ArchCharter

The Management Agency of the National Marine Park of Zakynthos participates in the European Program ARCHICHARTER, funded by the European Union under the Community Initiative INTERREG III B ARCHIMED. The program promotes the implementation of sustainable tourism in 6 protected areas, 3 Italian and 3 Greek (the Regional Natural Park of Serre Calabria, the Regional Park of Nebrodi Sicily, the Regional Park of Matese in Campania, the Border Region Delta Rhodopi / National Park of Eastern Macedonia - Thrace, which manages the River Nestos, the Municipality of Nevropolis Agrafon (Thessaly), which manages Plastiras Lake and the National Marine Park of Zakynthos). In these areas tourism is an important economic activity and potential burden on the environment and society. To avoid this, the program based on principles established by the European Charter and the Local Agenda 21 seeks to develop an alternative model of quality tourism and friendlier to the natural environment and human. The European Charter promotes sustainable tourism in protected areas, considering that the core of tourism should be to protect natural, cultural and social resources. The Charter shall require from every protected area Manager and those involved in tourism (public services, tour operators, local authorities, etc.) to create a cooperation network with common strategies and an action plan to sustainable tourism and the resulting economic benefits from it.

Sustainable tourism is any tourism activity that ensures long-term protection of natural and cultural resources and contributes in a positive and fair way, to economic development and prosperity. The concept of Sustainability was introduced by the Conference on Environment and Development in Rio de Janeiro in 1992, in the text of Agenda 21. It was signed by 170 nations and sets targets for the environment, society and economy. The Local Agenda 21 is a simplified guide of the general text for local governments, supporting civic participation and initiative.

The ARCHICHARTER program provides for the involved Protected Areas:
- research on tourism supply and demand
- awareness activities and environmental education
- implementation of Environmental Certification in infrastructure, services and tourism products
- seminars and training programs for new strategies
- a common strategy and action plan for implementing the European Charter
- studies at local and national level
- sustainable tourism and management of protected areas
- networking between public and private entities

For the implementation of the Project, the Management Body of the National Marine Park of Zakynthos adopts a strategy for sustainable development in the region, which aims at:
- the recognition that both the natural resources, that is the key point of the protected area and the cultural, social and traditional values should be protected and considered as the core for the tourism development.
- improving the tourist offer, in accordance with quality principles in products and services.
- promoting new tourist markets, with initiatives that ensure low environmental impact, new jobs and promotion of local productive sectors such as agriculture.
- promoting a tourism addressed to all social groups, with particular attention to the sensitive ones and meets the needs of both visitors and the local community.
- the tourist awareness to the environmental and socio-cultural values of the area and information on the importance of protecting them.
- the training of stakeholders on the principles of sustainable tourism.
- the improvement of the quality of residents' life on the environmental and economic level.
- the cooperation with visitors, tour operators, local community and other concerned stakeholders.
- developing monitoring programs for the state of action plans implementation for the promotion of sustainable tourism.

The main objective of the program is to create a network of coordination and processing of proposals (FORUM) for Sustainable Development, particularly in the tourism sector. The contribution of the local parties, as suggested also by the Local Agenda 21 and the European Charter, the public and private sector and NGOs is important and necessary. The responsibilities of the FORUM will be:
- Diagnostic analysis of Reports on the environment and tourist traffic in the region and the processing of results.
- a proposal for a joint Action Plan for Sustainable Tourism.
- monitoring the implementation of the Action Plan.
- definition of criteria for a label 'Provider of Environmental Quality'.
- recognition of "Providers of Environmental Quality" with the special label of the park operator. It is a label that distinguishes the companies that base their production processes on the respect of the natural environment. The label's model defines that all those living and working in the region are potential "Providers of Environmental Quality. These can be:
- agribusiness, private farmers and farmers in the tourist area of the Park, hotels, agritourism units, rooms, camping and restaurants, tour operators office.
and eco-guides in the tourist area of the Park. All these entities may be certified, under conditions agreed between the Park and interested parties. The certification specifications are defined by the working table, as a Forum's tool, which also promotes the improvement of environmental performance of each activity. The label "Provider of Environmental Quality" is available on specific disciplinary provisions defining the necessary actions to continuously improve the environmental quality of the area.

In addition to the certification label "Provider of Environmental Quality", anyone will be able on its own private initiative to participate in procedures for further Environmental Certification, European or global recognition, eg with one of the following certification schemes:
- The Ecolabel: is the European eco-quality label in which, products and services with low environmental impact, are certified.
- The EMAS, is the European Eco-Management and Control System for businesses - organizations. The organization certified, declares its agreement with the environmental system's parameters, its Environmental Performance and also sets goals for its improvement.

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