

Local Authorities in Crete and the Development of Tourism

Konstantinos Andriotis

Abstract

It is widely accepted that local authorities play a significant role in the development of the tourism industry of islands by providing various services and infrastructure. This study reports on a survey of local authorities in the Greek island of Crete and has two main objectives: (i) to explore local authorities' involvement in tourism and their activities to the tourism development of the island; and (ii) to elicit suggestions by local authority officials for the further tourism development of the island. The results indicate that although the variety of the actions currently undertaken by the local authorities, towards the tourism development of the island, there is still a need for more efforts to promote tourism and to provide more opportunities for encouraging tourism development. As a result, this paper discusses the implications of the findings for Cretan tourism and provides conclusions for the future tourism development of the island.

Dr Konstantinos Andriotis is a Teaching Assistant in the Department of Tourist Enterprises at the Technological Educational Institute of Crete, Greece.

Introduction

Local authorities *occupy a complex, central role at the heart of the tourism industry* (Bacon & Pelley, 1993, p.A5), and exercise an essential or even critical influence over the local tourism industry (Andriotis, 2002a; Elliott, 1987). Vaughan, Jolley and Mehrer (1999, p.118) identified the following three roles of local authorities in the tourism industry: by being the key co-ordinating body for the strategic planning of the local tourism industry; by owning, operating and promoting their own tourist resources and infrastructure; and by promoting their local area as a destination and, by implication, the private sector tourism products and services.

Most islands face a series of binding constraints to traditional forms of economic development. These include: external dependency, lack of autonomy in the decision-making, isolation, peripherality, diseconomies of scale; rurality; scarcity of resources, and accessibility constraints (Butler, 1993; Cross & Nutley, 1999; Milne 1992; Pearce, 1995; Royle & Scott, 1996). Therefore, growing tourism demand opens new opportunities for island development. Due to the increase in the real incomes of the island populations and the generation of employment (although mostly seasonal), governments have seen tourism as a promising opportunity for reducing the prosperity gap between themselves and developed countries, and as a means of modernising their economic base and retaining their population and community welfare. A significant role for the development of the tourism industry of island destinations is played by the local authorities. However, despite the pervasive growth of tourism for many islands over the last decades and the use of tourism by many local governments as a strategy to eliminate economic problems, development literature has almost neglected the significant role played by local governments for the expansion of islands' tourism industry.

This is also evident in the Greek island of Crete, where despite the importance attached to the role played by the local authorities for the island's tourism development, there is an absence of studies examining Cretan local authorities' involvement in tourism and their contribution to the tourism development of the island. However, Crete experiences many problems, similar to the ones faced by island destinations, and an increasing number of local authorities have taken an active role for their amelioration. As a result, the current study was undertaken with two main objectives. The first objective was to explore local authorities involvement in tourism and their activities to the tourism development of the island. The second objective was to elicit suggestions by the local authority officials for the further tourism development of the island. The main idea of the study is that the local authorities contribute to the tourism development of Crete. Local authority officials live on the island, they have to deal with many of the problems faced by the tourism industry, and, as a result, they can be considered as the experts for providing suggestions for the further development of the island. This paper is divided into five sections. Following this introduction, section two reviews tourism in Crete; section three presents the methodology of the study; section four presents the results of a survey of 25 local authority officials conducted during the summer of 1997 in Crete; section five proceeds to a discussion of the results, and the final section provides the conclusions of the study.

Tourism in Crete

Tourism in Crete has been seen as a development strategy, due to its potential for employment and income generation, infra-structural development and overall community welfare (Andriotis, 2002b; Kousis, 1984). In 2001, 2.5 million tourists

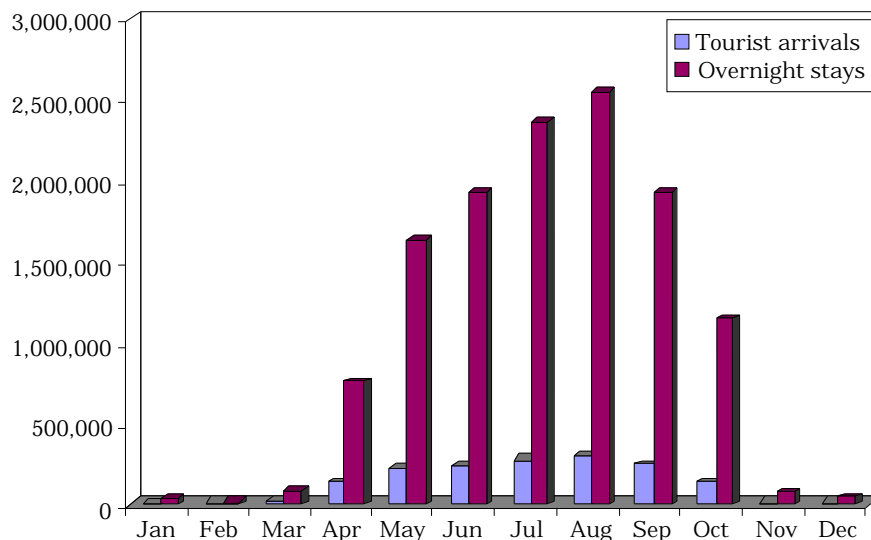


Figure 1: Tourist arrivals and overnight stays in Crete (2001)

Source: Hellenic National Tourism Organisation (HNTO), 2002.

visited the island, 13.1 million overnights were recorded and the island had 113.1 thousands beds (HNTO, 2002). In addition, the Region of Crete (1995) estimates that approximately 40 percent of the island's population is directly or indirectly involved in the tourism industry. As a result, tourism can be considered the largest industry in the island.

Tourism development in Crete was not without problems. The two major problems faced by the island's tourism industry are seasonality and dependence on tour operators. The fluctuation of tourist arrivals in Crete limits job creation and return on investment to the summer season of less than seven months a year, and severely restricts peak turnovers and occupancy rates to the months of July, August and September (Donatos & Zairis, 1991; Drakatos, 1987; Tsitouras, 1998). As a result, in 2001, almost 85.7 percent of tourist arrivals and 88.7 of overnight stays on the island were recorded between April to October (Figure 1).

In addition, the island is heavily dependent on tour operators. Horwarth (1994) found that in 1993, 85 percent of tourists to Crete were organised through tour operators. Although tour

operators provide the island with mass tourism, these tourists tend to be cost - rather than quality - orientated. Therefore, tour operators demand and achieve massive discounts on services, and enterprises have low profit margins leaving most entrepreneurs incapable of investing in extension or modernisation of their properties (Bird, 1995; Dighe, 1997; Truett & Truett, 1987).

Greek tourism policy is highly centralised, and therefore local authorities do not have any autonomy, but the central government and its ministerial headquarters in Athens are responsible for nearly all decisions about tourism on the island (Komilis, 1987). As a result, the EU (2000) reports that in Greece, because of central administration in Athens, the formulation of development plans do not reflect the needs of the local communities. There is also an over supply of rooms attributable to two factors: incentives given by the central government, for instance, law 1262/82 granted permission for the construction of too many low quality accommodation establishments (Andriotis, 2001), and an underground economy consisting of a considerable number of undeclared unlicensed units and

rooms, known as 'parahoteleria' (Andriotis, 2001).

The island also faces a plethora of other problems that include: accentuated regional imbalances with the vast majority of tourism activity concentrated on the northern coast, environmental degradation resulting from over-development and insufficient tourism planning, insufficient infrastructure, bureaucracy and insufficient coordination of tourism activities (Anagnostopoulou, Arapis, Bouchy & Micha, 1996; Andriotis, 2000, 2001, 2002b; OANAK, 1995). However, it has not yet proven whether the local authorities of the island undertake any activities to overcome these problems, something that will be the focus of the current research.

Methodology

Overall approach

This paper is a part of a larger project undertaken in Crete during the summer of 1997. The project investigated the tourism development and planning process of the island of Crete and the sample incorporated three community groups: residents, tourism business people and local authority officials. The results of this paper are based on the local authorities survey, although the results of the other two surveys are presented elsewhere (e.g., Andriotis, 2000, 2002a, 2002b; Andriotis, Vaughan & Wilkes, 1999; Vaughan, Andriotis & Wilkes, 2000).

The sampling process

Non-probability sampling was used for the selection of local authority officials. The sampling procedure used was judgmental or purposive sampling, whereby representatives of the sample are identified in accordance with the interest of the researcher because they will shed light on a particular aspect of the phenomenon under investigation (Hornby & Symon, 1994). At

first, only authorities with direct involvement in the tourism development of the island were considered appropriate. However, tourism is a multi-faceted industry, and it was decided that interviews with officials not directly involved in tourism, e.g., from technical and commercial chambers, would be useful. Therefore, 28 local authority officials were selected, those with an involvement in the development of the island. Officials were selected from the four major cities of the island (Heraklio, Chania, Rethymno and Agios Nikolaos), although the majority of interviews were undertaken in Heraklio, since the largest city on the island has the highest concentration of authorities (e.g., Region of Crete, Governmental Departments, HNTD directorate).

Questionnaire design

To develop the interview questionnaire, the main issues of tourism development and planning in Crete, as well as the problems faced by the island's tourism industry were reviewed. In total, local authorities' questionnaire consisted of 17 questions. However, this paper is based on six questions. These questions were concerned with the actions undertaken by each authority to overcome the two major problems faced by the island's tourism industry namely seasonality and dependence on tour operators, as well as any other attempts undertaken to develop tourism. Other questions dealt with the number of seasonal or year-round staff engaged directly or indirectly in tourism activities, as well as future strategies and measures for planning tourism development of the island. By evaluating the responses to these questions, it will become possible for the current research to identify whether the actions currently undertaken by local authorities are sufficient for the tourism development of the island or further actions are required, as well as to elicit suggestions for

the further tourism development of the island.

The questions analysed in this paper were open-ended (without fixed categories for responses). Open ended questions were used to allow greater flexibility of answers, to encourage interviewees to give more spontaneous opinions and to avoid the potential bias arising from restricting responses to the researcher's own fixed categories (Ryan, 1995).

The interviews

Each official with development and planning interests received a phone call with a request to participate in the study. Very often telephone contact with the potential interviewee was not possible, but the interview request was made via a secretary or an administrative assistant. If it was not possible to arrange an interview by phone, the interviewer visited the official. The interviewer gave the head of the authority the opportunity to forward the questionnaire to a more knowledgeable person within the authority if he/she thought that this person was more appropriate to participate in the interview.

Upon acceptance of the request to participate in the study, a meeting was arranged. 25 interviews were conducted, including: six from chambers, five from trade associations, four from local governments (OTAs), four from Prefecture Councils, two from development organisations, two from ministerial departments, one from the Region of Crete, and one from the directorate of the HNTD. Three interviews did not take place due to refusals. The average interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The interviews were given in confidence and therefore are presented here anonymously.

The analytical process

For the question dealing with the number of staff engaged in

tourism activities in each authority frequency distributions, means, ranges and sums were calculated.

For all the other (qualitative type) questions the 'transcendental realism' approach was adopted, as suggested by Huberman & Miles (1998). Specifically, after the collection of data the following components of data analysis were followed.

- *Data reduction* through editing, segmenting and summarising the data, memoing, and associated activities, and conceptualising and explaining.
- *Data display* through the use of tables. (Given that the sample size of this survey was small, it was considered more appropriate to express the results in the tables in terms of the number of respondents or responses rather than percentages).
- *Drawing and verifying conclusions.* The only reason for reduction and displaying data was to interpret them and draw conclusions.

However, although qualitative-type questions were utilised, replies were not explored as in depth as qualitative research does, mostly because the study was mainly concerned with identifying the attempts undertaken by the local authorities to overcome the major problems faced by the island's tourism industry, as well as officials' suggestions for future tourism planning and not to undertake an in depth analysis of the nature of each activity and suggestion.

The findings of the study

Activities currently undertaken by the local authorities

This section investigates the various responsibilities undertaken by the Cretan authorities

Table 1: Attempts to Overcome the Seasonality Problem.

	No. of Responses
Co-operation/Involvement in a plan	9
Alternatives forms of tourism	4
Provision/Improvement of facilities	3
Promotion/Advertisement	3
Other	6
Total (N=15)	25

used in the sample for tourism development, in order to understand whether Cretan local authorities contribute to the development of the local tourism industry. Due to the fact that the island faces two major problems: the high seasonality and the dependence on tour operators, as identified above, local authority officials were asked to indicate their attempts to overcome these two problems.

Attempts to overcome seasonality

Despite the severity of the seasonality problem, 10 out of 25 local authorities did not have any strategy in place. It was commonly stated that seasonality was outside their responsibility. Among the authorities having undertaken steps to reduce seasonality, nine attempted to create mechanisms for co-operation with other bodies (e.g., trade associations have designed promotional campaigns together with public and private sector bodies) and were involved in the existing programme for the elimination of the seasonality problem¹ (Table 1). As a result, there are signs where private and public sector bodies collaborate for the extension of the existing tourist season into shoulder periods and the creation of new

seasons of tourism activity. Other attempts made by a lower proportion of authorities (four in total) included the elimination of the seasonal distribution of tourist arrivals through the promotion of alternative forms of tourism (e.g., campaigns abroad and creation of necessary infrastructure). Three authorities attempted to overcome seasonality through provision and/or improvement of outdoor and indoor sport/leisure/entertainment facilities, and further three through promotion/advertisement, e.g., participation in exhibitions, production and distribution of promotional material and delivering information through the Internet. Other attempts undertaken by less than two local authorities each, included promotion of conference trade, elaboration of studies for the extension of tourism season, financing of plans for the extension of the tourism season and improvement of service provision.

Attempts to overcome dependency on tour operators

Despite the extent of the dependency on tour operators problem, the majority of authorities (17 out of 25) had not taken any action to reduce it,

Table 2: Attempts to Overcome the Problem of Dependence From Tour Operators.

	No. of responses
Partnerships with other authorities	5
Participation in exhibitions abroad	2
Other	5
Total (N=8)	12

because, as they mentioned, it was not their responsibility and/or there was not sufficient help from the Greek government. Among the authorities dealing with the problem, attempts undertaken included partnerships with other authorities (for five) and participation in exhibitions abroad (for two) (Table 2). A variety of other actions undertaken by only one authority, included: increasing competitiveness of the tourist product through the provision/improvement of infrastructure and services, promotion of new forms of tourism, improving co-operation with tour operators, establishing a charter airline in order to reduce dependency by controlling a share of the air traffic to the island, and provision of advising/informing enterprises and all bodies involved in tourism.

Other activities

Apart from seasonality and dependency on tour operators the island faces various other problems, as mentioned above, although limited past research has made it difficult to prove their severity for the development of the island's tourism industry. As a result, officials were asked to indicate their activities to contribute to the tourism development of the island (Table 3), in their attempt to eliminate these problems. The most common activity of the authorities was: promotion/advertisement for 14, mainly through participation in exhibitions, printing of information pamphlets and booklets, publishing hotel and tourist guides and having established sites in the internet. Other activities are carried out jointly with other administrative bodies at regional or local level for nine authorities. Specifically, the authorities participated in the establishment of the Tourism Company of Crete² responsible for the development of the island. The prime concern of six authorities was to develop

Table 3: Activities for Tourism Development.

	No. of Responses
Promotion/Advertisement	14
Jointly with other bodies	9
Alternative forms of tourist	6
Culture/Festivals	5
Infrastructure	4
Other	10
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Total (N =22)	48

alternative forms of tourism, and for a further five to promote cultural tourism and/or organise festivals. Four authorities were responsible for the provision, operation and/or improvement of infrastructure. Other activities adopted by one or two authorities each included: the provision/improvement of services, the protection of coastal zones, the promotion of local products/nutrition through tourism, the participation in conferences and European Community programmes, the provision of advising/informing for tourism matters, elaboration of tourism studies and the increase of residents' consciousness towards tourism.

Local authorities involvement in tourism

The authorities interviewed can also be categorised according to their involvement in tourism. Specifically, 22 out of the 25 local authorities surveyed undertook specific activities for tourism development. For seven of them tourism was their only responsibility. For a further five authorities, although tourism was not their major activity, they had established a tourism department within the authority, including the four Prefectures of the island, which are required by

Law 2160/1993 to establish a Department for Tourist Promotion. In contrast, 10 authorities did not have any department to promote tourism, since their responsibilities were not directly involved in tourism. However, they operated some tourism activities. Finally, three authorities did not run any tourism activities, although one of them was planning to employ skilled staff in order to contribute to the promotion of tourism.

The reason for authorities to engage staff in tourism activities is to contribute to the tourism development. Among the 25 authorities a total of 194 employees were engaged directly or indirectly in tourism activities. Table 4 shows that the workforce in the local authorities contained in the sample, was mainly directly involved in tourism (59%), full-time (81%) and all year (77%). On average, each local authority had 7.8 employees. Two authorities had in total 44 seasonal employees (23% of total). The range of staff with tourism responsibilities in the authorities varied from zero for three authorities to 60 for one. Two of the authorities had 100 employees involved in tourism (52 percent of total employees). Specifically, the most tourism dependent municipality of Agios

Table 4: The Workforce of the Sampled Local Authorities.

	All year		Seasonal		Total
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time	
Direct	81 (42%)	26 (13%)	-	8 (4%)	115 (59%)
Indirect	40 (21%)	3 (2%)	36 (19%)	-	79 (41%)
Total	121 (62%)	29 (15%)	36 (19%)	8 (4%)	194(100%)

Nikolaos had 60 (of which 36 were seasonal employees) and the HNTO directorate in Heraklio had 40 full time employees directly engaged in tourism.

Suggestions for the further expansion of the tourism industry

Local authority officials can be considered as the experts of the local tourism industry. Therefore, they were asked to suggest actions for the further expansion of the island's tourism industry. These suggestions are concentrated on two main themes.

Suggestions for additional facilities or improvement of existing

Due to the fact that past studies (e.g., Anagnostopoulou *et al.*, 1996; OANAK, 1996) have reported that the island needs further facilities for tourist use, officials were asked to express their opinions about the needs of the island for additional facilities or improvement of existing. Officials' responses are summarised at Table 5. The vast majority suggested that the island needs more infrastructural facilities, such as marinas, airports, roads and car parks. 15 officials suggested the improvement of existing facilities with the main criticism focused on water and electricity supply, drainage, telecommunications, ports, airports, road networks and the need for improved local public transport system with

more bus services during the tourist season, and better co-ordination of public transport. 10 officials declared the need for more and varied outdoor and indoor sport/leisure/recreation facilities to attract tourists, mainly in the off-season period. Facilities suggested included: casinos, golf courses, mountain trails, mountain and fishing shelters, theaters, sport centres and facilities for winter sports. 10 officials expressed the need for facilities that will respect, enhance and protect the natural physical resources, e.g., trails and signing of national parks and biological cleaning of seas. Additionally, recommendations attracting the support of four or less officials included: reclamation and restoration of archaeological sites, traditional buildings and villages, establishment of more museums, construction of conference centres and creation of facilities for alternative forms of tourism.

Most essential action for planning Cretan tourism development

The last question provided an opportunity for local authority officials to suggest the most essential action to be undertaken for planning the island's tourism development. Officials' suggestions were concentrated on three main areas (Table 6). The first essential action for planning tourism development (mentioned by eight officials), was the construction and maintenance of

infrastructure and tourism superstructure by the public sector, together with the provision of incentives to the private sector towards the construction of infrastructure. Next, four officials called for the protection of the environment through urban and coastal planning. Thirdly, three officials suggested the attraction of alternative forms of tourism together with the extension of the tourism season.

In addition, a number of other actions were suggested each of which attracted the support of two or less officials, such as calls for a detailed investigation of the problems resulting from tourism development so as to design a master plan for the island's tourism development, attraction of higher quality tourists and new markets, prohibition of more hotel construction apart from high class hotels, improvement of services, promotional campaigns of Cretan tourism abroad, enforcement of controls on tourist enterprises/entrepreneurs, training/education of all involved in the tourism industry and co-operation between the public and private sector and, finally, incorporation of the local community's needs and desires in the development and planning process.

Discussion

The expansion of tourism and the fierce competition have spurred various changes in the way destinations are managed (Crouch & Ritchie, 1999). As a result, Richards (1992) remarks:

tourism is a diverse activity which impinges on many areas of local authorities responsibility (p. 5).

Therefore, this study has used local authorities as a sample unit because they represent the views of those who develop policy and planning, and make decisions for future developments and public good. From the findings of the

Table 5: Additional Facilities or Improvements of Existing

	No. of Responses
Infrastructure	19
Improvement of existing	15
Outdoor and indoor sport/leisure/recreation facilities	10
Protection of the environment	10
Reclamation/restoration of archaeological sites, traditional buildings and villages	4
Conference centres	3
Facilities for alternative forms of tourism	3
Other	5
Total (N = 25)	69

Table 6: Most Essential Action for Planning Tourism Development.

	No. of Respondents
Provision of infrastructure/improvement of existing	8
Environmental protection/urban and coastal planning	4
Alternative forms of tourism/extension of tourism season	3
Other	10
Total (N=25)	25

study it is evident the importance attributed to tourism for the island, since 22 out of the 25 authorities used in the sample had a direct or indirect involvement in tourism and staff engaged in tourism activities, and they had undertaken actions for the development of the industry.

Whilst the seasonality and the dependence on tour operators problems have long been recognised, there was not enough evidence of significant actions taken to reduce them, since many authorities do not necessarily identify a central role for themselves in their solution. Only nearly half of the authorities, used in the sample, share a common interest in promoting tourism as a year-round activity. The participation of local authorities in the plan for the extension of the tourism season shows encouraging signs that something can be done for the elimination of the seasonality problem. Nevertheless, the accompanying comments made by most officials for the elimination of the dependence on tour operators problem indicated that local authorities have not consciously made serious attempts, perhaps because they lack motivation, staff, funding or time. Clearly there is still a critical need to further investigate these problems in order to find an effective means of converting good intentions into appropriate action.

Most of the existing efforts toward tourism tend to concentrate on promotional activities and programmes primarily focused on ways that

the island can improve its ability to attract tourists. Thus, there is a lack of innovation in the strategies of local authorities towards tourism development, and it can be assumed that authorities are concerned with their day-to-day activities, rather than looking ahead. Thus, more aggressive strategies are required to eliminate the various problems faced by the island's tourism industry.

There was also limited concern for local development issues. The majority of authorities are either concentrated on a larger region or the entire island. Even when local or regional rehabilitation is attempted, attention seems to be directed mostly towards advertising and promotional activities, rather than designing policies aimed at ameliorating specific environmental and socio-cultural problems. In short, little emphasis is placed on ensuring that tourism spending flows to other areas, other than the existing coastal northern strip. As a result, many non-tourism communities are left on their own when it comes to capturing a share of the benefits associated with tourism activity.

Considering the concentration of tourism activity in some tourist resorts of the northern coast (Andriotis, 2001; Eurostat, 1994; OANAK, 1995), the rich environmental resources of the island (Eurostat, 1994; Kousis, 1989; Theodosakis, 1994), and officials' request for environmental conservation, ecotourism can contribute to the spatial distribution of tourism trade and may provide increased benefits to indigenous people in the least

developed parts of the island. However, from officials' responses it seems that authorities have not yet gotten ahead to this end. More efforts are required in an attempt to utilise ecotourism as a strategy for the dispersal of tourism activity in the hinterland and the least developed parts of the island, and as a low impact form of tourism expansion.

In addition, although the importance of research into the tourism industry, e.g., perceptions of incoming tourists of the island's image and the quality of the tourist product, and the identification of industry problems for effective tourism management, there was little evidence that the local authorities have undertaken or plan to undertake any kind of research. Research therefore probably plays a minor role in management planning. As a result, current tourism efforts suffer from a lack of rigorous evaluation and monitoring efforts and little emphasis has been placed on determining whether tourism, as a development strategy, fits within the socio-economic and environmental structure of the island and its communities, as well as whether tourists are satisfied by the offered product. Research is required to identify the real problems of the island's tourism industry, as perceived by tourists, islanders and the business sector and whether the actions currently undertaken by the public sector are sufficient for the amelioration of these problems or additional actions are required.

On the surface the number and range of actions is encouraging. However, some of the actions described seem of questionable value. For example, although many authorities are involved in promotion, a situation may arise where many different bodies are involved in the promotion and development of the island and their actions may be in conflict. Within the public sector, tourism

is integrated within many organisations. Consequently, actions may be subject to increasing duplication and contradiction. Thus, some co-ordination and sharing of responsibilities within local authorities, especially in the promotion field, is essential for the whole island. This has been realised by some of the authorities involved in the establishment of the Tourism Company of Crete.

Finally, it was evident that although the local authorities undertake various actions toward tourism, officials believe that more efforts are required. Specifically there were calls for creation of infrastructure and improvement of the existing, creation of facilities, and environmental protection. As a result, actions should be taken towards these ends.

Conclusions

The above review raises questions as to whether current initiatives are sufficient for the future tourism development of the island and the reinforcement of positive outcomes. The findings of this research suggest that many local authorities may need to reconsider what they are currently doing in the tourism field, and think carefully what they want to achieve through tourism and how they can best secure it. In particular, they need to consider how strategies can be used to assess whether they are doing the right thing in tourism matters and how they can act more effectively. As Long (1994) asserts

successful strategies are likely to have clear aims, seek the perspective of the tourist, be responsive to residents, identify roles of many tourism players, review their targets and effectively gather finance (p. 22).

For successful development of the island's tourism industry, future

strategies should be directed to these ends.

Many Cretans have concentrated their expectations on the Tourism Company of Crete for the better development of tourism within the island (Andriotis, 2000). However, five years after the establishment of the Tourism Company, there are not enough encouraging results to support that the Tourism Company has achieved its foundation aims. In addition, from the officials' responses it is clear that further actions are necessary for planning tourism development. Therefore, it may be necessary to design a regional master plan for the island in order to achieve coordination of tourism activities. Future policies should be based on a master plan that would be able to integrate tourism development within the island and would address the policy aspects and strategies of future growth.

Endnotes

¹ A plan for 12-month tourism has been designed in an attempt to mitigate the seasonal concentration of tourism activity in Crete. This plan has attached major importance to publicity, co-ordination of all participants'

actions, and the provision of incentives to Cretan enterprises, airlines and tour operators ("Winter tourism", 1997). A pilot programme (1998-99) has been designed with the co-operation of the Hellenic National Tourism Organisation, the Region of Crete and a large group of businessmen (hoteliers, travel agents and Greek tour operators) ("Destination Crete", 1998).

² The Tourism Company of Crete has been established with the responsibility to contribute to the tourism development of the island. Its participants include all the immediately interested parties from the public and private sector of the island. According to "Destination Crete" (1998) it aims:

At the scientific-technocratic support of the tourist structures of the private and the public sector, the unified expression and the development of Cretan tourism, the processing of policies and propositions of tourist interest and, in general, the co-ordination of all the activities that carriers or private companies create, in a way that they form for Crete a strong point of reference, in the international tourist market, strengthening its presence and its negotiations position (pp.68-69).

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