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WORLD ENVIRONMENT DAY 2012

Green Economy and Sustainable Nature Based Tourism

NGO project promotes innovative management tools for protected territories in the Black Sea region

Green Economy: Does it include YOU? is the theme for the World Environment Day 2012. Its purpose is to introduce in an understandable form the idea that economy can be efficient and responsible to the environment and society, and also socially inclusive. Green Economy is really something that is applicable all around you and it is easy to imagine how you fit in it. With the coming of summer and the holiday season, one of the immediate suggestions is tourism and travel.

Tourism, the biggest industry in the world accounting for around 11 per cent of global GDP and some eight per cent of jobs world-wide, holds the potential to deliver a sustainable future with the choices made by visitors and travelers having positive or negative impacts on the environment and the social fabric of communities.

This very idea is embedded in the concept for the project “Interpretative Trails on the Ground - Support to the Management of Natural Protected Areas in the Black Sea Region (InterTrails)” funded by the European Union through the Joint Operational Programme “Black Sea Basin 2007 - 2013”. The project includes activities associated with management and conservation of protected territories on regional scale.

Nature interpretation is the answer to the rapid growth of nature-based tourism and an effective means of managing the tourist use of natural resources. Tourist operators being well aware of the awakening interest of people in the environment and wildlife offer a variety of attractions based on the recreational use of nature. Protected territories and especially parks of nature increasingly employ indirect mechanisms of management avoiding the physical or legal barriers before visitors. Opening up for tourists, the park managements rather seek to reduce inappropriate behaviour of visitors on voluntary basis through education. Using nature interpretation, an interactive educational activity, to manage nature-based touristic activities is widely utilized.

Since the late 1950-ies various definitions have been provided about ‘nature interpretation’. In general, the definitions stress on the interactive presentation of knowledge, aiming to reveal meanings and relationships between original objects of the natural surroundings. Interpretation involves first hand experience, not a simple account of information and facts. The use of interpretation has become a



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widespread management technique in the park management profession and is now a specialist subject within many natural resource management disciplines.

The focus of the NGO project is to design and create interpretative trails in protected territories in the Black Sea region. The meaning of the name given to the trails implies that the visitors to the parks need to have the significance of nature interpreted to them. The trails are routes inside the park which comprise nature landmarks and specific items of interest to be shown and their significance explained to the visitors. Those can include plant and tree species specific to the region or the area. If there are endangered species of plant and animal life, they can also be included in the interactive presentation. Explanations about habitats, voices of birds, footsteps and traces of animals can also form part of the 'interpretation'. Each trail can include about 20 or more points to be addressed in the interpretative explanation. It can be delivered in foreign languages as well depending on the interest in the trail.

Tourist operators in the Black Sea countries, especially in the coastal area, are responding to the increasing demand for enjoyable nature-based attractions. For the time being these attractions are not a big section of the market. In terms of sustainable use of the nature resources, it seems that the aim of the private tourist operators and the government environmental agencies have one common objective - to allow the proper recreational use of the environment while taking care to protect that environment from deterioration and degradation. The achievement of the right balance between the recreational use of the environment and its protection remains a true challenge.

Partners in the project are five non-governmental organizations from the Black Sea basin countries. Beneficiary is the Black Sea NGO Network (www.bsnn.org) and the partners are NGO Mare Nostrum, Constanta Romania, the Black Sea Branch of the Ukrainian Environmental Academy of Science of Odessa, Ukraine, the Foundation for Sustainable Development of Cahul, Moldova and the Black Sea EcoAcademy of Batumi, Georgia. The length of the project is two years and its total cost is 396 912.00 euro. The project motto is *Nature without borders* and its website is at www.trails.bsnn.org. The project aims to raise public awareness of the coastal environment and its problems, including human interactions and effects. It can also help people in the regional communities utilize better the opportunities for sustainable development and protection of nature and the historical and cultural heritage through management of protected territories.

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