressed that planning is a part of management; although it is often treated separately from management. Planning should be seen as a part of a complex sectoral management process. It would be very useful to put all terms within a management process approach:

- Policy can be defined as an overall set of guidelines. Policy points the way; it provides guidelines for subsequent action. Subsequent tourism development should follow the policies closely, and policy leads to strategies
- Strategies (guided by policy) specify the actions to implement the policy; show the ways to pinpoint objectives. Strategies set out the series of actions chosen, and thus, lead to objectives.
- Actions chosen are expressed as objectives. An objective is something to achieve, for instance, improve the tourism product. They are expressed and measured as results, i.e. achievements or outcomes

There is a need to monitor the tourism sector-wide and the nature of public sector involvement. A main need of a Destination Management Organization (DMO) is to develop its own capacity to manage the sector. Planning is only a part of this. It also elaborates tourism master plan as a starting point to provide an overview of the sector and a clear idea of future development strategies. Thus, the main task of a DMO is to manage tourism and coordinate tourism activity and sectoral planning.

Management involves that DMO should maintain a comprehensive view and integrated approach must be prepared and implemented. All approaches to planning are only appropriate as related to the management of tourism sector as a whole. There is a well-established way of looking at the functions of management as divided between planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, and monitoring (Krainer, 1995), which are as follows (Table 1):

**Table 1 – Tourism Management functions / tasks**

| Functions    | Content / Tasks                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
|--------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Planning     | Is about where one is going and what one is trying to achieve. This process describes the translation of policy into strategies, objectives, results and activities.                                                                                                                                                              |
| Organization | Relates to the mobilization and deployment of resources and technology. It provides the foundation for working towards the objectives and results. DMO should organize itself into departments defining their various roles and responsibilities.                                                                                 |
| Direction    | Directing includes leadership, encouraging the various parties involved, maintaining a sense of purpose and achieving objectives and results.                                                                                                                                                                                     |
| Coordination | This is the unifying activity, maintaining harmony and building close working relationships. One crucial management's function is to coordinate all public and private sector interests involved in the sector. DMO should coordinate with all parties involved / stakeholders, trying to arrive at a consensus on future action. |
| Monitoring   | Represents the control function; the reporting and analysis of results. This may indicate where and how performance may vary from the plan, and how to take evasive or corrective action. DMO should monitor the performance of the sector as a whole.                                                                            |

One of the most interesting developments during last decade is the establishment of DMOs and no anymore National Tourism Organization, underpinning a more comprehensive approach to tourism management. The previous forms of organization tended to represent a traditional approach, concentrating mostly on domestic and international marketing, tourism statistics and some regulatory functions.

Briefly, destination management means: (i) setting objectives; (ii) focus on results rather than on activities; (iii) translating strategies into specific subsectors / branches objectives and results; (iv) attempting to improve the organization's performance; (v) enabling DMO to plan comprehensively for the sector, to implement plans and achieve effectiveness; and (vi) enhancing monitoring the implementation of plans and to see whether results have been achieved. It is obvious that a DMO exists to plan and manage the sector, working in close collaboration with all other stakeholders (Edgell et al., 2008; Hall, 2008). It does not have, in the management sense, an executive responsibility. While it may coordinate the planning for tourism it is, for the most part, the public agencies / bodies and the private sector which executes the plans. The DMO assumes a catalytic role in the management of the sector and it should try to find the best way of playing this role while involving the private sector to the maximum degree possible.

The needs of tourism activity across the whole country should be addressed and coordinated effectively. The strategies in tourism development fall into three main and interdependent areas: (i) Markets (marketing opportunities to pursue; promotional strategies, etc.); (ii) Product: Forms of development and portfolio of experiences; (iii) Human resources: future workforce and training needs in accordance with the expected development of tourism. There are political as well as economic considerations in determining what tourism priorities should be (Varvaressos, 2008). Mediterranean coastal tourism destinations like Greece, Italy and Spain adopted a strategy allowing the concentration of infrastructure into a location, with consequent benefits arising from scale economies. However, this model has involved serious problems and side-effects. Additionally, the governments' persistency on old-fashioned model (mass / coastal tourism), and the lack of sustainable tourism management, lead to a crisis.

### **Tourism development and management: two models and new tourist**

Tourism product - and not the demand - should be viewed as the main variable of tourism activity. Thus, since the '60s, the tourism product, from a consumer perspective, has undergone several changes through every stage of its life cycle: creation/introduction, development, maturation, saturation and decline (Agarwal & Shaw, 2007; Oppermann, 1998). Initially, every product constitutes a discovery, an innovation addressed to a restricted target group due to its high cost. The productivity gains which are gradually recorded are resulting from increases in productivity, rationalisation and improvement production of methods which are connected to a gradual dissemination, penetration

and mass production of tourism (Varvaressos, 2008). This phase is followed by a decline period and a diminution of income. In the final phase of the product life cycle, it is possible to observe a spatial restructuring towards other hosting destinations or countries, to the extent that added value is sufficiently low and research, development and innovation inexistent (Py, 2002). It is estimated that life cycle theory can be utilised as an interpretative tool of tourism management formulation and the crisis of the 4Ss model (Agarwal & Shaw, 2007; Cooper, 1994; Opperman, 1998). The new 4Es model (post Ford) is considered to be an antidote and would facilitate the formulation of tourism management based on sustainability principles. These issues are examined with regard to tourism experiences.

### ***The mass tourism model***

The life cycle often seems to correspond to tourism product's development and holiday's democratisation, where tourism consumption pertains to lower income classes and is represented by the so-called 4Ss model (Lawton & Weaver, 2000; Morucci, 2003; Schluter, 2005). Thus, the beginning of visitation decline might be seen as coinciding with the crisis of this model. The democratization of tourism tends to reach consumers having lower income levels. This procedure is due to productivity gains, benefits resulted from a mass production, leading to lower operational and production expenses (low cost / charter flights and low budget accommodation). This rationalisation process, based on productivity gains, determines a level under which the tourism services provider cannot easily drop (Varvaressos, 2008)). Consequently, the new consumers have a low disposable income and spending power and, thus, register a very low and even inexistent positive impact on hosting destinations. This situation of gradual diminution of revenue would probably lead to a lower quality service and a deterioration of tourism consumption structure (Treboul & Viceriat, 2003). The 4Ss model had shown a considerable growth since '70s, and, consequently, mass production quickly had developed in order to meet these needs.

However, it seems that growth rate stops at the maturation stage; this is the phase of the product being offered to large parts of consumers. It is estimated (Soteriades & Varvaressos, 2003) that the task to attract a new demand should be founded on increased investment capital, since the tourism demand stemming from low income classes is known. The model of steady tourism development cannot be sustainable; the model tends to disappear for two reasons: (i) its own conditions of development, and (ii) problematic production / offering (Vera & Ripplin, 1996). It is evident that the 4Ss model was essentially based on the definition of 'homo-touristicus mass', which characterizes a certain type of herd behaviour and a kind of consumption associated with imitation (Bergery, 2002). It is estimated that the model's uniformity does not offer any possibility for behavioural customization and selective preferences. Coastal summer / pleasure tourism, in the form of a traditional model of tourist development, does no longer satisfy the 'new tourists' (Morgan, 2005; Origet du Cluzeau & Viceriat, 2000; Poon, 2002).

### ***New tourism – Tourism experiences***

The central role of visitor experiences in tourism is generally recognized. Tourists do not buy products, or even services; they purchase the total experience that the product or service provides (Morgan et al., 2010). Visitors have become increasingly interested in visiting destinations, as much as in discovering, experiencing, participating in, learning about, and more intimately being included in the everyday life of the destination, with the past and the present of places becoming part of the authentic cultural, sporting or other experience. Certain tourism products – no matter how peculiar they may appear, may mean and appeal differently to a growing set of niche tourism markets, responding to the changing trends towards (individual/personal) experience-orientated holidays (Novelli, 2005; Ryan, 2003). Destination's resources form essential components to the visitor experience. By creating an experiences portfolio, it could provide a source of niche tourism product diversification. Tourism management is seen as the way to remain competitive in markets where globalisation and technology have turned products and services into commodities. Thus, a DMO is strongly concerned by understanding, researching and managing experiences.

Literature has revealed challenges of managing the tourist experience in a variety of contexts and providing the guest with a rewarding experience (e.g. Jolliffe, 2010; Pearce, 2005). Literature suggests that a destination offering should involve a spectrum of experiences and can be a mix of adventure, traditional, nature and cultural tourism. What seems to be the main challenge on the field of destination management is planning and organizing the nature and the theme of a visitor experience. It is suggested that it is desirable to implement management strategies, which attempt to shift the experience from simple enjoyment and satisfaction through stages of greater understanding, attitude change and more responsible behavior. The primary focus of sustainable tourism management has been on the protection of the physical and socio-cultural environment in destination areas, which is a fundamental requirement. It is also

necessary to take into account, and to balance, the requirements of the other factors of what has been described as tourism's "magic pentagon" (Muller, 1994).

These factors are: economic health; subjective well being of the locals; unspoilt nature, protection of resources; healthy culture and optimum satisfaction of guest requirements. At destination level, management interprets this as: Meeting the needs and wants of the host community in terms of improved living standards and quality of life in both the short and long term; satisfying the demands of a growing number of tourists and of the tourism industry and continuing to attract them in order to fulfil the first aim; and maintaining or enhancing the competitiveness and viability of the tourism industry. Essentially this entails modifying patterns of economic and tourism development and growth, through the adaptation of mass tourism as well as the introduction of new forms of alternative and special interest tourism (Soteriades & Varvaressos, 2003; Soteriades & Farsari, 2009).

### **A differentiated model**

Mediterranean tourism undergoes a crisis and a large number of business, managers and DMOs became conscious of the need to abandon the traditional model and to adopt the new one. In order to face the structural crisis of mass tourism, it is suggested that a destination has to adopt and implement a differentiation and customization approach instead of uniformity, and consequently providing quality experiences to visitors. A new model is suggested (Morucci, 2003; Obermair, 1998), i.e. the 4Es model, namely: Environment and nature; Education, culture and history; Events and festivals; and Entertainment. This model is considered to be sustainable in the sense it is seriously taking into account the visitors' needs and requirements, as well as the hosting destination features, requirements and objectives. It constitutes the main strategy for a large number of countries in order to access 'new tourism' (Poon, 2002 and 2003). The main difference, compared to the previous model, lies on the general perception about hosting tourism / visitors.

Tourism is characterised as an industry, very often heavy industry requiring a high degree of planning (Laws 1995). Thus, it is necessary to form a procedure of replacing one model with another, completely or partially, taking into consideration financial and funding constraints as well as a task of convincing stakeholders, i.e. managers, services providers and local community - in order to be adapted to the new model (Varvaressos, 1999). Emphasis should be put on quality, offer opportunities for quality visitors' experiences; this is the strategic aim of hosting destinations aiming at boosting and rejuvenating tourism activity (Varvaressos, 2008).

It is obvious that the crisis of Mediterranean tourism was evident before the advent of the global financial crisis and can be characterised as structural one. The global financial crisis, in turn, will further deteriorate the negative economic impact caused by the mass tourist model's crisis. It is estimated that Mediterranean hosting destinations must abandon the mass tourism model and adopt an approach and implement a model focused on the quality experiences (Soteriades & Farsari, 2009). Therefore, the new model for tourist management could be characterized as 'post-Ford' and focused on quality experiences for visitors (Deprest, 1997; Morucci, 2003). The present study suggests that the 4Es model constitutes: (i) a remedy, an antidote to mass tourism / coastal destination crisis; (ii) an alternative option to the old-fashioned model adopted by Mediterranean destinations.

### ***Sustainable destination management***

Sustainable tourism has been defined as 'a positive approach intended to reduce the tensions and frictions created by the complex interactions between the tourism industry, visitors, the environment and the communities which are host to holiday makers... an approach which involves working for the longer viability and quality of both natural and human resources.' (Bramwell & Lane, 1993: 2). The task to plan, develop and promote sustainable tourism is welcome and profitable for achieving a reciprocal balance and a mutual symbiosis between the properly tourism activities and the environment's preservation. In order to accomplish this aim some prerequisites and conditions have to be fulfilled. The first condition is related to the region-hosting visitors, this is the challenge of planning and monitoring the facilities and activities (McIntyre et al., 1993).

The second is relevant to the business involved in such activities; the enterprises having to develop and market the adequate programs and products, being able to attract the specific target groups (Middleton & Hawkins, 1997). At the same time, all local stakeholders must be aware of the fact that the aims into the two fields are not in contradiction. Tourism planning and management are concerned with anticipating and regulating change in a system, to promote orderly development so as to increase the social, economic, and environmental benefits of the development process

(Page, 2009). Therefore, it is a rational sequence of operations, and within a context of a changing and globalized environment, sustainable tourism management may help tourist destinations to optimise resources' use.

Despite the acceptance of sustainable tourism as a mode of development, a gap commonly exists between policy formulation and policy implementation and related management. Deficiencies in the implementation process arise because of conflicts between involved stakeholders; resource management agencies, planners and developers; and host communities. Management of a destination must be perceived and approached as a complex domain involving multiple interrelationships between various areas and issues, as suggested by tourism literature (e.g. Agarwal & Shaw, 2007; Page, 2009): the interaction mode between various actors / stakeholders; politics and the power distribution; and complexity of tourism bodies and agencies.

However, complexity might also be considered within the large scope of activities and factors having competing or conflicting goals and must to be managed simultaneously, in a holistic approach incorporating social, environmental and economic dimensions and considerations. It is estimated that sustainable tourism management is an over requiring task involving various interrelated fields, issues and topics (Hall, 2008; Ritchie & Crouch, 2003; Ryan, 2002). That's why comprehensive and integrated approaches to sustainable tourism management have to take into account all interrelationships and interconnections, aiming at ensuring plans effectiveness and efficiency, and par extension, improved outcomes.

### ***Potential contribution of a differentiated model***

The tourism system is a complex social system and considered as an industry which operates within the micro and macro environments considering all factors of sustainability. The sustainability principles and the multidisciplinary nature of tourism entail that only governments and public authorities can coordinate efforts in sustainable tourism policy making and management at both national and local levels (Bramwell, 2005). Sustainable tourism, viewed as contributing to overall sustainable development, requires coordination between various policy making levels and agencies to accommodate sectoral considerations that only government bodies can provide. In contrast to the mass tourism model, the new 4Es model is related to four areas: (i) Environment; (ii) Education, culture and history; (iii) Events and festivals; and (iv) Entertainment. This model constitutes the main strategy for a large number of countries aiming at access 'new tourism' (Middleton et al., 2009; Poon, 2002). The main difference in comparison to the previous model lies in the general established perception of tourism activity in a hosting destination. Two are the main challenges: funding and adaptation of all involved stakeholders.

### ***New model's strategies: a conceptual framework***

Some actions that should be undertaken within a sustainable approach based on the new model, creating conditions to provide adequate offering and quality experiences to visitors. It should be stressed that some key ideas provided to enhance the notion of sustainability and its implications to a cluster of economic sufficiency, social equity and environmental conservation factors need further investigation. Within this approach and framework, a conceptual framework for destination management is proposed and shown into Figure 1.

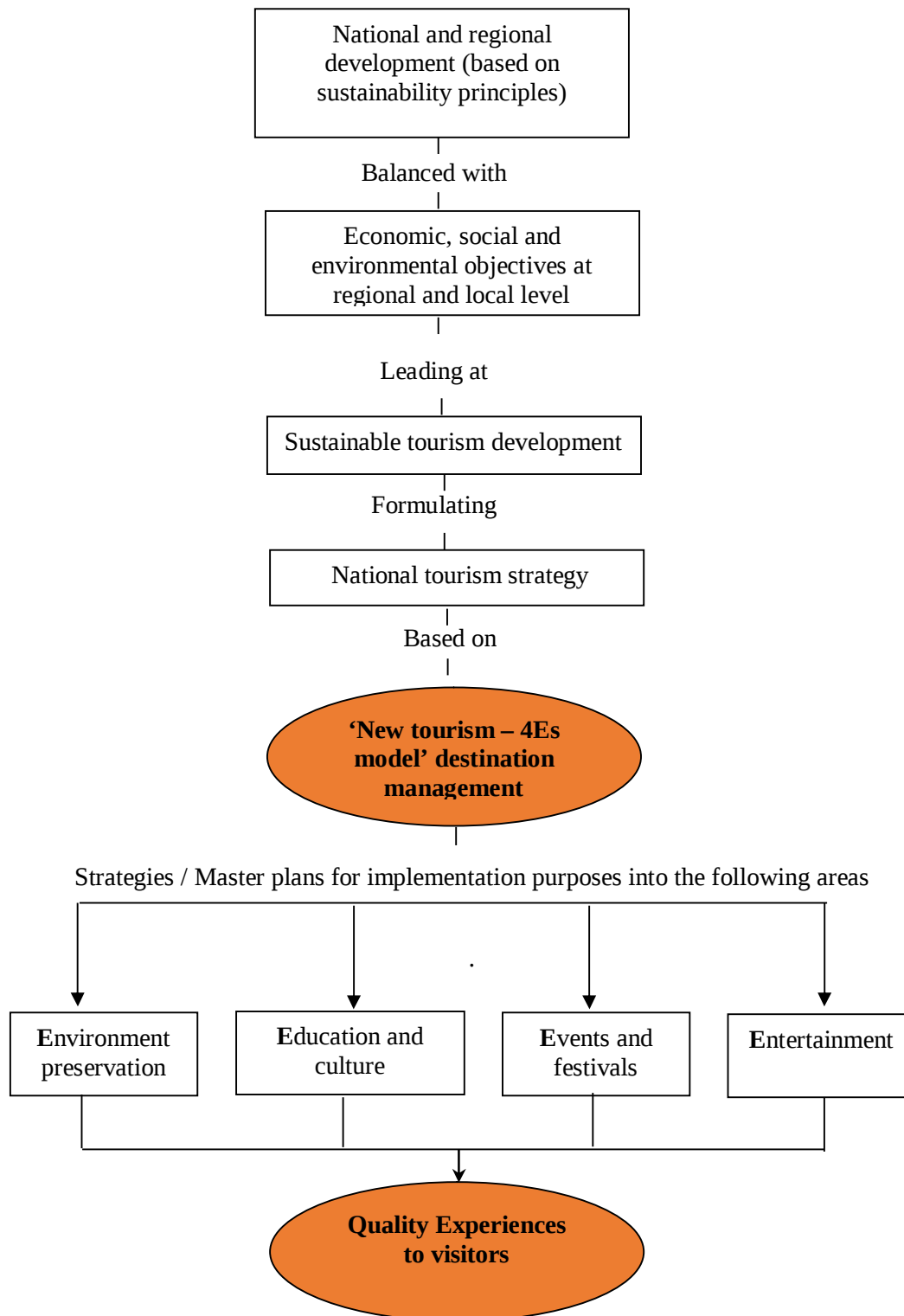


Figure 1. A conceptual framework for sustainable destination management

It could be stressed that the proposed framework addresses the following crucial challenges and issues:

- The need for sustainable approach and respect of sustainability principles, translated into actions within an integrated framework
- The three crucial areas of management approach – planning, management and marketing – are all efficiently considered.
- All environmental resources and issues are integrated into all strategies and expressed into related plans.
- Consider both sides / perspectives; that of supply, development opportunities of destination, and that of demand, experiences for visitors
- Tourism offering of a destination is incorporated into a general framework and context; tourism industry is helping create an environment for all stakeholders
- The two main aims of a mature destination, i.e. strengthen tourism providers and improvement of the experiences quality – are a core part of this approach.

In brief, this framework ensures the five factors of tourism's "magic pentagon" (Muller, 1994): economic development; inhabitants' quality of life; environment protection; culture and optimum satisfaction of guest requirements (sustainability in tourism and related activities). At destination level, management's main task is to maintaining and enhancing the competitiveness and viability of the tourism activity; that's all about sustainability.

### **Conclusions and management implications**

This study aims to point out and highlight the way that sustainable principles and methods should be translated into appropriate strategies and plans. It is estimated that only an appropriate framework as has been suggested, could be achieve destination's aims and objectives. The paper concludes with a discussion of the necessary conditions and actions to achieve sustainable destination management. From the above discussion is evident that sustainable development, tourism policy and sustainable destination management are compatible; they should be constituent parts of an integrated and comprehensive approach at national and regional level. Their interrelation and symbiosis are the two most crucial prerequisite.

A weakness in order to achieve sustainable tourism development is the lack of experience, knowledge and financial resources, and the limited involvement of local stakeholders. Removal and correction of administrative and governmental intervention failures are therefore of importance for a proper integration of environmental policy into master plans for implementation. This may end up in a better synergy and co-ordination of tourism activity and operations with other socio-economic activities. In case of Mediterranean coastal destinations the experience and opportunities can be elaborated in various areas of travel and tourism. Despite of having massive infrastructure, support facilities and travel and tour destination with great value chain has not yet had the desirable quality influx. Mediterranean vacation destinations should implement a modified sustainable management in order to achieve sustainable development involving environmental preservation and protection, equity and growth in socio- economic and cultural fields

.A serious consideration is needed in all related topics, particularly in constraints and deficiencies in all functions and areas of management, as well as on various stages of planning process. Additionally, the key importance of involving stakeholders into tourism planning and management is increasingly recognized; as well as local participation and support in the development of appropriate action plans. Only adequate tourism planning and management could contribute into meeting all stakeholders' needs and interests.

Therefore, the task of implementing sustainable destination management must surely be to identify the conditions for its successful achievement: (i) It is vital to involve the local community. The full involvement of local stakeholders in the tourism activity not only benefits them and the environment in general but also improves the visitor's experience quality. (ii) Consultation between the tourism industry and local communities, bodies and agencies is essential if they are to work alongside each other and resolve potential conflicts of interest. (iii) The monitoring and measuring of the effectiveness of master and action plans is a critical issue. In any event, assessment of effectiveness depends crucially on establishing a complete database, using effective data collection and analysis. (iv) Marketing enhances guest satisfaction and this can be achieved by providing quality experiences. Increase the small-scale tourism development product base, by offering a quality experience, which conforms to the meeting of sustainable tourism objectives.

The above briefly presented conditions should be the topics and issues to be considered by destination planners and managers, as well as marketers in order to cope to an effective and efficient bridging between sustainable development potential and offering quality experiences to visitors of a destination.

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