



Pilot action «A snorkel on the mountain» “Mediterranean Experience of Eco-Tourism” (MEET) Program

Management Body of Samaria National Park

1st Report

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1st Report

Pilot Action

«A snorkel on the mountain»

In the framework of the Project

“Mediterranean Experience of Eco-Tourism” (MEET)

Revision of the translation: Georgia Papadakis



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“MEET” Program and why it is important for the National Park of Samaria

“MEET” Project or “Mediterranean Experience of Ecotourism”, started in January 2013 and will continue until 2015. It is a strategic project involving 10 countries of the Mediterranean in the framework of cross-border cooperation within the European Neighborhood Partnership Instrument – “Mediterranean Sea” Programme (ENPI Med). The Projects’ budget is approximately 5.000.000 € (specifically 4,999,966), from which 90% is allocated by ENPI Med and the rest 10% comes from private co-financing. The Main objective is to develop an integrated strategy in order to set up an Eco-Tourism Development model for the Mediterranean Protected Areas that will eventually promote a better seasonal distribution of tourism influx, starting from the “European Charter for Sustainable Tourism” approach through the establishment of a network among Protected Areas.

Expected results of the MEET Project are:

- **Guidelines for eco-tourism** planning in the Mediterranean region
- **An international agreement** to ensure cooperation in the field of eco-tourism across the Mediterranean region
- **An eco-tourism catalogue**, offering eco-tourism packages located in 20 Mediterranean Protected

Areas to selected markets (starting from USA, Canada, Australia and Japan)

- **A MEET Network** gathering the involved Protected Areas to manage the catalogue and capitalize on the project results
- **At least 6 partnerships of local Small and Medium Enterprises (SME)**, developing eco-tourism products

The activities of the Project include:

- a) **To create a communication strategy on eco-tourism** that raises environmental awareness on a national and local level and which disseminates project results on an International level
- b) **To collect Best Practices on eco-tourism** on an international level
- c) **To analyze the expectations of eco-tourists and Tour Operators** from 4 overseas markets (USA, Canada, Australia and Japan)
- d) **To involve relevant national and international policy-making institutions** in the “Advisory Panel on Eco-tourism”, and to organize 3 international workshops on the project’s achievements
- e) **To select 2 Protected Areas from each of the 10 Mediterranean countries**, for designing and testing Pilot eco-tourism products
- f) **To establish a Secretariat** to support the MEET Network and promote the catalogue with selected Tour Operators

g) **To initiate collaboration** with other sustainable tourism-related projects



Picture 1. The logo of MEET Program

The Management Body of Samaria (White Mountains) National Park acknowledging the fact that the dynamic of eco-tourism in the Protected Area is vast and wishing to encompass this dynamic – in conjunction with the present situation – to a new framework of investigation, broader social dialogue, alternative proposal statement and testing of these proposals in real time situations, submitted a relative proposal in the MEET Project framework: Call for Interest for the implementation of Pilot Actions on Eco-tourism in Marine Protected Areas in Greece. The proposed Pilot Action received the prominent title “a snorkel on the mountain” to highlight the image of an eco-tourist hiking the mountain while holding a snorkel in his back-bag. Thus, the overall aim of this title is to highlight the unique and inextricable connection among the terrestrial and marine-coastal environment of the Park and its importance for eco-tourism but also to show that when the management body in collaboration with the local stakeholders carefully plan a more intense avocation one which leans towards the marine-coastal part of an eco-touristic experience, this is of great significance and primary importance. Through this approach eco-tourism for the National Park may become a valuable tool for:

- A. The achievement of more effective policies for the conservation of biodiversity and landscape, terrestrial and marine - coast
- B. The unification of the eco-touristic experience and its integration in a common profile with the mountain **AND** sea merged together and not considered separately
- C. The environmental awareness and information dispatch on the environmental and economic significance (beyond the simple usage of resources) of the marine – coastal part of the National Park for visitors but also-and more importantly for local political parties and financial stakeholders.
- D. The holistic promotion of the National Park through an alternative style of eco-touristic experience that transcends the simple hiking of the Gorge, food consumption, swimming in the south coast and return to the city centers.
- E. The achievement of alternative ways to reinforce the local income through a soft activity development which is actually already present in the area but also through extending the current touristic period
- F. The conservation, reinforcement and promotion of the current cultural identity of the area and of local residents as a basic component of the eco-touristic experience

The Management Body of the National Park and its relationship with Eco-tourism

According to the proposal¹ submitted by the Management Body of Samaria National Park, the Pilot Action “a snorkel on the mountain” is basically designed to enhance and promote the eco-touristic experience currently acquired by visitors. Up to date, this experience is limited to just hiking a pre-defined trail either by private initiative or through organized tourist offices. Hiking the Gorge of Samaria is by all means a very interesting activity with its main feature being the observation of the vertical configuration of the terrestrial environment through a horizontal, relatively short and relatively difficult hike. Nevertheless, the Management Body has always been convinced that the protected area is much more than a simple hiking experience. It should be a holistic experience bearing elements from both the terrestrial and coastal – marine environment as well as the natural and cultural process of the area.

Through the Pilot Action, the Management Body aims at positioning the matter of extending the touristic period as well as the economic activity based on tourism, hence hoping that a plan of this kind would act in a positive direction towards the supply of environmentally friendly services and reinforcement of financial opportunities for both visitors and private initiative. Furthermore, the Pilot Action will provide a new insight for the local community to gain

¹ Pilot Action proposal «a snorkel on the mountain» in the framework of the MEET Project: Call for Interest for the implementation of Pilot Actions on Eco-tourism in Marine Protected Areas in Greece (2013)

understanding of the importance of the coastal and marine zone of the National Park, resulting in the reduction of negative effects of the marine environment such as the degradation of Posidonia meadows and reefs, the non-existence of eco-friendly mooring systems etc. It may also help disperse the touristic body primarily located in the terrestrial environment through a more equal distribution of the human presence to more locations than the ones at present.

The basic idea behind the Pilot Action is not the result of a contemporary approach for the management of the National Park. On the contrary, it has been suggested in a more generic form by the Management Plan of the National Park.

More specifically, the conservation objectives as stated in the Management Plan include²:

- a. Protection and preservation of habitats listed in the Annex I of the 92/43/EEC Directive
- b. Protection and preservation of rare, threatened endemic and protected species of flora, with particular emphasis to the species described in Annex II of the 92/43/EEC Directive
- c. Protection and preservation of rare, threatened endemic and protected species of fauna
- d. Protection and preservation of rare, threatened endemic and protected species of avifauna

²E.Pappas, E. Karapidakis. Samaria National Park Management Plan. Forest Directorate of Chania, 2009

- e. Protection and sustainable management of natural resources

The proposed management measures for elaborating on the abovementioned objectives include:

- a. Protection of the natural environment
- b. Protection of the aesthetics of the mountain landscape
- c. Control of the present activities with parallel promotion of alternative forms with less environmental surcharge
- d. Continuations and reinforcement of the dynamic interaction of the natural and cultural environment
- e. Reinforcement and support of the elements of the natural environment
- f. Achievement of sustainability through determining particular measures and regulations for the exploitation of natural resources

Based on these objectives and measures, **two of the priorities placed by the Management Plan are the constant and systematic monitoring of habitats and species with the contribution of scientists, volunteers and visitors as well as the development of main and alternative eco-touristic activities with the reinforcement of a solid environmental awareness system.**

But beyond the objectives, measures, provisions and priorities stated in the Protected Area's Management Plan with a five-year time extent ion, the

Management Body and other services and structures with jurisdictions in the protected area, haven't so far placed in a particular basis the subject of establishing and developing a holistic eco-tourism strategy in the area. The Pilot Action has come to fulfill this void and strengthen the current general belief of the eco-touristic policy in the National Park.

At this point what needs to be clarified is that the eco-touristic policy and activity in the National Park are not absent. Nevertheless, the current fragmented situation indicates that a unified theory of eco-tourism and ecotourism strategy in the local area and community basically does not exist. Eco-tourism as a meaning and activity is known to the local community and it does exist as a practiced activity, yet the way which is practiced by visitors and local business private initiative in general tends to attract the size of **mass eco-tourism** which, in reality, is no different from the mass tourism practiced in the broader northern zone of Crete. The only difference is the enactment of this practice in natural areas with all subsequent negative factors that this could entail on the sustainable management and protection of these areas.

The MedPAN Organization

The³ "Mediterranean Protected Areas Network" was created in 1990 during the Monaco Conference with the support of the World Bank. The two main objectives established for its creation were:

³ <http://www.medpan.org/>

- The sharing of experience between managers of Mediterranean protected areas;
- The development of management tools.

The MedPAN Network, led by the Port-Cros National Park (France), operated for 6 years, from 1990 to 1996, with one thematic seminar and four publications each year.



Picture 2. The MedPAN logo

The lack of human and financial resources left the network in a dormant state from 1996, but its value was re-affirmed by the United Nations Program for the Environment in the spring of 1999 via the Regional Activity Center for Specially Protected Areas (RAC/SPA), based in Tunis.

In 1999, the Port-Cros National Park applied for new statutes concerning MedPAN, transforming the latter into a non-profit organization under French law, with administrative offices hosted in the premises of the Port-Cros National Park. The General Secretariat is provided by RAC/SPA. The Executive Secretariat is provided by the Port-Cros National Park and the Federation of French Regional Natural Parks.

In 2001, the Port-Cros National Park proposed that the WWF-France "Oceans and Coasts" program takes

on reviving, coordinating and raising funds for the MedPAN Network.

At the end of 2007, the managers who were part of the Interreg IIIC project decide that a permanent structure should be set up to support the network.

A non-profit Organization is created in 2008 in France under the technical coordination of WWF-France and with the support of 9 founding members; the statutes of the Organization were registered and new members and partners joined the Organization.

In 2009, a 2010-2012 action strategy is developed. At the end of 2009, the Executive Secretariat of the Organization is established in Hyères (France). The first General Assembly is organized.

2010 and 2011 are the first two years of activity for the Organization.

In 2012, the Organization and its partners are now elaborating the 2013-2015 strategy.

In April 2014, the Organization brings together 54 members who manage over 80 MPAs and 31 partners from 18 Mediterranean countries. The Executive Secretariat of the Organization includes 6 employees. The Management Body of Samaria National Park is nowadays a member of the MedPAN Organization while it is the 4th Organization in Greece along with the Management Body of Karpathos – Saria, the Marine National Park of Alonissos – Northern Sporades and the marine National Park of Zakynthos.

The main objective of the Organization is to promote the creation, continuation and ecological functioning

of the Mediterranean Ecological Networks of Marine Protected Areas⁴. Thus it contributes to the achievement of the special objectives set by the Convention on Biological Diversity (Rio de Janeiro, 1992), which is the creation and preservation of national and regional systems of sustainably managed and ecologically representative marine protected areas, which collectively and through a global network can contribute to the achievement of the three targets of the Convention as well as the elimination of the biodiversity loss rate in a global, regional, national and sub-national level. In addition, the Organization contributes to the elaboration of the Barcelona Convention and more specifically of the protocol for Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity in the Mediterranean. Furthermore, under the power of the Mediterranean Action Plan and the Center of Regional Activities for Special Protected Areas, the Organization encourages countries to adopt and manage special protected areas, to elaborate projects for research and technical and scientific information exchange, to prepare management plans and design cooperation projects.

The basic activity fields of the Organization for 2012 are:

- ✓ Analysis of the Network of Marine Protected Areas
- ✓ Management Support of Marine Protected Areas
- ✓ Scientific Strategy

⁴<http://www.medmpaforum2012.org>

- ✓ Governance and regional and international coordination
- ✓ Communication and training

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is the basic instrument on which the MEET Project is structured. It comprises a proved method for planning touristic activities in protected areas using participatory procedures. MEET Project is basically a non-site test for applying the approach of tourism planning as described in the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas, in a very specific area, the Mediterranean, with various governance systems for protected areas, ranging from the highly concentrated systems of Malta and Egypt to the non concentrated ones of French and Lebanon.

The European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is a practical management tool aiming at ensuring that tourism can contribute to the sustainable financial, social and environmental development of Europe's protected areas. It is a voluntary agreement aiming at encouraging the implementation of good practices of protected areas that satisfy certain conditions for the sustainable development and management of tourism. The Charter was created by a team of representatives from protected areas, the tourism industry and partners, and was coordinated by the French Federation of Natural Parks under the umbrella of the

Europarc Confederation, a pan-European, non-governmental organization of protected areas in Europe.



Picture. 3. The logo of the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas

Even though analyzing the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas is not an object of the present Deliverable, nevertheless it is vital to report on the basic principles characterizing the Charter in order to be clear on which elements are highly related to the basic components of the MEET Projects and the planning Pilot Action. In this light, the European Charter is structured in 10 basic principles⁵:

1. **To involve all those implicated by tourism in and around the protected area in its development and management.** *A permanent forum, or equivalent arrangement, should be established* between the protected area authority, local municipalities, conservation and community organizations and representatives of the tourism industry
2. **To prepare and implement a sustainable tourism strategy and action plan for the protected area.** The

strategy should be based on careful consultation and be approved and understood by local stakeholders. It should contain *a definition of the area* to be influenced by the strategy, which may extend outside the protected area, *an assessment of the area's natural, historic and cultural heritage, tourism infrastructure, and economic and social circumstances*; considering issues of capacity, need and potential opportunity, *an assessment of current visitors and potential future markets, a set of strategic objectives for the development and management of tourism*, covering conservation and enhancement of the environment and heritage economic and social development preservation and improvement of the quality of life of local residents visitor management and enhancement of the quality of tourism offered, *an action plan to meet these objectives, an indication of resources and partners to implement the strategy* and finally *proposals for monitoring results*.

3. **To protect and enhance the area's natural and cultural heritage, for and through tourism, and to protect it from excessive tourism development** by *monitoring impact on flora and fauna and controlling tourism in sensitive locations, encouraging activities, including tourism uses, which support the maintenance of historic heritage, culture and traditions, controlling and reducing activities, including tourism impacts, which adversely affect the quality of landscapes, air and water; use non-renewable energy; and create unnecessary waste and noise, encouraging visitors and the tourism industry to contribute to conservation*

⁵ <http://www.european-charter.org/become-a-charter-area/charter-principles>

4. **To provide all visitors with a high-quality experience in all aspects of their visit**, by researching the expectations and satisfaction of existing and potential visitors, meeting the special needs of disadvantaged visitors, supporting initiatives to check and improve the quality of facilities and services
5. **To communicate effectively to visitors about the special qualities of the area**, by ensuring that the promotion of the area is based on authentic images, and is sensitive to needs and capacity at different times and in different locations, providing readily available and good quality visitor information in and around the area and assisting tourism enterprises to do so, providing educational facilities and services that interpret the area's environment and heritage to visitors and local people, including groups and schools
6. **To encourage specific tourism products which enable discovery and understanding of the area**, by providing and supporting activities, events and packages involving the interpretation of nature and heritage
7. **To increase knowledge of the protected area and sustainability issues amongst all those involved in tourism**, by providing or supporting training programmes for staff of the protected area, other organizations and tourism enterprises, based on assessing training needs
8. **To ensure that tourism supports and does not reduce the quality of life of local residents**, by (already stated above), ensuring good communication between the protected area, local people and visitors, identifying and seeking to reduce any conflicts that may arise
9. **To increase benefits from tourism to the local economy**, by promoting the purchase of local products (foods, crafts, local services) by visitors and local tourism businesses, encouraging the employment of local people in tourism
10. **To monitor and influence visitor flows to reduce negative impacts**, by keeping a record of visitor numbers over time and space, including feedback from local tourism enterprises, creating and implementing a visitor management plan, promoting use of public transport, cycling and walking as an alternative means instead of private cars, controlling the siting and style of any new tourism development

According to the above-mentioned 10 principles and the general planning of the Pilot Action "A snorkel on the mountain", we can distinguish the following components relative to the Pilot Action in the national Park of Samaria:

- ✓ **Conducting wide Participatory Processes for the development of the ecotourism planning in the White Mountains**, with the participation of all stakeholders active in the field of tourism in the area
- ✓ **Drafting a clear strategy for the ecotourism development model and an action plan** which is characterized for its clarity with clarity as far as the partners, measures, economy and time management are concerned.
- ✓ **Development of one or multiple (distinguishable or parallel) tourism products** of high quality adjusted to the special environmental and cultural conditions of the White Mountains and with the discovery of the

area and the “environmental recognition”⁶ through the tourism product being the general drafting framework

- ✓ **Capability of direct supply of retribution by the use of the tourism product to local communities** and in general, strategy of ecotourism directed to the reinforcement of the local economy
- ✓ **Protection of the natural and cultural heritage through mild development of parallel and accompanied structures** of the tourism product and supply of the latter.

The tourism industry in Crete- what do the data tells us

In 2007 an extensive tourism quality research⁷ for all Crete was elaborated under the supervision of the Laboratory of Planning and Development of Decision Support Systems of the Technical University of Crete. The research was elaborated through the use of questionnaires to a representative sample of tourists during their departure from airports in Crete. The aim was to study the characteristics and attitude of foreign tourists that arrived in Crete by charter flights for their summer vacation.

The sample included 5.144 questionnaires from both men and women over 18 years old.

⁶The use of the meaning of “environmental recognition” which is connected to softer and more public terms of combined leisure and education is preferred to the term of “environmental interpretation” which is more oriented to pure environmental education.

⁷Technical University of Crete, Department of Production and Administration Engineering. Quality Survey of Tourism in Crete. 2008

Out of the multiple deductions made from this study, ten of them were considered to be of high importance for the profile analysis of potential visitors in an eco-tourism package but also for the planning of the eco-touristic strategy. These are the following:

1. From the total sample of visitors that took part in the survey, 93% were classified as having secondary and higher/highest education. This fact is a strong indication that visitors are perhaps attracted to the area by an inner intention for “discovery” and a more profound understanding of the special features of the area, besides just participating in simple leisure activities.
2. The majority of visitors chose Crete as a destination because of the climate/natural beauties (78.01%) and the cultural background (history, archaeological sites) (34.21%). This fact, even though self-evident for Crete, indicates a strong dynamic of the natural features of the area as a means of attraction.
3. The Main sources of information regarding the features of Crete were drawn from the Internet and the tourism offices. This fact is evident of the strong dynamic of the Internet in relation to the organization and marketing of an eco-touristic package. This is a fact that should be taken seriously into consideration when planning an eco-tourist strategy.
4. The basic duration of visitors ‘stay in Crete is approximately 10 to 18 days. 40.32% replied that the stay duration is 7 days while 45.75% replied 8-14 days. This information is very important for the

- planning of any strategy but also for the eco-tourist package itself since it refers to the total stay in Crete and it is a strong indication for the optimum time of stay for any eco-tourist package in order for visitors to be able to combine it with other activities which are non-relevant to the package.
5. The attitude of visitors regarding their primary choice of nutrition was also examined. The majority chose to eat at restaurants outside their place of stay, while many chose to eat at their hotels even if the holiday package they had paid for was not all-inclusive. This fact demonstrates a strong dynamic of trust displayed by visitors to local restaurants but also the tendency to explore different sources of gastronomic experience.
 6. The National Park of Samaria was considered the most popular part of Crete for visitation by 11% of the tourists. This percentage is particularly high considering the fact that there are a number of versatile possible destinations in the entire island of Crete (for example Vai, Rethymno City, Elafonissi e.tc).
 7. The three major preferred leisure activities were “beach activities” (52%), “taverns” (50%) and “areas of natural beauty” (49%). This information is sufficient enough to indicate the optimum direction that an eco-tourist holiday package should have and, more specifically, the orientation towards sea and nature activities as well as gastronomy.
 8. In relation to visitors’ satisfaction, the criterion regarding “Environment – People”, which basically translates to the satisfaction felt from the natural environment, cultural features and local attitude, resembles the optimum efficiency for the tourist product of Crete. The nutrition criterion follows next with a high rate as well.
 9. 42% of visitors declared that they would be interested in participating in some form of special tourism (outdoor tourism, cultural tourism, health and hiking tourism e.t.ch.)
 10. The dynamic of the local gastronomy is proven by the fact that 53% of the sample knew about the local cuisine prior to their arrival on the island of Crete, while 75% of those classified the Cretan gastronomy as «very good” or “excellent”.
- From the above 10 direct results of the survey, a first evaluation of their dynamics in relation to the Pilot Action in the White Mountains contains:
- **Perhaps the eco-tourist strategy of the area should be more intensely directed to the creation of new or the expansion of the current features of educational leisure with specific topic-related activities within the framework of the pattern “sun-sea”**
 - **The basic duration of an eco-tourist product should not exceed 4 days in total (3 nights)** so that visitors would have the opportunity to wander about other local or regional destinations.
 - **The Gorge of Samaria is one of the most popular landmarks out of the entire island of Crete, and subsequently, its global recognition should be the core upon which the ecotourist strategy should be developed.** This does not imply that the “ Samaria venture” should be the central element of the total

experience of any visitor but the potential of the Gorge should definitely be used for marketing reasons

- **The gastronomic experience should be one of the basic features** for the development of the ecotourist strategy, either as part of another activity or as an individual thematic field
- **The use of the Internet for the promotion and endorsement of any ecotourist product should be the prime choice for marketing**

Eco-tourism

Ecotourism:

«travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated areas with the specific object of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery, its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations found in these areas»

When we refer to ecotourism it is important to comprehend the different forms of tourism among which the meaning of ecotourism is included in order to direct all subsequent activities to the correct direction.

When we refer to tourism in general then we refer to the activity of travelling for leisure⁸ or the activities of people travelling and staying to areas outside their usual place of stay for less than a year for purposes of leisure, work or other⁹. Before 1970, all definitions of tourism described tourist activities without evaluating the consequences to the environment or the local communities. But shortly before the end of 1970, the notion of eco-tourism was developed as part of a new global environmental tension. Until the end of 1990, eco-tourism was the fastest developed section of the tourism industry. Contrary to the original definitions, eco-tourism nowadays describes

⁸<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/tourism>

⁹<http://www.unwto.org/facts/menu.html>

the effect of tourism in natural areas and local communities and considers that as long as the practice of eco-tourism is right, then the effect will be positive. Under this notion, eco-tourism is not only a part of the global tourism industry but a body of principles and good practices closely linked to sustainable development.

One of the most famous definitions of eco-tourism is “responsible travel activity to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being being of local communities (TIES, 2009)”¹⁰.

One of the most representative definitions of eco-tourism is¹¹ «Ecotourism is a sustainable form of natural tourism that focuses primarily to gaining experience and understanding of nature, it is mild, non-consuming and locally directed. It is typically developed in natural areas and should contribute to the conservation and preservation of these areas». One of the first definitions given was¹² **«travelling to relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated areas with the specific object of studying, admiring, and enjoying the scenery, its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestations found in these areas»**. Another approach is that eco-tourism is a journey aiming **“to observe and at the same time**

¹⁰<https://www.ecotourism.org/>

¹¹Georgouli Ek., 2007. Bachelor Thesis: Ecotourism and Ecotouristic motives. Ecotourism as a form of mass tourism University of Piraeus, Department of Business Administration and Management, Master of Science Curriculum in Business Administration – Tourism Management.

¹² Ceballos-Lascurain H. 1996. Tourism, Ecotourism, and Protected Areas: The State of Nature-based Tourism Around the World and Guidelines for its Development. IUCN, Cambridge, UK.

learn about the natural phenomena, to experience wild life, to do something important”.

According¹³ to the Centre of Business and Technological Development of Western Greece, eco-tourism is a “form of tourism developed and managed in such a manner that the entire tourist activity – which is mainly focused on a resource or cultural heritage – may be continued forever. Eco-tourism seeks to reinforce the quality, quantity and productivity of ecosystems and human and natural resources over time while simultaneously respecting the dynamics of these systems. Ecotourism is friendly with nature that surrounds humans and compatible with the local environments and local communities”.

All in all, there is a plethora of definitions on eco-tourism but their precision in meaning is not part of the present study. What matters is to comprehend the general point of view on eco-tourism and mostly the parameters characterizing it. Thus, summarizing these parameters, ecotourism is:

- ✓ based on nature
- ✓ educational
- ✓ viable
- ✓ supported by the interaction with local communities

According to the above -mentioned, we could define the basic principles forming eco-tourism. These are:

¹³Georgouli Ek., 2007. Bachelor Thesis: Ecotourism and Ecotouristic motives. Ecotourism as a form of mass tourism University of Piraeus, Department of Business Administration and Management, Master of Science Curriculum in Business Administration – Tourism Management.

1. **Minimizing negative effects and cultural pollution (loss or industrialization of cultural identity)**
2. **Participation of local community in defining and planning of policies and decisions**
3. **Development of environmental and cultural sensitivity and recognition**
4. **Provision of positive experiences for visitors and local community using the educational element as the core factor**
5. **Allocation of direct economic benefits for the preservation of the environment**
6. **Allocation of economic benefits and strengthening of the local economy**
7. **Awareness development for the environmental, social and cultural climate of the country.**

“The conservation of biodiversity, cultural heritage and eco-tourism are logical partners as each one is necessary for individual targets to be accomplished”¹⁴

¹⁴Karagiannis S., Apostolou A., 2004. Knowledge Management in Eco-tourism: A Case Study. PAKM 2004, LNAI 3336, pp. 508–521, 2004.

According to the United Nations World Travel Organization (UN-WTO), in 2007 eco-tourism claimed 7% of the global market.

The basic features of ecotourism¹⁵:

1. **It contributes to the protection of biodiversity**
2. **It supports the conservation of the local community’s well-being.**
3. **It is an explanatory and educational activity**
4. **It contains responsible actions regarding tourists and tourism businesses**
5. **It is addressed to small groups of people**
6. **It is offered by SMEs**
7. **It requires minimum consumption on non-renewable resources**
8. **It requires local participation, property and business initiative especially by residents in agricultural areas.**

Why the concept of eco-tourism should constitute a separate chapter in the Life of the White Mountains

According to the “Update Study of the Special Environmental Study of the White Mountains”, tourism is the most fundamental factor of development for the wider area of the White Mountains. The Municipality of Chania is actually placed in one of the first positions regarding tourism dynamic in Greece. In “Region of Crete” level, Chania holds the second place regarding overnight stays in the 2000-2004 period with considerable amount of these held by Greek citizens (approximately 12%). The overall completeness in hotel units and lodges show an increasing rate for the same period and from

¹⁵ Vliamos, Spiros, and Karagiannis Stefanos.: Eco-tourism and Local Government: A proposal, The Step of Social Sciences, 28, June 2000, Athens.

the last place it held during the beginning of 2000 Chania has risen to the first place by the end of 2004. During the period 2002-2004, Chania shows the largest increase rate in arrivals, too. The number of hotel lodges and hotel beds was also constantly increased during 1998-2005.

However, on a regional level, and especially in the year 2005, Chania had the lowest number of 4&5 star hotels and the highest number of 2&3 star hotels. In general, tourism is the most fundamental economic activity especially along the coastline communities and settlements. The tourism dynamic of the area during 2006 was 559 hotel units and rooms to rent and 1.798 beds.

According to the available data from the Greek Organization of Tourism, Department of Crete, regarding the dynamic of hotel units in each District for the year 2006 the following were recorded:

Hotels: In the Districts of Anopoli and Chora Sfakion, 2 hotels, while in the Districts of Agya Roumeli, Askyfou, Vafe, Sougia, Therisso and Lakkoi, 1 hotel unit. Most beds are located in Chora Sfakion (184) with Lakkoi and Anopoli following (95 and 87 respectively).

Rented Apartments: Most of them are located in the Sougia district (17 apartments and 66 beds). The district of Anopoli (11 apartments and 29 beds), Agya Roumeli (10 apartments and 20 beds) and Vafe (2 apartments and 7 beds) follow suit.

Rooms to rent: Most operate in the districts of Sougia (184 rooms and 398 beds), Anopoli (142

rooms and 398 beds) and Chora Sfakion (88 rooms and 199 beds).

This data is an estimation of the update study of the Special Environmental Study of the White Mountains and regards to the overall tourism infrastructure in the area of the Pilot Action.

At the same time, from a recent survey elaborated under the surveillance of the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (M.A.I.Ch.), following an initiative of the Management Body of Samaria National Park with the support of the Forest Directorate of Chania, the Technical University of Crete and the University of Crete, some important data regarding the visitor profile and the economic profit of tourism for the wider area were extracted.

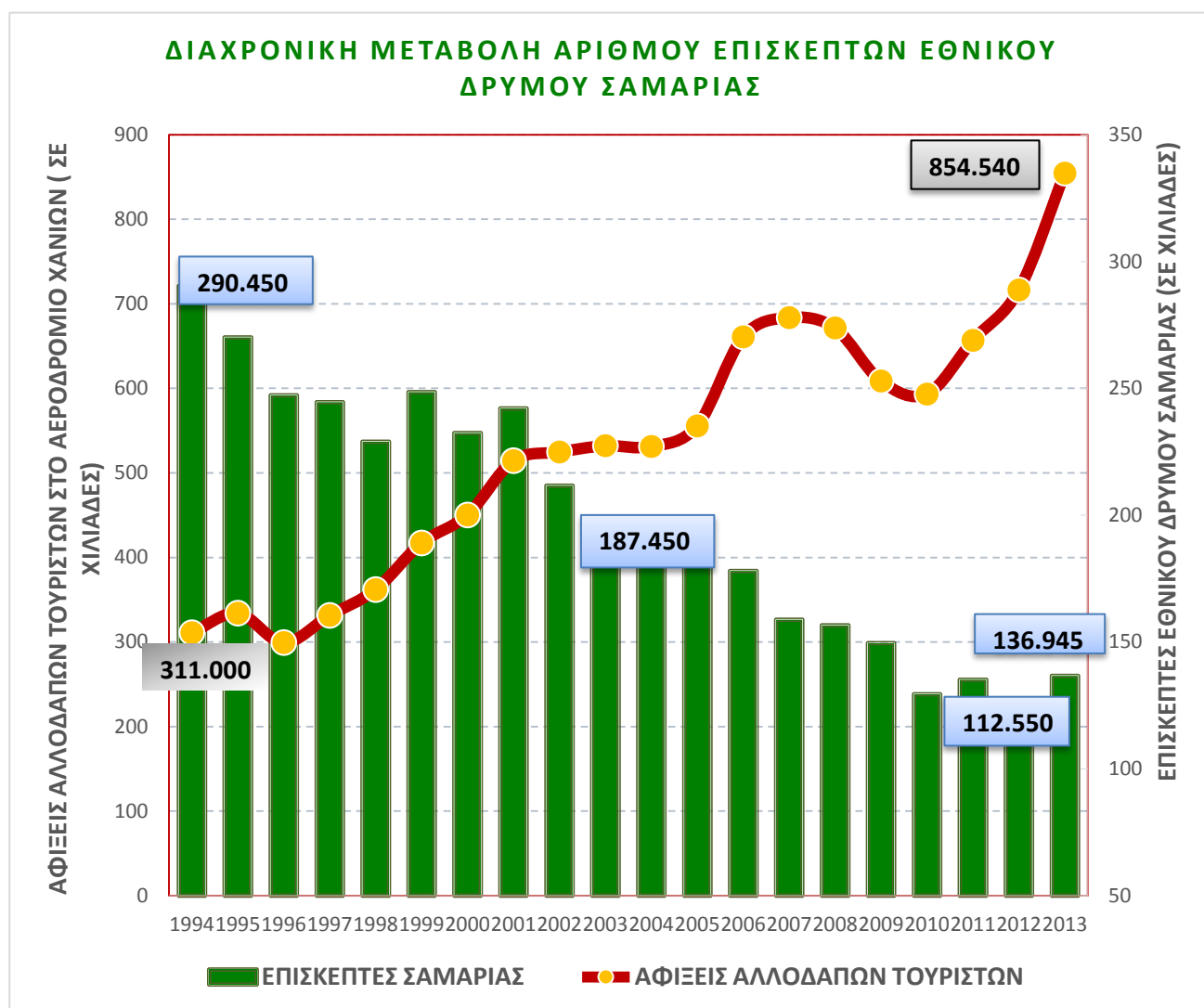
The survey was held through personal interviews in the National Park of Samaria (in the old settlement of the Gorge of Samaria) from May to October 2013. 1.101 questionnaires from direct interviews were gathered. The respondents came from 44 different countries.

It was reported that there is an inverse relationship between the number of visitors in the National Park and the number of visitors arriving at the Chania Airport. The number of visitors in the National Park has been **decreased by 53%** (from 290.450 in 1994 to 136.650 in 2013) in the last twenty years. On the contrary, the number of visitors in the airport of Chania has been **increased by 175%** (from 311.000 to 854.540). It is obvious that the Gorge of Samaria does not absorb the systematic increase in the number of foreign visitors. Possible cause for this sheer drop of visitation in the Gorge is that a considerable amount of visitors in Chania (mostly Scandinavians) had in

previous years visited the area and hiked the Gorge of Samaria. This is reinforced by the fact that from the total number of visitors, **84% visit Samaria for the first time and 16% have revisited the area. Another reason maybe that a great number of visitors comes to Chania with their families, which makes them believe that it would be very difficult to make an excursion of this type.** A third reason is that **most visitors prefer**

already prepaid his vacation to pay extra for the Samaria excursion.

Regarding age groups, the National Park's **majority of visitors are young, regardless sex (half were aged less than 35), followed by people aged 36-50 years old.** Older ages occupy smaller percentages. **The educational level of visitors is quite high, since 6 out of 10 are higher education graduates.**

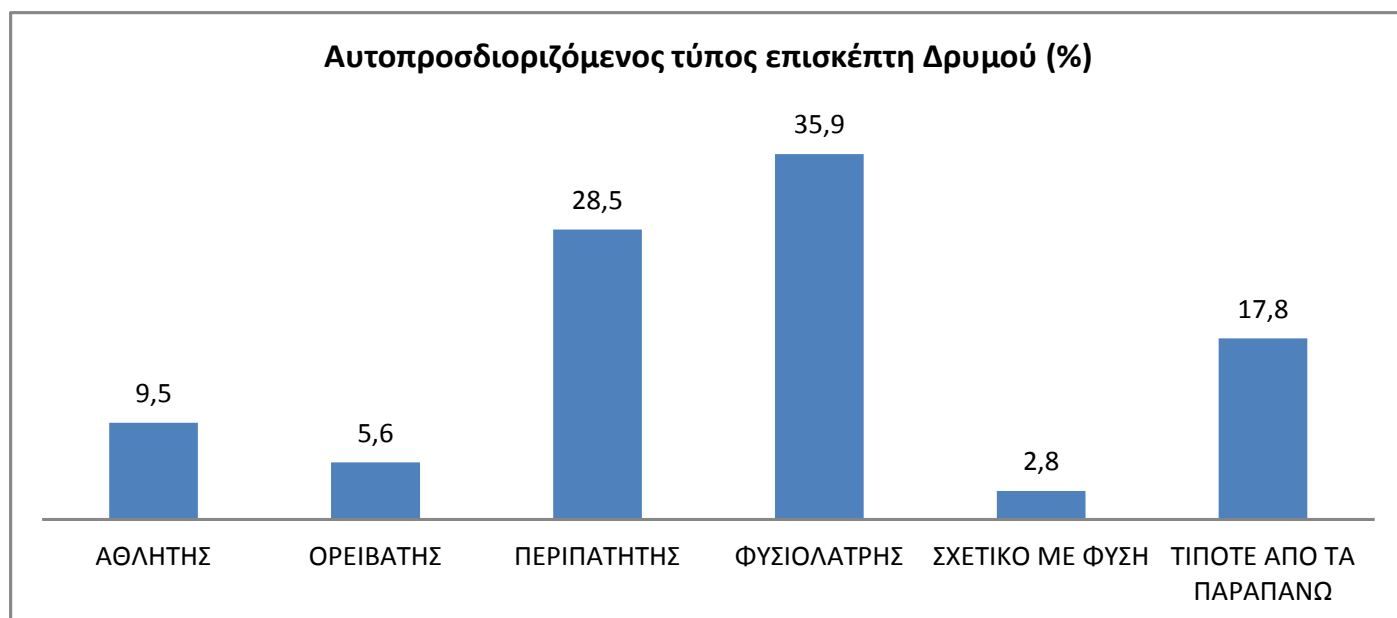
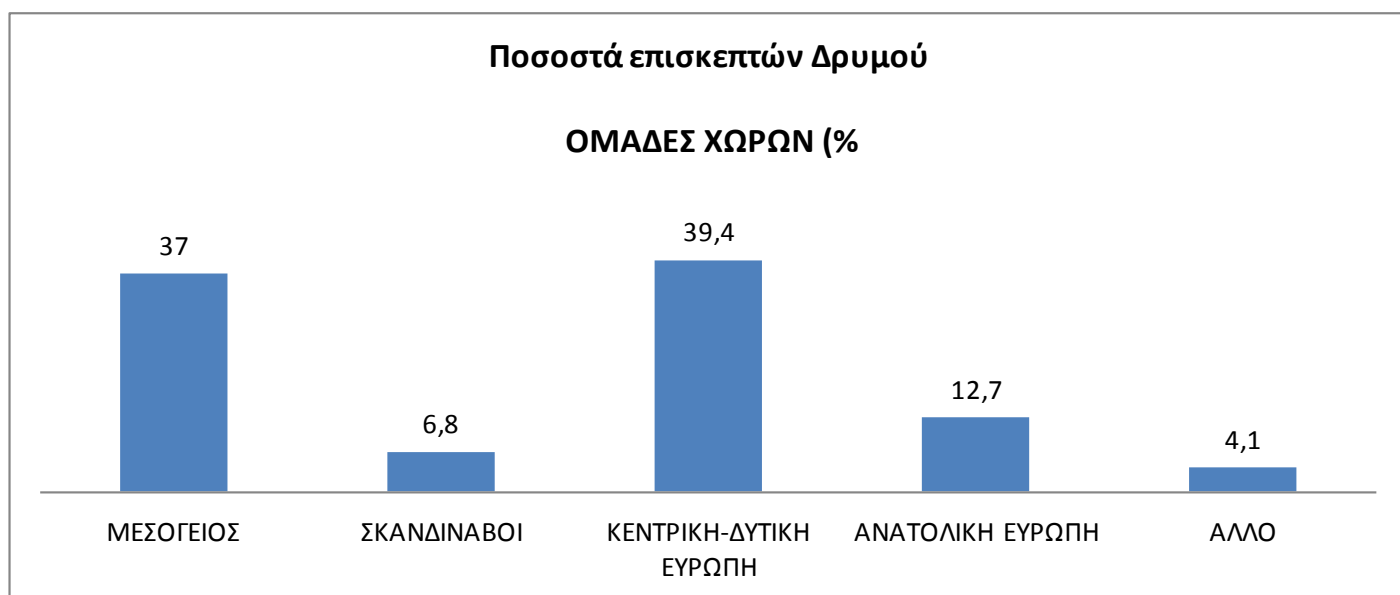


coastal regions instead of spending an entire day of their vacation hiking the Gorge of Samaria. The last cause is **a pure reflection of the all-inclusive holiday packages offered and the tour operators' choice.** It is probably very difficult to persuade someone who has

Another interesting fact is the country of origin. Two are the main groups, Central-Western Europe and the Mediterranean (35-40% respectively). **Considerable and worth mentioning is the fact that Scandinavians who are the most populated visitor group of the municipality of Chania, hold only 7% of the visitation**

to the National Park. This is probably due to the fact that this group usually arrives in Crete along with their families in an “all-inclusive” state and it is considered difficult to take part in such an activity without also excluding the fact that they might have visited the area in some past trip to Crete (Scandinavians have the highest index of double visitation in the municipality).

The visitation rate per country is also an interesting fact. It is noted that 1 out of 4 visitors is Greek while French come second place (14%) and Germans third (11%). These rates which do not represent the arrival rates at the Chania airport show that the Gorge of Samaria is chosen by tourists from all over Crete and not from Chania only.



Most visitors, almost 2 out of 3, stated that they are nature lovers and hikers, making it clear that the

majority of them have integrated nature as an integral part of their lifestyle.

Also, almost 9 out of 10, stated that they had been informed about the area prior to their arrival. The majority received information from friends/relatives (41%) and the Internet (40%), while television/radio came last as information sources.

Most visitors arrive to “Ksiloskalo” (north entrance) by bus (either a tourist office bus or a public bus). Only 10% chooses to come using a private car. This low percentage was anticipated since it is not practical at all. **The majority (88%) chooses the “Ksiloskalo” entrance (north entrance) which is also the only one that can be accessed by bus or private cars.** The entrance of Agya Roumeli (south entrance) is preferred by 12% of visitors and usually most of them arrive there the previous day and stay overnight at Agya Roumeli since access through the sea is the only way to get there.

2 out of 3 visitors responded positively to having previously read the Regulations of the National Park. This is an encouraging fact since visitors are aware of how to behave in the area of the National Park. However, what is also alarming is the very fact that most tourists didn’t visit the Information Centre at the entrance of the Park, a fact that may be explained by the limited time they have before their hike since there seems to be a considerable pressure to start hiking “early as the sun is in a low position”.

More than 85% of visitors reported that they were aware of the existence of protected species of flora and fauna in the Park. Additionally, the majority stated

that the trail was sufficiently marked while they considered the risk of diverting from the trail quite limited. 95% stated that they had a feeling of security during their entire descent, a fact that points to the fulfillment of the basic security measures.

Finally, in the “free comment” field question about what visitors would want to see happening additionally in the Gorge of Samaria, five were the main opinions/suggestions:

1. Additional and more informational signs
2. Cleanliness/toilets
3. Canteen in the old settlement
4. First Aid Doctor
5. Extension of the “social ticket”

In the majority visitors would not choose to stay overnight in the wider area. The rates of negative answers are 70-82%, with the exception of visitors from Mediterranean countries (with a significant rate being Greeks) (50%). This is maybe due to the fact that the majority of visitors usually has arranged for their place of stay during the vacation period and do not divert from their choice. An important fact is also the degree of satisfaction gained from the National Park and whether they would be willing to suggest the visit to friends/relatives. This fact is very important since it has already been mentioned that the main source of information for the Park’s visitors are friends/relatives that had previously visited the Park.

Almost 6 out of 10 visitors would evaluate their visit with 10, which is “excellent”.

This is also evident in the case where the analysis is being done per each country group where the scale of evaluation (1 to 10) reaches 8 to 10 for all groups, thus

demonstrating the excellent impression that visitors get from their visit to the Park. On the other hand, the negative rates range in very low quantities and near the limits of statistical error.

Additionally, the rate of visitors that would be willing to suggest their visit to friends/relatives is overwhelmingly positive. This is also another fact indicating the area's dynamic and potential for further development.

From all of the above facts some significant deductions can be made for the aim of the present study, for the general strategy framework as well as for the development of an ecotourist package, the target groups and the marketing and promotion procedures. More specifically:

- The fact that the visitor rate in the National Park has plummeted to more than half during the last 20 years intensifies the need to modify the general tourism strategy in the area. Taking also into account the fact that the number of visitors at the airport of Chania has significantly increased, then this very fact should become a direct field of study since it is obvious that a strong market and potential demand already exists but, nevertheless, the offer situation is not correspondent to this condition. The development and endorsement of an alternative and more eco-tourist approach could become a suggestion for improvement.
- A significant percentage of visitors is families who possibly consider an excursion to the White Mountains a difficult task in relation to their situation. The development of any eco-tourist product should take this into serious consideration and propose activities

that won't be deemed so challenging in terms of difficulty.

- Most visitors choose to stay in coastline regions. This fact, even though anticipated, strongly suggests that the development of eco-tourism and eco-touristic product should focus dynamically on sea activities such as snorkeling and diving, which are known to be favorably easy, fun and educational leisure activities.
- Most visitors are young. In addition to this, the fact that all participants asked in the study were already in the Gorge of Samaria, suggests that they are people with a mediocre to good physical condition seeking out new experiences and not just a way to spend their leisure time. This should be taken into serious consideration when developing tourist holiday packages so that the latter includes activities worthy of and designed for young people (discovery and athletic activities, environmental interpretation, identification and experiencing the local culture) and in general promoting active rather than passive activities. This assumption is also induced by the fact that most visitors were of higher education, generally willing to expand their information and deepen their knowledge but also visitors willing to gain knowledge about the environment and the protected elements of the National Park.
- The market to be approached in the framework of eco-tourism coincides with the general philosophy of the MEET Project. Even though the Scandinavian market remains the most popular group of visitors in Chania, nevertheless, it occupies a very small rate of the overall visitation to the National Park. Therefore, the Projects' target markets of Canada, U.S.A, Australia and Japan

remain an open field for the eco-tourism development of the area. Of course, this does not mean that the Scandinavian market should remain neglected but the main source of attraction for potential visitors – eco-tourists should be examined alternatively in relation to the current conditions.

- Most visitors are individuals with a strong connection to nature (nature lovers, hikers, climbers etc.). This alone indicates the capabilities of developing a holistic approach to the eco-tourist package.
- The development and promotion of eco-tourism and selected eco-tourism activities in the area should be utterly processed through the Internet. This requires the creation of artistic web pages, strongly oriented to the features offered by the package with selected information about nature and local culture and about the wider area of Chania and Crete as well. In this way, the eco-tourism package will become eligible for combinational activities prior to or after visits to popular sites of Crete. It is strongly suggested that the eco-tourism package should not be treated as the unique selling point for attracting visitors. Every individual willing to travel from distant countries in order to participate in the package is most probably willing to visit other areas possibly not directly related to eco-tourism or other forms of tourism.
- The vast majority of visitors declared their satisfaction gained from the experience of hiking the National Park. Taking into account that the research was carried out after visitors had entered the National Park and experienced a small part of it, it is easily inferred that combinational experiences in the framework of the package will undeniably add more to the visitors'

satisfaction and holiday experience since the potential of activities in this area is vast especially when including sea activities.

From the above conclusion we can summarize the following:

- ✓ **The need to develop an alternative and eco-tourism approach to the area is vital and urgent and of primary importance.**
- ✓ **The development of a single package or several packages should be oriented to families and visitors with a higher educational level and a strong tendency to equally discover and experience both nature and culture.**
- ✓ **The use of the Internet for endorsing and disseminating the eco-tourism alternative should be the prime choice with the rest methods following suit.**
- ✓ **Sea activities will add a valuable essence to the eco-tourism package/s and it is important to receive the proper attention.**

Eco-tourism in the National Park of Samaria as a sustainable means of developing and protecting the natural environment and cultural heritage

There is no doubt that the National Park of Samaria can constitute a dynamic destination of eco-tourism for countries such as the U.S.A., Canada and Australia. Moreover, eco-tourism is already practiced even though not dealt with in a holistic and strategic way.

However, the National Park bears all basic features of an attractive destination with strong potential for development on an international scale. The main reasons are:

- **Natural Environment of Exceptional Quality.** The combinational act of the geographical isolation and the intense relief of the mountain have contributed significantly to the diachronic evolution of the area's natural environment and constituting a unique totality of landscapes with enormous ecological capital and special natural beauty. The National Park encompasses more than 50 summits higher than 2.000 meters high. while the geomorphologic profile of the area is characterized by the intense presence of Gorges such as the one in Samaria, in Klados, In Tripiti, in Aradena and Eligia as well as plateaus such as the one in Omalos.



Picture 4. Desert Alpine Landscape in the White Mountains

- The White Mountains occupy approximately 40% of the area of the municipality of Chania, a fact that shows the uniqueness and irrevocably positive effect of the National Park on the entire island of Crete in both an ecological and financial way. 14 different types of habitats (of Annex I of the 92/43/EEC Directive) are located within the White Mountains along with one "Greek habitat", the Greek *Quercus coccifera* woodlands. The Mediterranean Temporary Pond of

Omalos is also of great significance. Located in the plateau of Omalos at the site called "livadi", the Temporary Pond is a priority habitat with rich diversity and important abiotic elements and 34 species of avifauna recorded. From these, 3 species are waders, 2 birds of prey and 29 are passerines. The largest area of the National Park is occupied by alpine habitats Endemic oro-Mediterranean heaths with gorse (habitat 4090) as well as cypress forests (habitat 9290). The Mediterranean pine forests also cover notable extensive area resembling, in addition, a pattern of spreading against the rest of the habitats. This pattern is now apparent in the Gorge of Samaria. Up to date, more than 600 taxa of flora have been recorded from which 24 are steno-endemic and 97 are endemic in the island of Crete, which basically means that more than 50% of all endemic species of Crete are located in the White Mountains. Typical steno-endemic species are the *Nepeta sphaciotica* species, with the only known population located in the summit "Svourichti" (2300 m.a.s.l) as well as the *Bupleurum kakiskalae* species which is found only in two locations of the White Mountains, the "Linoseli" spring and near the summit of "Melintau". Of great ecological as well as livestock – apiculture importance are the aromatic plants of the area. Sage, ironwort and thyme are some of the most distinctive. The floristic catalogue of the area has not been completed yet, a fact verified by the relatively recent discovery of a new species *Anthemis samariensis* (Turland, 2007), a perennial chasmophyte found in 2007 on a steep cliff between the summits of "Melintau" and "Avlimanaku". The fauna of the area is also of great ecological importance. Terrestrial mollusks, orthopteran and beetles resemble a 33%,

35% and 40% percent of endemism respectively. Also, 3 species of amphibians, 12 species of reptiles and 32 species of mammals (from which 11 are species of chiropterans) have been recorded. Widely known species of local mammals are the Cretan wild goat (*Capra aegagrus cretica*), the Cretan wild cat (*Felis silvestris cretensis*) and the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) which was recorded in the coast-marine environment of the protected area. All these species are included in the monitoring program elaborated by the Management Body. Moreover, the protection and preservation of the Cretan wild goat population was the initial cause of declaration as a National Park for the White Mountains and the Gorge of Samaria. Poaching is still a viable pressure in the population of this species which is utterly limited within the area of the National Park (70 sq. kilometers). The Cretan wild cat is a species with intense cryptic nature and very few unofficial recordings while the monk seal is a species known to reproduce and breed in sea caves of the southeast coast of the National Park but also with very few recordings besides unofficial information acquired by local fishermen and residents. The only endemic species of the White Mountains (and



Picture 5. White Mountains are characterized by rich biodiversity in all levels

all of Greece!) is the Cretan shrew (*Crocidura zimmermani*).

199 species of avifauna have been recorded in the National Park of Samaria some of which are the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*), the red-billed chough (*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*) and the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) which are also species that define the Special Protection Area coded GR 4340014 – National Park of Samaria – Gorge of Tripiti – Psilafi – Kustogerako. From all of the recorded species, the majority are passing by during migration while from the species known to reproduce in the area, some birds of prey are included like the bearded vulture (*Gypaetus barbatus*), the griffon vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), the common buzzard (*Buteo buteo*), the golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*), the Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraetus fasciatus*), the common kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) and the peregrine falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). Additionally, other species like the black-eared wheatear (*Oenanthe hispanica*), the common house martin (*Delichon urbica*) and the tawny pipit (*Anthus campestris*) also exist. Sixty species of avifauna which are either permanent residents of the area or only breeding or passing by are included in the Annex I 79/409/EEC Directive.

- **Unique Selling Points.** The sense of isolation, the real possibility of discovering, the intense geomorphologic profile and the easiness to combine experiences in both the terrestrial and the marine-coastal environment due to natural proximity are a few of the unique elements able to attract Eco- tourists of particular target groups.

- **Offering Experiences.** The natural features of the area are such that can support numerous and different *energetic* activities. Climbing, hiking, diving, mountain biking, canoeing, food and wine tasting, paragliding, bungee jumping, environmental education, bird watching, observing and participating in agricultural and traditional activities are just a few of these.



Picture 6. The White Mountains ©Natour – Lab

- **Existing infrastructure for receiving and hosting eco-tourists.** The area is covered by an extensive network of hotels and lodges that can host eco-tourists. Also, a number of SME's offering different ecotourism services are present. These infrastructures are described in the following chapters.
- **International recognition.** The White Mountains (Samaria) National Park is one of the most institutionally regulated protected areas in Greece as well as one of the most important ecological, socio-economic and historical – cultural pylons of Crete and Greece. The declaration of Samaria as a National Park in 1962 was only the beginning for a series of national and international distinctions and titles, such as Landscape of Outstanding Natural Beauty (1973),

Biosphere Reserve(UNESCO, 1981), Biogenetic Reserve (Council of Europe), area protected under the auspices of the Barcelona Convention, Important Bird Area - IBA (BirdLife International) and Wildlife Refuge. Moreover, the area is incorporated within then ATURA 2000 Ecological Network, after implementation of the European Directives 79/409 and 92/43. It has also been awarded with the National Diploma of Nature Protection (1971) and it is the only protected area in Greece to have received the European Diploma of Protected Areas by the Council of Europe. The Gorge of Samaria as a landmark is already internationally known and remains an attraction for thousands of visitors. Its use as the basic pylon for eco-tourist experience will significantly facilitate the process of promoting any kind of eco-tourist strategy.

- **Intense cultural elements** (churches, historical buildings, archaeological sites, castles, intense cultural profile, mythology and traditions) with strong differentiation in relation to other areas of Greece and with the authentic element being the central feature. Crete demonstrates a distinctive cultural difference in relation to any other destination in Greece but also to the Mediterranean. The authenticity of the local



Picture 7. Abandoned building with distinctive architecture ©Natour – Lab

society and traditional practices is already a pole of attraction for visitors.

- **Connection of the wider area of the National Park with national and international airlines throughout the year.** The city of Chania is facilitated – besides the port of Souda – by the International Airport “Ioannis Daskalogiannis”, which is less than 60 kilometers from the National Park of Samaria and receives direct flights from Athens, Thessaloniki, Germany, Great Britain, Scandinavia and other European countries. Only for 2013¹⁶, there were 15.076 flights from and to the International Airport carrying approximately 2.078.850 visitors in total.
- **Lack of extensive road network.** Even though this could be regarded as a disadvantage, nevertheless, the lack of an extensive road network could act as an attraction for visitors seeking a sense of isolation and, hence connecting this feature with the presence of specific cultural elements.

By proceeding one step ahead and conducting an **original SWOT** (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities,

SWOT¹⁷: “The SWOT analysis is a general technique for planning and organizing a coherent decision making framework regarding an institution, a business, a geographic area...basic aim is the holistic investigation of internal strengths and weaknesses of an institution or business in combination with the holistic investigation of external opportunities and threats”

¹⁶http://www.ypa.gr/up/files/statistiki_aerop_kinissi_2013.pdf

¹⁷http://www.aegean.gr/lid/internet/elliniki_ekdosi/TEL_DIMOSI/SWOT_final.pdf

Threats) **analysis plan¹⁸** to record the dynamics of developing ecotourism we would see the following:



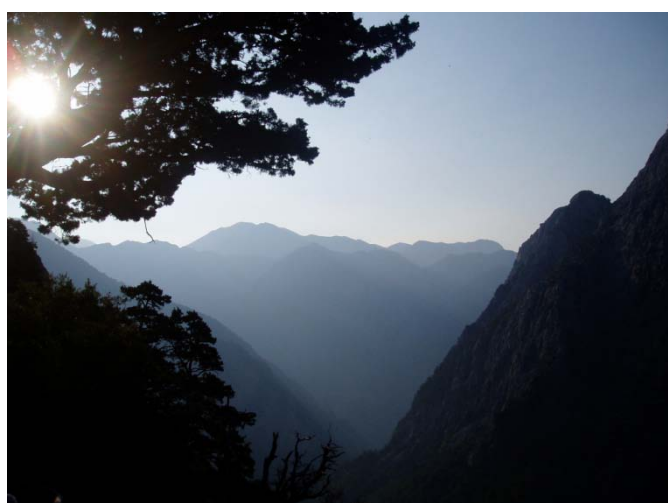
Picture 8. The E4 trail crosses the White Mountains in two axons ©Natour – Lab



Picture 9. The Mediterranean Temporary Pond in Omalos ©Natour – Lab

¹⁸The SWOT analysis will be significantly reinforced after the participatory meetings where different stakeholder opinions will be presented

Strengths		Weaknesses	
The natural environment of the area is rich in terms of biodiversity and special from a geomorphologic point of view	Areas and species with great sensitivity where limited human presence is of necessity.		
There is a wide range of possibilities for energetic activities and generally eco-tourist activities	Many activities entail significant natural difficulties and restrict potential target groups of eco-tourists		
There is existing infrastructure for hosting eco-tourists in key spots of the area	Many hotels, lodges, restaurants and generally infrastructures bear intense foreign elements that are not in accordance with the cultural profile of the area.		
The cultural element is intense and prevalent in the entire region.	There are trends which negatively affect the cultural element as a result of long-term practice of mass-tourism		
There is no extensive road – network	There is no extensive road – network		
Products in the area are considered of elevated quality	Most products in the area have not received some type of certification and are not widely recognizable		
Most businesses in the area have long experience with tourism	The experience of businesses is more connected with mass tourism services		
Opportunities		Threats	
Reinforcement of local economy and networking through planning of holistic eco-tourist packages	Exclusion of people or areas from the process due to natural difficulty (peripheral regions with connection difficulties in a unified package)		
Reinforcement of environmental awareness and sensitivity for both locals and visitors	Possible increase of human pressure to ecologically sensitive areas		
Development of dynamic packages of eco-tourism	Dissatisfaction of visitors due to poor or insufficient package planning and strong weather dependence		
Training of local businesses in the implementation and usage of environmentally friendly methods (i.e. small scale solar parks, recycling e.tch.) and with lower cost	No implementation of environmentally friendly methods due to the cost of installation. (i.e. purchase of compost bins, purchase and process of establishing small-scale solar parks e.tch.)		



Picture 10. The entrance of the Samaria Gorge at dawn

Baseline research – Evaluation of artificial structures and infrastructure – let's see what's in

For the development of any ecotourism strategy in a protected area, it is necessary to make certain steps. Before the development per se, it is important to establish the necessary participatory processes (participatory planning) in which the participation of actors from the public sector, private sector, NGOs, representatives of the local community, educational institutions is held positive. After the launch and consolidation of such participatory processes, then

follows the research base which eventually completes the process including but not limited¹⁹:

- **Determination of the area (size).** The investigation concerns throughout the area of responsibility of the Management and specifically the area bounded by updating the Special Environmental Study of the White Mountains, which includes entirely the Natura 2000 area code GR4340008. The total area of the region is approximately 584,840 acres. This is a significantly extensive area, covering about 40% of Chania, including a similarly extensive coastline (about 32 km) and a strong geomorphology. This acts as a two-dimension concept as, on the one hand, it constitutes a platform for numerous options as for creating and managing ecotourism packages and, on the other hand, it creates practical difficulties associated mainly with times of transition from one spatial unit to another as well as a strong dependence of the management of ecotourism package on the local weather conditions and time.
- **Description of existing tourism infrastructure (accommodation, activities, places to attract visitors, etc.).** These are shown below.
- **Description and assessment of natural, cultural and socio-economical sources.** Shown below.
- **Description of the current and potential demand.** There has been a first assessment through statistical analysis in the form of a series of

¹⁹ Practical, profitable, protected. A starter guide to developing sustainable tourism in protected areas. EuroparcFederation

questionnaires which have been filled out in the village of Samaria, under a recent research supervised by the Mediterranean Agronomic Institute of Chania (MAICH) following the initiative of the Management Samaria National Park with the support of the Directorate of Forestry Chania, Technical University of Chania and the University of Crete. The results are presented in the section "Why the concept of ecotourism should be a separate chapter in the life of the White Mountains".

- **Description of social and economic content and political system in the region.**
- **SWOT analysis.** There has been a first assessment in the section "Ecotourism in the National Park of Samaria as a viable means of developing and protecting the natural environment and cultural heritage waiting to be completed during the participatory processes.
- **Investigation from student teams and educational institutions. This proposition is to be built** as a separate action under the Volunteer Program prepared by the Management Authority annually.

In the case of the current Pilot action, the procedure, which if followed, is basically a baseline research on the existing tourism infrastructure, and natural resource characteristics which are the poles that attract tourists, the visitor characteristics and initial draft proposals for the formulation of ecotourism strategy in the region, the Action Plan and the potential ecotourism packages. These baseline data will be used as inputs during the implementation of

participatory processes. Opinions, observations, recommendations and conclusions will be made during the participatory processes which will ultimately contribute to the completion of the investigation (final output).

The reason why we follow the “opposite” procedure is because the development of ecotourism strategy in an integrated framework for the region is prepared for the first time. Thus, participatory processes are considered an extremely important step in this development since the ecotourism strategy starts and ends in the local community.

For the initial investigation into the existing tourism infrastructure, the division of the area into four main areas follows as such:

1. Sougia. Even if the area of Sougia equipped with most of the ecotourism infrastructure falls outside the competence of the operator, however, it is estimated in the region's potential..
2. Agia Roumeli – Loutro. These two areas were considered as one spatial entity due to its proximity and affinity with water activities.
3. Sfakia. Examined as a separate territorial entity and one which includes ecotourism infrastructure of the regions Askyfou, Imbros, Sfakia, the Liviana, Anopoli and St. John Sfakia.
4. Omalos. It Includes ecotourism infrastructure around the plateau.

At the same time, there was an initial inventory of existing ecotourism activities and enterprises which operate in the area while, additionally, the shelters of the area have been recorded.

In total, 79 businesses have been recorded including restaurants, rooms to rent, villas, apartments, diving centers, hotels, fishing tourism activities, etc. For each business, the website, the email address, phone numbers, social media webpages, the area that exists as well as a score for each one according to the relevance to the pilot action (1=small relevance and probability of inclusion in potential ecotourism package, 2=medium relevance and probability of inclusion in potential ecotourism package & 3 = strong relevance and probability of inclusion in potential ecotourism package) have been assigned. It is worth mentioning that the rating of the business is not related to the offered quality but through the relationship with the general spirit offered by ecotourism and its potential involvement in ecotourism package- mainly due to spatial proximity or connection with other activities-it will eventually occur under an ecotourism package design.

The collected information is presented below:

Name	Type	Website	email	Tel.	Social Media	Area	Quality (1 - 3)
Agriorodo	Rooms to rent	http://omalos.com/agriorodo	info@omalos.com	2821067237		Omalos	2
Neos Omalos	Rooms to rent	http://www.neos-omalos.gr/index.php?option=com_content&view=frontpage&Itemid=47&lang=el-GR	info@neos-omalos.gr	28210 67590, 67269, 96735	https://www.facebook.com/pages/Hotel-Neos-Omalos/139590169426261	Omalos	2
Omalos Village	Villas	http://www.omalosvillage.gr/en/index.html	mkazalakis@gmail.com	821067169	Not available	Omalos	3
Εταιρία Ανάπτυξης - Λάκκων Ομαλού Α.Ε	Rooms to rent, restaurant	http://www.omalos.com/	info@omalos.com	2821067237	Not available	Omalos	3
To Ellinikon Hotel	Rooms to rent, restaurant	Not available	Not available	2821067169	Not available	Omalos	2
To εξάρτι	Rooms to rent, restaurant	http://www.exari.gr/			Not available	Omalos	2
Artemis studio	Rooms to rent	http://www.agiaroumeli.com/	artemis@agiaroumeli.com	2825091377	https://www.facebook.com/the.samarila.experience	Agia Roumeli	2
Calypso	Rooms to rent	http://www.calypso.agiaroumeli.gr/	calypso@agiaroumeli.gr	28250 91314	https://www.facebook.com/calypso.roumeli	Agia Roumeli	2
Tarra	Rooms to rent	http://tarra.agiaroumeli.gr/	via the website	28250 91231	https://www.facebook.com/pages/Tarra-Agia-Roumeli-%CE%A4%CE%AC%CF%81%CF%81%CE%B1-%CE%91%CE%B3%CE%AF%CE%B1-%CE%A1%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%BC%CE%AD%CE%BB%CE%B7/441842762504969	Agia Roumeli	2
Gigilos	Rooms to rent	http://www.gigilos.gr/en_index.html	gigilos@mycosmos.gr	28250-91383, 6977742184	Not available	Agia Roumeli	2
Mashalis Sweet Corner Apartments	Rooms to rent	http://www.samariagorge.eu/index.php/en/component/hotelguide/hotel/hotel/6-mashalis-apartments	masxali@chania-cci.gr	6974631029 6973766992	https://www.facebook.com/pages/Sweet-Corner-Masxali/380250092012842	Agia Roumeli	2
Faraggi	Rooms to rent	http://faragi.com.gr/en/	info@faraggi.com.gr	2825091225, 6977177249	Not available	Agia Roumeli	2
Paralia rooms	Rooms to rent	https://plus.google.com/117133843211908078872/about?gl=gr&hl=en	via the website	Not available	Not available	Agia Roumeli	1
Samaria	Rooms to rent	http://www.samaria-prokopis.gr/	samaria.prokopis@yahoo.gr	28250-91215 28250-91365	Not available	Agia Roumeli	2
Agia Roumeli	Rooms to rent	http://www.agiaroumelihotel.com/index.php?lang=el	info@agiaroumelihotel.com	2825091432, 91241, 91232	Not available	Agia Roumeli	2
Blue House	Rooms to rent	http://www.loutro.gr/index.php?option=com_hotelguide&view=hotel&cid=1%3Aloutro&id=1%3Ablue-house&Itemid=27&lang=en	bluehouseloutro@gmail.com	28250 91035, 91127	Not available	Loutro	2
Δασκαλογιαννης	Rooms to rent	http://www.loutro.gr/index.php?option=com_hotelguide&view=hotel&cid=1%3Ahotels-in-loutro&id=3%3Adaskalogiannis&Itemid=27&lang=en	not available	28250 91516	https://www.facebook.com/daskalogiannis.loutro	Loutro	2
Φάρος	Rooms to rent	http://www.faros.loutro.gr	farosloutro@hotmail.com	2825091334, 6936467521	Not available	Loutro	2
Ήλιος	Rooms to rent	http://ilios.loutro.gr/	iliosloutro@yahoo.com	28250 91160, 91460	Not available	Loutro	2
Κέραμος	Rooms to rent	http://www.loutro.gr/index.php?option=com_hotelguide&view=hotel&cid=1%3Ahotels-in-loutro&id=6%3Akeramos&Itemid=27&lang=en	aikstjohn@otenet.gr , aik@keramos.de	2825091356, 28210 59828	Not available	Loutro	2

		n					
Κύμα	Rooms to rent	http://kyma.loutro.gr/Kyma_Hotel_Restaurant_-_Loutro_Crete/Welcome.html	nikos.kriaras.kyma@gmail.com	2825091600	https://www.facebook.com/pages/MA-DARES-KYMA-LOUTRO/294503101104	Loutro	2
Λιμάνι	Rooms to rent	http://limani.loutro.gr/	limani@loutro.gr	2825091082	Not available	Loutro	2
Loutro bay	Rooms to rent	http://www.loutro.gr/index.php?option=com_hotelguide&view=hotel&cid=1%3Ahotels-in-loutro&id=8%3Aloutro-bay&Itemid=27&lang=en	loutrobay@hotmail.com	28250 91370	Not available	Loutro	2
Loutro holidays	Rooms to rent	http://loutroholidays.gr/	info@loutroholiday.gr	2825091298, 6938523407	Not available	Loutro	2
Marias rooms	Rooms to rent	http://www.loutro.gr/index.php?option=com_hotelguide&view=hotel&cid=1%3Aloutro&id=28%3AMarias-rooms&Itemid=27&lang=en	marias-rooms@loutro.gr	28250-91082, 6938530844, 6977123436		Loutro	2
Νικόλας	Rooms to rent	http://www.loutro.gr/index.php?option=com_hotelguide&view=hotel&cid=1%3Ahotels-in-loutro&id=12%3Anikolas&Itemid=27&lang=en	not available	2825091352	Not available	Loutro	2
Νότης	Rooms to rent	http://notos.loutro.gr/	nikandr@otenet.gr	2825091501	Not available	Loutro	2
Όαση	Rooms to rent	http://www.oasishotelloutro.com/	info@oasishotelloutro.com	2825091017, 6937940 511	https://www.facebook.com/pages/OASIS-HOTEL-LOUTRO-SFAKIA/199263007295	Loutro	3
Παντελίτσα	Rooms to rent	http://www.pantelitsa-rooms.loutro.gr/	manousoudakis.loutro@gmail.com	2825091348	Not available	Loutro	2
Παύλος	Rooms to rent	http://pavlos.loutro.gr/	ikalliderakis@yahoo.com	2825091336	Not available	Loutro	2
Πρωτόπαπας	Rooms to rent	http://www.loutro.gr/index.php?option=com_hotelguide&view=hotel&cid=1%3Ahotels-in-loutro&id=19%3Aprotopapas&Itemid=27&lang=en	geoprotop@hotmail.com	28250 91400-401, 6978007678	Not available	Loutro	2
Σιρόκος	Rooms to rent	http://scirocco.loutro.gr/	scirocco@loutro.gr	2825091479	https://www.facebook.com/pages/%CE%A3%CE%99%CE%A1%CE%9F%CE%9A%CE%9F%CE%A3-SCIROCCO/174330239257083	Loutro	2
Σήφης	Rooms to rent	http://www.sifishotel-loutro.com/	sifis_hotel@hotmail.com	2825091346, 6942413109	https://www.facebook.com/christina.kantounataki	Loutro	2
Σοφία	Rooms to rent	http://www.sofiarooms-loutro.gr/	info@sofiarooms-loutro.gr	2825091354	Not available	Loutro	2
Ξενοφίνα	Rooms to rent	http://www.loutro.gr/index.php?option=com_hotelguide&view=hotel&cid=1%3Ahotels-in-loutro&id=23%3Axenofinas-house&Itemid=27&lang=en	xenofina@loutro.gr	2825091160, 91460	Not available	Loutro	2
Porto Loutro	Rooms to rent	http://www.hotelportoloutro.com/Hotels/Porto_Loutro/index.htm	portolou@gmail.com	28250 91433	Not available	Loutro	3
Villa Niki	Rooms to rent	http://loutro-accommodation.com	info@loutro-accommodation.com	28250-91213	Not available	Loutro	3
Ακρογιάλι	Rooms to rent	www.akrogialilykos.loutro.gr ,	akrogialilikos@gmail.com	2825091446	Not available	Lykos bay	2

		www.akrogiali.no						
Georges House	Rooms to rent	http://georgoshouse.wordpress.com/	via the website	6977597545	Not available	Lykos bay	2	
The small paradise	Rooms to rent	http://loutro.gr/index.php?option=com_hotelguide&view=hotel&id=27%3Alikos-small-paradise&Itemid=106	likosmallparadise@gmail.com	2825091125, 6937254749	Not available	Lykos bay	2	
Dialiskari-Marmara	Restaurant		not available	6942201456	Not available	Marmara	3	
Phoenix hotel	Rooms to rent	http://loutro.gr/index.php?option=com_hotelguide&view=hotel&cid=2%3Aphoenix-and-lykos&id=29%3AGeorgos-House&Itemid=106&language=el	not available	2825091257, 2825091126	Not available	Phoenix bay	2	
Madares - Kyma Loutro	Rooms to rent	http://kyma.loutro.gr/Kyma_Hotel_Restaurant_-_Loutro_Crete/Contact.html	nikos.kriaras.kyma@gmail.com	2825091600, 6972228170	https://www.facebook.com/pages/MA-DARES-KYMA-LOUTRO/294503101104	Loutro	2	
Notos Mare Diving Center	Diving Center	http://notosmare.com/	office@notosmare.com	6947270106	https://www.facebook.com/NotosMare	Chora Sfakion	3	
Fishing Sfakia	Cruises	Fishing tourism	http://fishingsfakia.wordpress.com/	fishingscruises@yahoo.com	6981920076	http://fishingsfakia.wordpress.com/feed/	Chora Sfakion	3
Xenia Hotel	Rooms to rent	http://www.sfakia-xenia-hotel.gr/index.php/el/hotel	via the website / info@sfakia-xenia-hotel.gr	2825091202, 91490	https://www.facebook.com/XeniaSfakia	Chora Sfakion	3	
Hotel Lefka Ori	Rooms to rent	http://www.chora-sfakion.com/index.php?p=1	via the website	2825091209	Not available	Chora Sfakion	2	
Samaria Hotel	Rooms to rent	http://www.hotel-samaria-sfakia-crete.com/	via the website	2825091261 91071	Not available	Chora Sfakion	2	
Livikon Hotel	Rooms to rent	http://sfakia-livikon.com/	info@sfakia-livikon.com	2825091211 2825091223	https://www.facebook.com/pages/Livikon-Hotel/392512254223507	Chora Sfakion	2	
Hotel Starvis	Rooms to rent	http://www.hotel-stavris-sfakia-crete.com/	via the website	Not available	Not available	Chora Sfakion	1	
Four Seasons	Rooms to rent	http://www.four-seasons-sfakia-crete.com/	via the website	2825091050	Not available	Chora Sfakion	1	
The three brothers	Rooms to rent	http://www.three-brothers-chora-sfakion-crete.com/	via the website	2825091040	Not available	Chora Sfakion	1	
Hotel Alkyon	Rooms to rent	http://www.hotel-alkyon-sfakia-crete.com/	via the website	2825091220	Not available	Chora Sfakion	1	
Ilingas Hotel	Rooms to rent	http://www.ilingas.sfakia-kreta.gr/	via the website	2825091239	https://www.facebook.com/IlingasSfakia	Ilingas beach	2	
Villa Archodiko	Rooms to rent	http://www.marybeach.gr/	info@marybeach.gr	2831055289, 6945980944	Not available	Imbros	3	
Villa Nostos	Apartment	http://www.villa-nostos.gr/villa-gr.php	info@villa-nostos.gr	6974812679	Not available	Imbros	3	
Lefkoritis	Apartment	http://lefkoritis.com/site/	lefkoritis@lefkoritis.com	2825095455, 6945800007	https://www.facebook.com/lefkoritis?sk=wall&filter=12	Askyfou	3	
Anopoli rooms	Rooms to rent	http://www.anopolirooms.gr/el/	info@anopolirooms.gr	2825091171	https://www.facebook.com/anopolirooms	Anopoli	3	
Alonia hostel	Rooms to rent/restaurant	http://www.alonia.gr/en/article/home	ageorgedakis@yahoo.gr	6938792695	https://www.facebook.com/groups/aloniasfakia/?fref=ts	Agios Ioannis	3	
Notos Studios and Suites	Rooms to rent	http://www.agni.gr/travel/crete/notos_studios_and_suites/index.asp	Not available	Not available	Not available	Chora Sfakion	2	
Xenonas Anopoli Orfanoudakis	Rooms to rent/bakery		xenonas-anopoli@hotmail.com	06945876199, 6932493035, 2825091189	Not available	Anopoli	3	

Lotos	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougialotos.gr/	info@sougialotos.gr	2823051142	Not available	Sougia	2
Aretousa Studios & Rooms	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/aretouca/index.htm	aretousa@sougia.info	2823051178	Not available	Sougia	2
Arhondiko Studios and Apartments	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/arhondiko/index.htm	arhondiko@sougia.info	2823051453	Not available	Sougia	2
Captain George Rooms and Studios	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/captain_george/index.htm	g-gentek@otenet.gr	2823051133	Not available	Sougia	2
El Greco Rooms and Studios	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/elgreco/index.htm	elgreco_sougia@yahoo.gr	2823051186	Not available	Sougia	2
Eliros Rooms	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/eliros/index.htm	mirizakis@yahoo.gr	2823051477	Not available	Sougia	2
Erontas - Diktamo Rooms	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/erontas/index.htm	erontas@sougia.info	2823051150	Not available	Sougia	2
Galini Studios and Apartments	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/galini/index.htm	galini@sougia.info	6974464824	Not available	Sougia	2
Idomeneas Apartments and Studios	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/idomeneas/index.htm	idomeneas@sougia.info	2823051540	Not available	Sougia	2
Irtakina Rooms	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/irtakina/index.htm	irtakina@sougia.info	2823051130	Not available	Sougia	2
Oceanis Rooms & Apartments	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/oceanis/index.htm	oceanis@sougia.info	2823051176	Not available	Sougia	2
Paradisos Rooms	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/paradisos/index.htm	Not available	2823051486	Not available	Sougia	2
Pension Elias Rooms and Studios	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/elias/index.htm	elias@sougia.info	2823051476	Not available	Sougia	2
Rebetiko Studios	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/rebetiko/index.htm	rebetiko@sougia.info	2823051510	Not available	Sougia	2
Ririka Rooms	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/ririka/index.htm	Not available	2823051167	Not available	Sougia	2
Santa Irene Studios and Apartments	Rooms to rent	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/santairene/index.htm	santairene@sougia.info	2823051342	Not available	Sougia	2
Syia Hotel - Studios & Apartments	Hotel 3***	http://www.sougia.info/hotels/syia/index.htm	syia_hotel@hotmail.com	28230 51174	Not available	Sougia	3
Pension Irene	Rooms to rent	http://pension-irene.gr/newsite/index.php/en/	Not available	2823051187, 6936536318	Not available	Sougia	2

perception of eco-tourism but also with the potential participation in an ecotourism package:

From the total of recording, the following SME's received the highest rating in relation to the general

Name	Type	Website	email	Tel.	Social Media	Area	Quality (1 - 3)
Omalos Village	Villas	http://www.omalosvillage.gr/en/index.html	mkazalakis@gmail.com	2821067169	not available	Omalos	3
Εταιρία Ανάπτυξης - Λάκκων Ομαλού Α.ε	Rooms to rent, restaurant	http://www.omalos.com/	info@omalos.com	2821067237	not available	Omalos	3
Οάση	Rooms to rent	http://www.oasishotelloutro.com/	info@oasishotelloutro.com	2825091017, 6937940511	https://www.facebook.com/pages/OASIS-HOTEL-LOUTRO-SFAKIA/199263007295	Loutro	3

Porto Loutro	Rooms to rent	http://www.hotelportoloutro.com/Hotels/Porto_Loutro/index.htm	portolou@gmail.com	2825091433	not available	Loutro	3
Villa Niki	Rooms to rent	http://loutro-accommodation.com	info@loutro-accommodation.com	2825091213	not available	Loutro	3
Dialiskari-Marmara	Restaurant	not available	not available	6942201456	not available	Marmara	3
Notos Mare Diving Center	Diving Center	http://notosmare.com/	office@notosmare.com	694727106	https://www.facebook.com/NotosMare	Chora Sfakion	3
Fishing Cruises Sfakia	Fishing tourism	http://fishingsfakia.wordpress.com/	fishingcruises@yahoo.com	06981920076	http://fishingsfakia.wordpress.com/feed/	Chora Sfakion	3
Xenia Hotel	Rooms to rent	http://www.sfakia-xenia-hotel.gr/index.php/el/hotel	via the website / info@sfakia-xenia-hotel.gr	2825091202-91490	https://www.facebook.com/XeniaSfakia	Chora Sfakion	3
Villa Archodiko	Rooms to rent	http://www.marybeach.gr/	info@marybeach.gr	2831055289, 6945980944	not available	Imbros	3
Villa Nostos	Apartment	http://www.villa-nostos.gr/villa-gr.php	info@villa-nostos.gr	6974812679	not available	Imbros	3
Lefkoritis	Apartment	http://lefkoritis.com/site/	lefkoritis@lefkoritis.com	2825095455, 6945800007	https://www.facebook.com/lefkortis?sk=wall&filter=12	Askyfou	3
Anopoli rooms	Rooms to rent	http://www.anopolirooms.gr/el/	info@anopolirooms.gr	2825091171	https://www.facebook.com/anopolirooms	Anopoli	3
Alonia hostel	Rooms to rent/restaurant	http://www.alonia.gr/en/article/home	ageorgedakis@yahoo.gr	6938792695	https://www.facebook.com/groups/aloniasfakia/?fref=ts	Agios Ioannis	3
Xenonas Anopoli Orfanoudakis	Rooms to rent/bakery	not available	xenonas-anopoli@hotmail.com	6945876199, 6932493035, 2825091189	not available	Anopoli	3
Syia Hotel - Studios & Apartments	Hotel 3***	http://www.sougia.info/hotel/syia/index.htm	syia_hotel@hotmail.com	2823051174	not available	Sougia	3

It is observed that in almost all sub-areas of the National Park covered by tourism infrastructure businesses basically for sleep are detected, with a rating of 3. In the area of Agia Roumeli there is no infrastructure available with this rate but all of them have a rate of 2.

refuge has a strong potential to participate in the pilot action because of the proximity to the entrance of Samaria gorge while the rest are far away from any other activity and the reason of existence is limited in specific target groups (high altitude trekking for more than 2 days).

Four mountain refuges exist in the area, having a capacity of 140 people. From them, only the Kallergi

Name	Type	No of People	Website	Tel.	e-mail	Area	Distance from nearest road	Quality (1 - 3)
Volikas	Mountain Refugee	30	http://www.eoshanion.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=12&Itemid=61	2821044 647	eoshania@otenet.gr	Kampoi Keramia	3	2
Kallergi	Mountain Refugee	45	http://www.eoshanion.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=12&Itemid=61	6976585 849	eoshania@otenet.gr	Omalos-Samaria	1:30	3
Tauri	Mountain Refugee	45	http://www.eoshanion.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=12&Itemid=61	2821044 647	eoshania@otenet.gr	Askyfou	2	2
Svoourichti	Mountain Refugee	20	http://www.eoshanion.gr/index.php?option=com_content&task=blogsection&id=12&Itemid=61	2821044 647	eoshania@otenet.gr	Anopoli	2:30 (if truck used) - 7:00 (on foot from Anopoli)	1

Also, from all of the above records, a company that does not have its headquarters in the area but operates in nearby areas, provides services on gastronomy and hiking routes and received relative rating of 3.

Name	Type	Website	email	Tel.	Social Media	Area	Quality (1 - 3)
Natour Lab	gastronomy and hikes	http://www.natour-lab.gr/	andon@natour-lab.gr	6951002502	https://www.facebook.com/NatourLab	active in the entire area	3

These records are to be the baseline for the Pilot action and will be supplemented with new elements during the participatory processes as well as during the implementation of the action.



Picture 12. The view from the site “Kakos Poros” at Saint John of Sfakia ©Natour – Lab



Picture 11. The Aradaina gorge ©Natour – Lab

Primary Research - Evaluation of major ecotourist natural areas - let's see what experiences the region can offer

This section will be a brief reference to the basic characteristics of the natural areas of the National Park of Samaria that can actively support the ecotourism activities.

Prior to this report what is important to become widely understood is that the entire area of the National Park cannot be regarded as a single field with similar characteristics with regard to the dimensions of a particularly ecotourist package. An initial categorization of the whole region into three sub-areas of difficulty was necessary (1 = low difficulty, 2 = moderate difficulty, 3 = strong difficulty). The characteristic feature of difficulty lies in two factors :

1. Difficulty in approach (physical difficulty). The classification relates to the degree of difficulty for a group of eco-tourists to reach the area concerned. At the same time, increased difficulty in one area also requires specially trained eco-tourists (e.g. skilled climbers, requiring special equipment due to the increased risk of both ascending and descending steep areas) in order for a potential ecotourist package to be designed.

2. Difficulties related to transportation to other areas within the scope of an eco-tourist package. Areas with increased difficulty present practical issues as to getting around to other areas for the configuration of a designed ecotourist package. For instance, to the long

distances or the consumption of valuable time when dealing with a limited time-framework offered by an eco-tourist package.

For the sub-categorization of these areas, we use the buffer zones of the National Park, as described in the update of the Special Environmental Study of the White Mountains²⁰:

Core: Protected Area: the Samaria Gorge called Core White Mountains National Forest.

A1a – A1b: Conservation Areas and Species Habitat areas Pachnes (A1a) and Gigilos - Volakias (A1b)

A2a – A2b – A2c: Conservation Areas of the Landscape Ecology in the areas of the canyons Trypiti & Klados (A2a), Eligia (A2b), Agia Eirini (A2c).

B1-B2-B3: Traditional Landscape Management Zones in the areas of Aradaina - Saint John (B1), Omalos plateau (B2), Agia Roumeli (B3).

NP: Management zones of the Natural Resources.

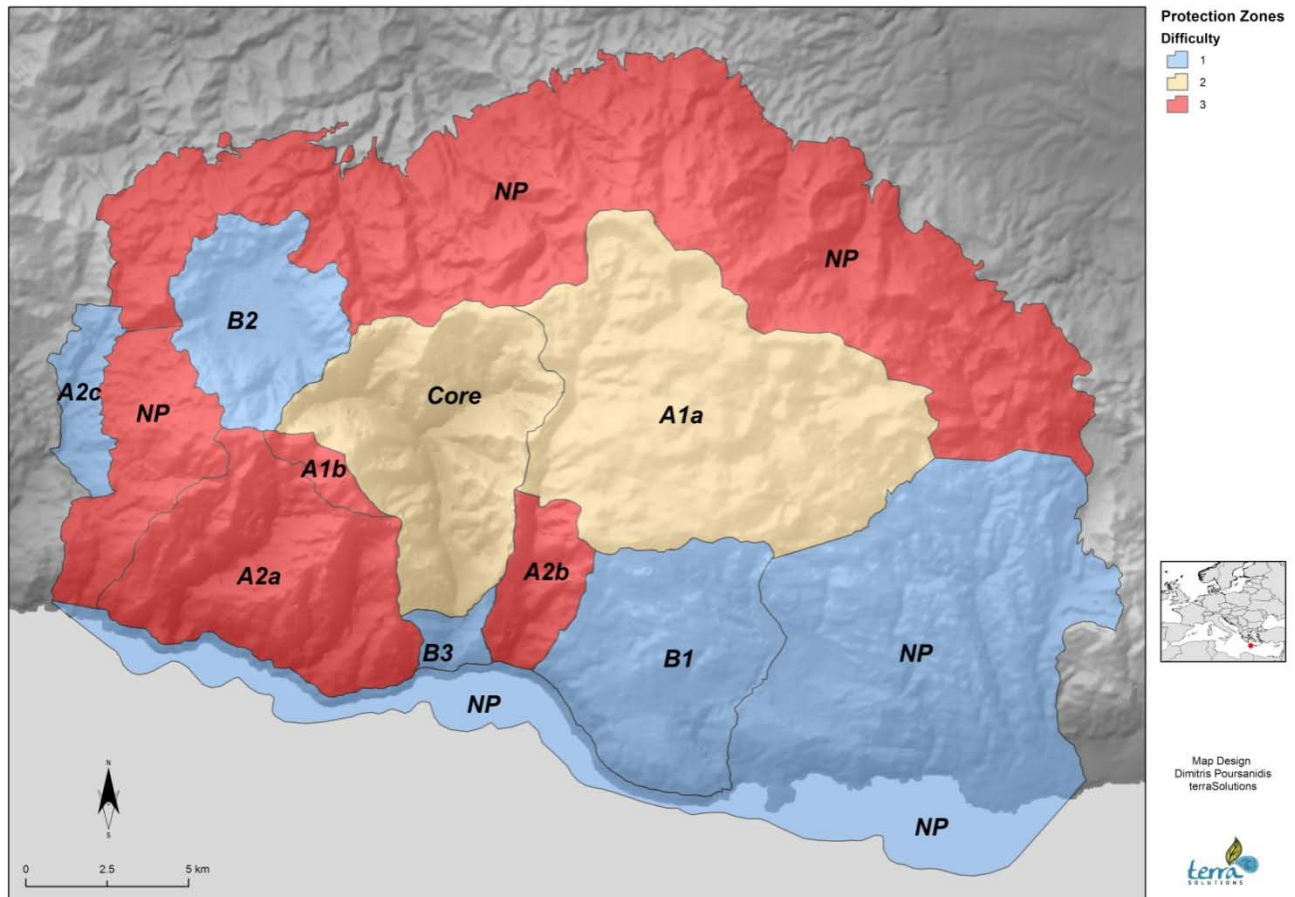
As mentioned in the update of the Special Environmental Study of the White Mountains, practically all zones allow visitors and generally eco-tourism to initiate and engage in outdoor activities and sightseeing

After considering the options of developing an ecotourism package while focusing on target groups, families with children aged 12 and older, moderate fitness and experience in ecotourism activities, the

²⁰ OIKOM L.t.d., 2009. Update Study of the Special Environmental Study of the White Mountains. Directorate of Environment and Planning, Region of Crete.

area was then classified as illustrated in the Charter below:

areas to the rest takes time. Yet, the natural value justifies such an inclusion in a potential ecotourism package. Meanwhile, the core due to its position and



Areas A1a, A2a, A2b and most of the NP are areas with strong difficulty in integrating a potential ecotourism package due to the physical challenges entailed and some relative difficulty in connecting with other areas. At the same time, the entire marine area of NP was of low difficulty since the actions of any ecotourism package can be supported from individuals by sea (e.g. water taxis, diving center) or the local shipping company (ANENDYK).

The core and the Zone A1a are areas of moderate difficulty as they require some amount of relative fitness from potential eco-tourists while linking these

recognition should be a standard option in any ecotourism package despite the relatively greater difficulty.

The rest are areas with low difficulty and it is suggested that their inclusion be in a potential ecotourism package. Special Zone A2c (Agia Irini Gorge), although at first assessment it may have problems connecting to other areas, however, the similarity of the general characteristics of the core can be a sensible alternative to the long hours it takes to cross the core or if certain conditions impede the approach to the core (e.g. bad weather conditions in the sea area and weak transition

from Agia Roumeli to other areas, increased risk of forfeitures stones etc.).

Since all activities examined proposed the following specific activities that can be developed in the context of a potential ecotourism package for each individual spatial unit received degree of difficulty.

From all the examined activities, the following are proposed which can become part of a potential ecotourism package, for each distinctive spatial region, having a degree of difficulty 1 & 2²¹:

The core of the White Mountains National Forest:

Samaria gorge, even if it is of mediocre difficulty, must be assumed to be included in a potential ecotourism package, partly due to its position (located in a central area and being accessible via a road and sea link to and from the canyon) and partly because of the indisputable international reputation it has justifiably received over the years. At the same time, each activity which will be linked to the core should follow the requirements of the regulations. Thus, activities such as lighting a bonfire, camping in any form or during the night, removal or destruction of nests, eggs or chicks and general nuisance and destruction of the animal species, swimming in the streams of the park should be strongly prohibited. The canyon can be directly associated with activities such as:

- Simple hiking in a mountainous terrain - canyons (including a possible overnight stay at the shelter Kallergi)
- Wildlife photography

²¹These activities will be completed during the participatory activities

- Bird watching and wildlife monitoring
- Environmental and historical - cultural education and information
- Culinary education on site (without the use of fire).
- Teambuilding activities
- Night sky watching



Picture 13. Trekking on the White Mountains ©Natour – Lab

B1 - B2 - B3: Traditional Landscape Management Zones

In the region of Omalos plateau, in the region of Agios Ioannis – Aradaina and in the region of Agia Roumeli, the following activities can be conducted:

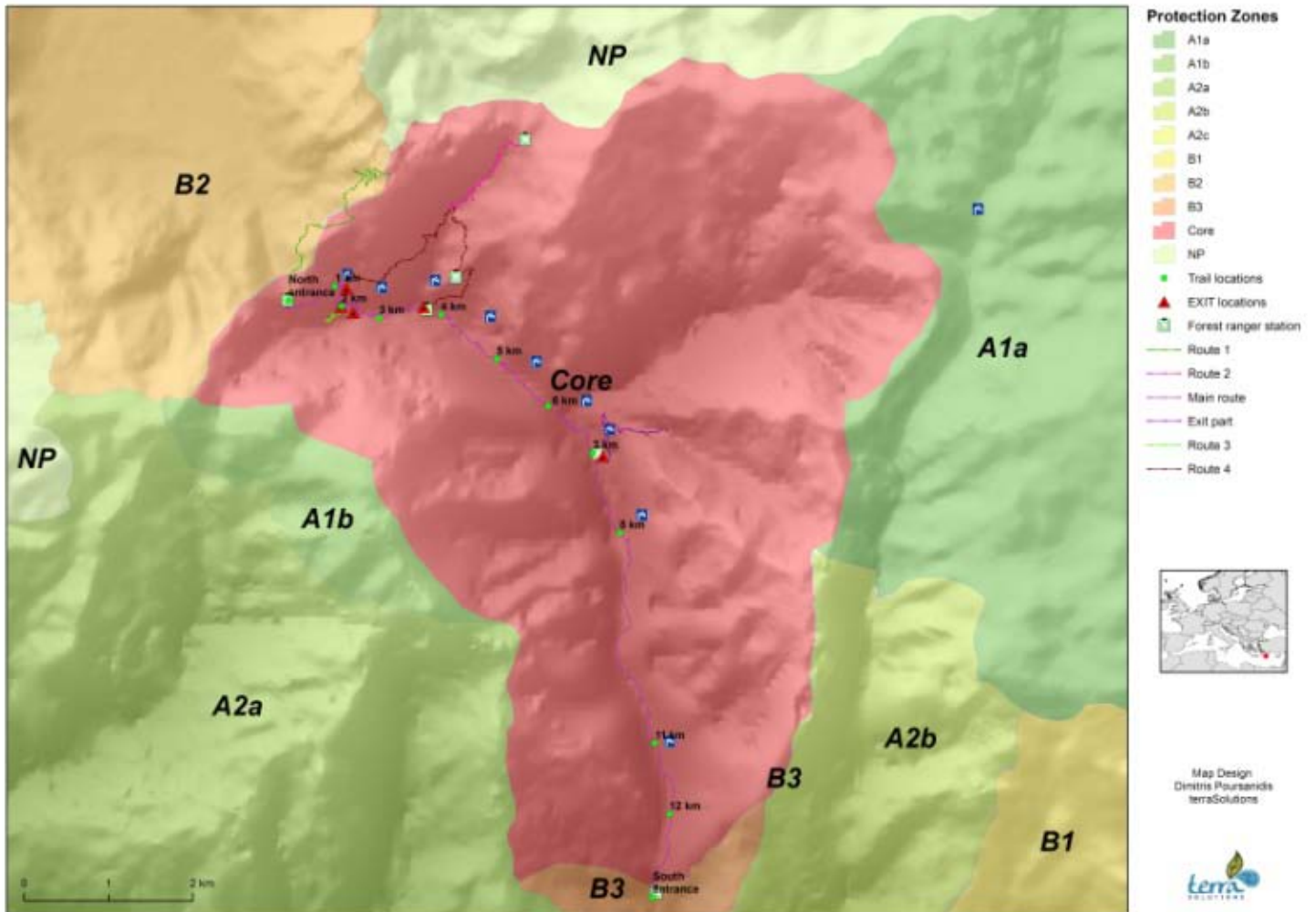
- Mountain bike (Omalos – Agios Ioannis)
- Bird and wildlife watching (All)
- Wildlife photography (All)
- Environmental and historical - cultural education and information (All)
- Culinary education (All)
- Tasting (All)
- Wine tasting (All)
- Teambuilding activities (All)
- Night sky watching

A2c: Ecological Landscape Conservation Zone in the area of Agia Irini (A2c)

In the gorge of Agia Irini, the activities that can take

place are related to those of Samaria Gorge:

- Simple hiking in a mountain mountainous terrain (ie canyons)
- Wildlife photography

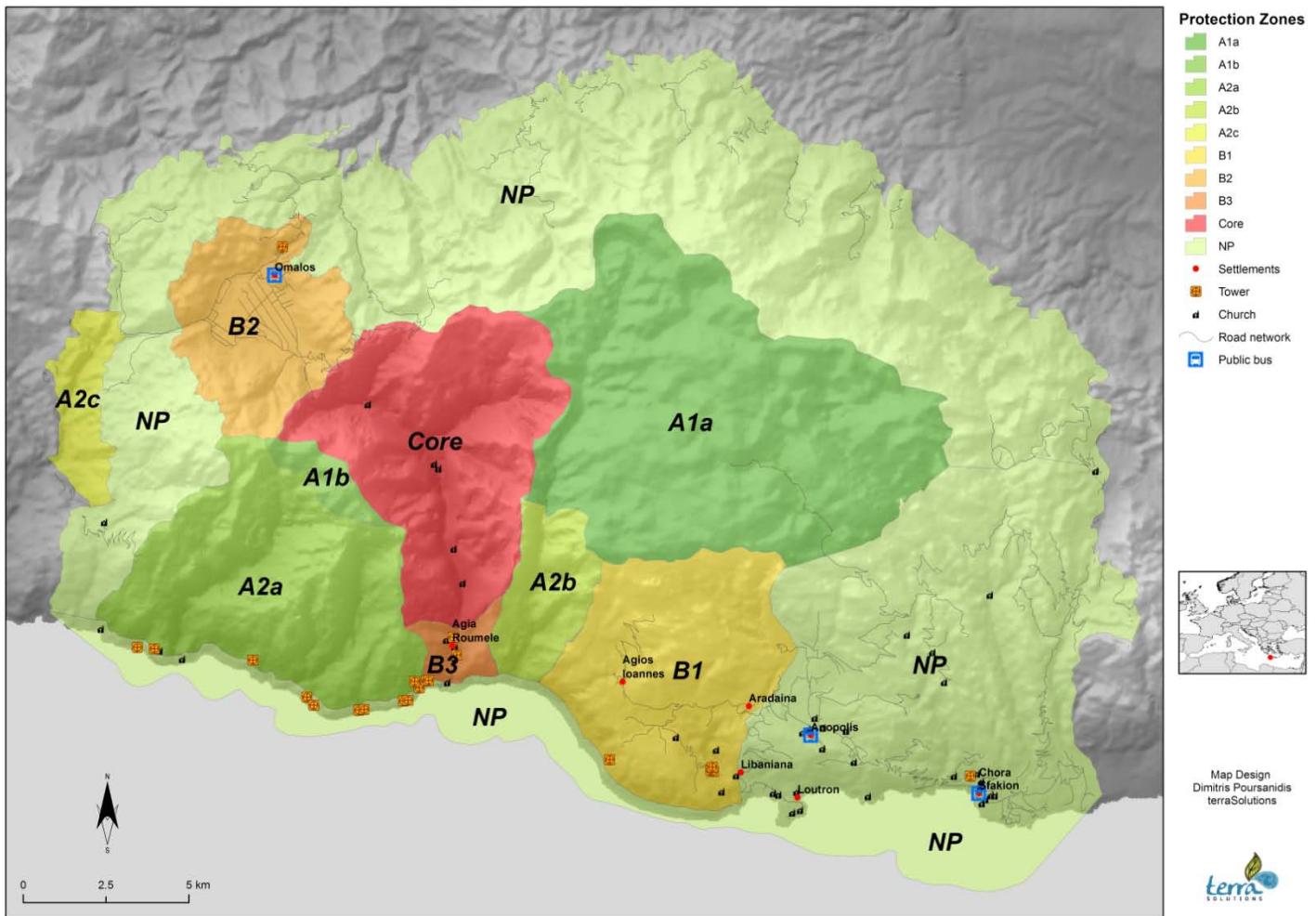


Picture 14. Beekeeping and ecotourism in the White Mountains ©Natour – Lab

- Birdwatching and wildlife monitoring
- Environmental and historical - cultural education and information
- Culinary education on site (without the use of fire)
- Teambuilding activities

NP: Management Zone of Natural Resources

In the broader Natural Resources Management Zone and especially in the part of the area which is classified



as of low difficulty, the activities that can take place are:

- Simple hiking in a mountainous terrain - canyons
- Nature photography
- Birdwatching and wildlife monitoring
- Environmental and historical - cultural education and information
- Culinary education on site (without the use of fire).
- Mountain biking
- Tasting
- Wine tasting
- Horse riding

- Archery
- Shooting
- Yoga
- SCUBA Diving²²
- Snorkeling
- Marine environmental education in underwater trails (underwater trails) and identification of marine flora and fauna
- Fishing
- Canoeing
- Night sky watching
- Teambuilding activities

²² Apart from the areas that are prohibited as are underwater archaeological sites

- Observation - Education and Participation in the production process of local products (e.g. cheese making, making of bakery products, beekeeping activities, making traditional knives.)

The activities listed above are indicative and obtained from an initial survey on the most common activities taking place in the area. They will be complemented with information generated from participatory processes.



Picture 15. Culinary and ecotourism at the White Mountains ©Natour – Lab

As for the cultural profile of the region, areas and features of particular interest are²³:

- Cave «Plativola» near the village Schourachlada (ΚεραμείαΚ.Υ.Α. 388 / 21-2-67,ΦΕΚΤΒ 168/ 9-3-67).
- The Neolithic and Hellenistic cave «Kalamata» or «Kafato», 1 km. towards the southeastern part of Vafes Apokorona.

²³ ΟΙΚΟΜΕ.Π.Ε., 2009 Update of the Special Environmental Study for the White Mountains. Department of Environment and Planning, Region of Crete.

- The ruins of the Greco-Roman era: a) The sanctuary in the location «Agiasmeni» on the road from Melidoni to Pemonia, b) The circular tomb in the location «Papas», north of the Papas villages and between the villages of Ramni and Paidochori Apokorona, c) The ruins of a settlement in the location «Elliniko» or «Vigla» around 2 km to the southeastern part of Melidoni village (Ramni – Paidochori).
- The prehistoric and hellenistic caves «Gourgouthia», «Lentaka», «Skolaka» και «Sta Xalasma», close to the Melidoni village in Apokoronas
- The prehistoric cave «Ellinotrypa» close to the Prasses village in Kydonies.
- The prehistoric and hellenistic cave «Kato Sarakina» or «Elliniko» close to the Therisso village in Kydonies.
- The ruins of the ancient town Anopolis, on the hill close to the Anopolis village, in Sfakia.



Picture 17. Diving, Environmental Information and Ecotourism in the White Mountains ©Dimitris Poursanidis / terraSolutions

- The ancient Tarra in the location of the modern town of Agia Roumeli Sfakion.
- In the location of the Agia Roumeli village, the ruins of the ancient town Tarra exists as well as

the cemetery in the exit of the Samaria gorge. There is a strong fortress and the sanctuary of Apollona Tarraiou. The area has been declared as a protected archaeological site. The ancient town of Tarra, after the invasion and occupation of the Dorians, was thriving as a religious center with large temples dedicated mainly to Apollo. The town, though small, was independent as it had its own coins, bearing on one side the Cretan wild goat head and arrows and on the other side the bee. Tarra flourished mainly during the Roman period. However, test excavations showed that the city existed in Late Minoan times. In this region a stone column with an engraved double ax was found and it is suspected that the church of Our Lady was built in the location of the ancient temple of Artemis by using the same material while the parquetry still maintained in the church dates back to the 1st century BC. There are also ancient sculptures.



Picture 19. Tripiti beach on a sketch of the British admiral Spratt



Picture 18. Agia Roumeli beach and the ruins of the ancient town Tarra

- The ruins of the ancient town Syias – Lyssou in the Sougia area, East Selinos. One of the most famous ancient towns in Crete during the Greco-Roman period Syia was built in the location of the Sougia village, which is located in the west part of the ancient town. The recent name Sougia is an alteration of the ancient. Etymologically, the work Syia seems to have derived from the word Sys, which means pork, and the town itself was famous for breeding porks, as there are big forests of oak and hollies existing in the area. Syia flourished mostly during the Roman period as evidenced by the ruins, but also during the early Byzantine period. According to ancient writers, the city was known as a port and more specifically as the port of the ancient city Elyrou. Foreign travelers as the Englishman Pashley, recorded the ancient monuments of Sougias during the last century. Shards, (pottery fragments), marble pillars, remains of the city walls and walls of public buildings have been observed, dating back to Roman imperial times. To date, remains of ancient buildings, walls, and tombs hewn foundations of Roman houses, as well as parts of the ancient

- aqueduct carrying water from sources of the village Livadas are preserved. Tanks gathered water through a channel in residences and public baths, the ruins of which are preserved in various parts of the site. On the west side of the valley, the necropolis of Syia lies, where there are vaulted tombs on ground surface. Mobile findings from the town of Syia are exhibited at the Museum of Chania.
- In the community of Epanochori, in the location Seisiana a Roman tomb is found with precious gems. The tomb and the findings date back to the second half of the 2nd century BC. The finds are housed in the Museum of Chania.
 - Another localized region of antiquity, the hill of Prophet Elias and the exit of the gorge Tripitis, is the ancient city Pikilassos of the Hellenistic period. From ancient inscriptions it is suggested that there was a majestic temple of Sarapis, a major Babylonian deity, whose worship came to Greece and lasted throughout the 4th century AD. One of the inscriptions is hosted in the Museum of Cambridge.
 - In almost all the villages of Apokorona built coolies. The coolies communicate visually with the fortress of Aptera.
 - In Melidoni a fortress (Koules) still exists from which the cistern and traces of its walls are well-preserved. Similar fortresses were also built in Kares, and two in Ramni.
 - The Koules in Vafe (a square-shaped box-like fortress with loopholes), is maintained by the masonry and the cistern overlooks the surrounding area of Vafe.
 - Emprosneros is supervised by two coolies, one in Tsouristra (from which the base is saved) and a second one on the Kimina hill where the tank water is located today.
 - In the Askyfou plateau, two such fortresses monitor the settlements, but are now in a dilapidated condition.
 - In Loutro, back in 1868, a big fortress was erected with two elevated gun positions to the east and west. In this Koule, the school of the village has been hosted.
 - In Agia Roumeli, four Koules have been built in order to control the gorge as well as the passages to the west of the locations Skoteni, Aggelokampos, Agios Sideris and Samaria.
 - Trypiti's Koules is on the E4 trail and controls all of the south part of the Chania region.
 - Of particular interest are the almost fossilized in time mitata, these unique stone houses that are used for housing and creamery during the summer months. In the beginning of the summer where the lowlands and hilly pastures are exhausted, the shoals find rich food in the high part of the White Mountains, the famous Madares, the name of which has derived from the ancient "Madaros" meaning naked. Thanks to many endemic plants a very special farming system had been growing for thousands of years.. The mitata (creameries) at Madares, consist of the coumous, rocky buildings of unknown age built with the ekforic system, kourtes sheepfolds (kourtes) for the sheep and the enclosures. Nowadays, most of the mitata are ruined and abandoned. Road constructions led to a different

form of farming, which does not require the accommodation of farmers in the highlands. But to date, some mitata exist, which the shepherds use as refuge during the summer period in order to produce cheese which matures in underground caves. Mitata in the area of Anopolis - Sfakia (Pyros area) operates in the above-mentioned way and others in Meskla (Psifakes), Karanou (Drys) and Omalos (Fokies) operate as resting places for farmers and 'sheepfolds' for their sheep.

Prospects on the ecotourism development in Samaria National Park - can we offer more than the three Ss, (the sun, sand, sea)?

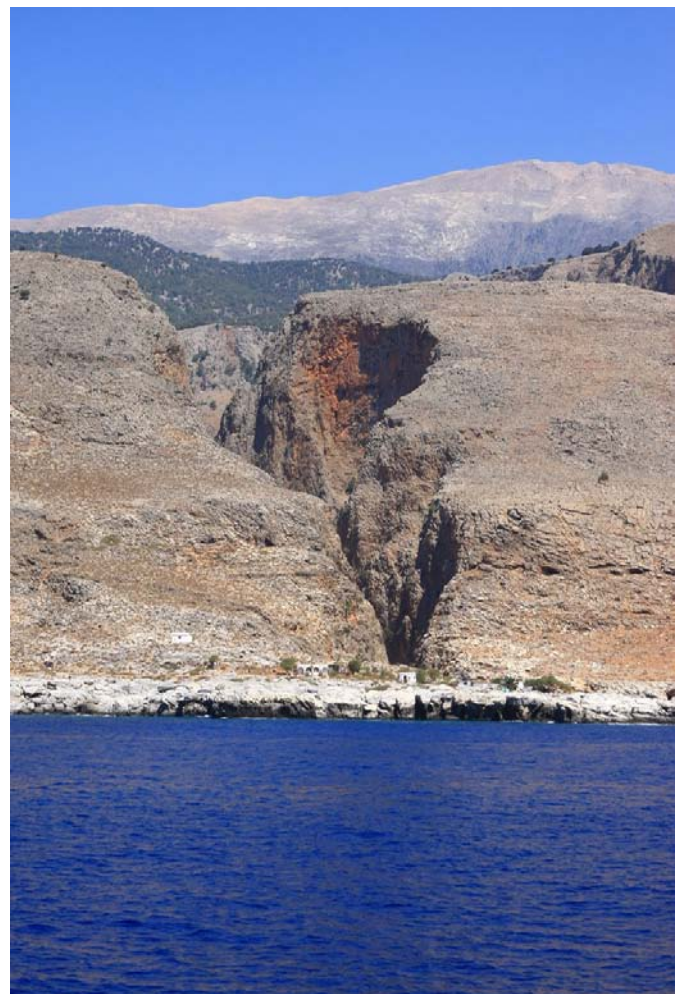
The factors that could lead to a successful tourist destination can be: the physical characteristics of the site, smart competitive strategies, effective marketing campaigns, smart grids on the distribution of the tourist product, creativity and product innovation, dynamic national airlines²⁴. The National Park of Samaria, as it is already evident from what has been recorded within the first Report of the Pilot Action, presents some peculiarities which must be taken into account during the development process of any ecotourism policy.

Firstly, it is a region where tourism industry already exists. Thousands of visitors come to this region every year, dozens of small tourism businesses operate while the data so far give a generally positive picture of

²⁴Auliana Poon, Best Practice Destination Management: Lessons from the Leaders

experiences offered. In parallel, the experiences offered are directly linked to the position and the physical characteristics and peculiarities of the region; therefore, the general form of the tourist industry is tailored to this ecotourism.

Nevertheless, the high volume of daily traffic, the short duration of the visitors' stay at the site, the almost exclusive use of only a portion of the area (Samaria gorge) and of all the activities which can be quoted, the relatively short period of the tourist development of the area, the incomplete utilization of the cultural profile of the region and the introduction of foreign elements to the delight of foreign visitors, the lack of a coherent planning and action plan with the participation and consent of the local communities, the



Picture 20. Aradaina's gorge ©Dimitris Poursanidis / terraSolutions

almost complete dependence of traffic on major tour operators, result in a tourist experience more similar to that of mass eco-tourism, if not mass tourism.

The development of ecotourism strategy should not be contrasted with the existing tourist activity in the area. Ecotourism should not be active in the existing competitive form of tourism, but instead should improve the provided experiences and strengthen the existing framework.

The reality is that the largest proportion of tourist influx in the National Park at the given time bears the following characteristics:

- They Remain in the area for a limited time and usually without overnight
- They Focuses, mainly, on the Samaria gorge without taking into account other important elements of the natural and cultural heritage of the other part of the National Park (e.g. the marine environment).
- The visit is not accompanied by the information and better understanding of the natural and cultural features (as it should be given by skilled guides), and also because of the short period of stay, which acts as a deterrent in such activity.
- The natural image which any visitor receives is relatively authentic (a mountainous environment relatively unaffected) as opposed to the cultural element that has now formed in such a manner as to satisfy the needs of the visitors

- The period of visitation is shaped substantially starting at the end of April until mid-October, being left untapped for a large part of the year
- Most of the visitors come in the context of a daily excursion organized by great travel agents and tour operators and not by eco-tourist packages

The abovementioned has as result the easy and fast transfer of the tree s (sea, sun, sand) in the natural environment of the National Park, leaving untapped a large part of the natural and cultural capital of the region.

The perspectives of an ecotourism development of course are dynamic as are shown by the possibilities of experience that can be provided in the region. In order to enable these perspectives to enter in an implementation orbit is necessary to make some primary actions:

- Recognition of the status quo and the launch of a debate on the revision of.
- Participatory processes with participation in the planning and decision-making of local community
- Dynamic (time and place) strategy development relate only to ecotourism (Ecotourism Strategy Development) and dynamic (time and place) action plan with at least five years of implementation and adaptation to the conditions of management of the National Forest.

It should be emphasized that the development and implementation of an ecotourism strategy is not an

additional action or some other option. In contrast and especially on Protected Areas, is a positive action that falls within both the general context of management plans and the economic viability of local communities. This is in full agreement with the general requirements of the Special Spatial Framework for Tourism which "aims to create conditions for:

a) Promote the sustainable and balanced development of tourism in the country, **according to the natural, cultural, economic and social characteristics of each region, with particular emphasis on the protection, enhancement and restoration of the environment, cultural heritage and landscape and in particular the protection of water and soil resources and biodiversity conservation.**

b) The transition from a mass, undifferentiated and monothematic tourism in **a quality, diversified and multidisciplinary tourism, cost-effective, targeted at audiences with higher requirements, not merely established tourism model "sun-sea."**

c) The **mitigation of the seasonality of tourism in the country** and the increase in the average per capita expenditure by promoting high quality tourist accommodation services and infrastructure, penetration of international branded hotel chains and promoting contemporary tourism products, such as composite tourist accommodation and tourism organized receptors activities.

d) The diffusion of tourism development opportunities and enhance of less developed tourist areas that have significant growth potential in conjunction with the use of special - alternative forms of tourism.

e) **The exploitation as a priority, specific features of the local natural and cultural resources - in developed and developing tourist areas - towards diversification of the local tourism product and lengthening the tourist season.**

f) **The creation of networks of natural and cultural environment, which will highlight and exploit all the historical and cultural resources (archaeological sites, historical sites, traditional villages, traditional customs) and linked to contemporary social, cultural and economic activity with emphasis on promoting local products of high standard.**

g) **The expansion of the range of tourism products offered and services, taking into account the natural, cultural, economic and social characteristics of each region»**

The strategic development of ecotourism in an area can :²⁵

- + Provides a motivation for the sustainable use of natural resources*
- + Generating resources for conservation and sustainable management of natural areas*
- + To strengthen the reform of local culture*
- + Create business opportunities and job opportunities for the local community*
- + To enhance responsible practices for planning and management of tourism*
- + Improve the profile of an area as ecotourism destination*
- + To enhance in local, regional and national level, the attraction visitors to a part of the tourism market which is widely regarded that it has significant growth potential.*

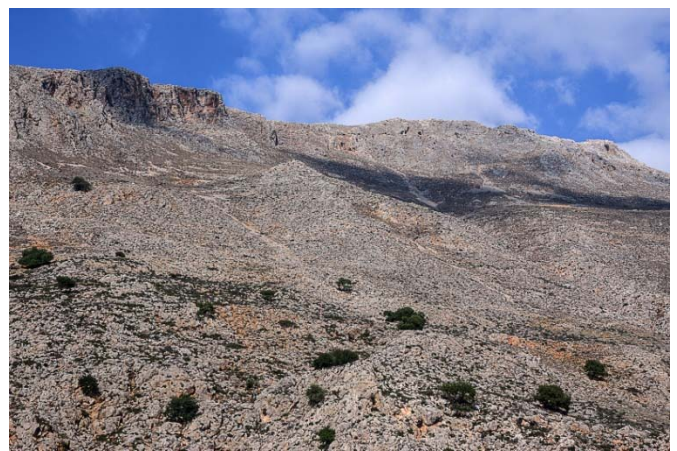
²⁵ Stevens, PW and Jansen, R. 2002. Botswana National Ecotourism Strategy

Basic Principles of Ecotourism Development Strategy (ASAO) in the National Park of Samaria and Action Plan (AP) strategy for the development of ecotourism in the National Park of Samaria

One of the key questions that may arise in the context of starting the process of determining the development strategy for ecotourism in an area regards the actual purpose of this process. The ecotourism development strategy will put first the question of developing this kind of tourism into a single, holistic theoretical framework, which will be recorded, among other things, the current and expected situation, needs, and opportunities, challenges, threats, strengths and disadvantages of implementation. This process is extensively participatory. Without the participatory processes and the planning process and decision-making primarily at local level, it is almost impossible to lay the basis of strategic development or at least extremely difficult to any implementation of an action plan (Action Plan). But, in this juvenilia condition and until the launch of participatory processes and record the views of the local community, as part of this petition will make an effort to put some basic Principles of Strategic Development of Ecotourism to form then a basis in the dialogue. These principles and the corresponding Action Plan is proposed as a five-year implementation horizon and include only basic actions that the implementation be realistic and practical and not stay at a theoretical level. At the same time, the

consideration is dynamic and can be changed at any time deemed necessary.

The Basic Principles of Ecotourism Development Strategy for the National Park of Samaria, were considered optimum be placed in four initial conceptual pillars with concrete actions in each of them. So were that ASAO and the corresponding AC for each Authority can, as a proposal to differentiate as follows:



Picture 21. Alpine landscape of the White Mountains ©Dimitris Poursanidis / terraSolutions

✚ **1st PRINCIPLE STRATEGY for the DEVELOPMENT of ECOTOURISM**

▶ **Protection, Support and Enhancement of Quality of Life of Local Society**

▶ *Action Plan*

- 1) *Development, consolidation and dynamic operation of a Roundtable (forum), consisting mainly of representatives of the local community and stakeholders associated with ecotourism at local and regional level, for the dynamic view of the strategy of the ecotourism in the White Mountains. The forum, which can be an informal body, will meet at least once a*

year in a different part of the area of the National Park where it will develop issues of ecotourism in the White Mountains.

II) Development of Ecotourism Package through the cooperation of local businesses in each territorial unit of the National Park. Cooperation between different SME's (Small and Medium Enterprises) to provide products and services in the region which will provide an additional validity to a ecotourism package, yielding the cultural identity of the region in an integrated framework.

«Ecotourism means something more than activities of small groups of selected people who show dedication and love to the nature. It is a platform to bring all interests that arise through environmental, economic and social issues. Ecotourism is a dynamic tool engagement with nature in the sense of social responsibility»²⁶

III) Encouraging the employment of local residents in particular sectors of ecotourism. The employment of local residents will create additional jobs in the region and will further strengthen the cultural background of each ecotourism package.

IV) Strengthening the local primary economy by integrating agro-pastoral activities in ecotourism activities. The inclusion of selected

agro-pastoral, bee or other activities of the primary sector as discrete actions within ecotourism packages will bring extra income to the local community and also enhance the cultural profile of ecotourism in the region.

2nd PRINCIPLE STRATEGY for the DEVELOPMENT of ECOTOURISM

Protection and Promotion of the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the National Park

«Hiring local people is a good selling point. You don't want to travel 10.000 miles just to find that your cousin from America or Europe is the one serving you at dinner»

Michael Njongu – Market and Sales Manager, Private Safaris, Kenya²⁷

▶ ACTION PLAN

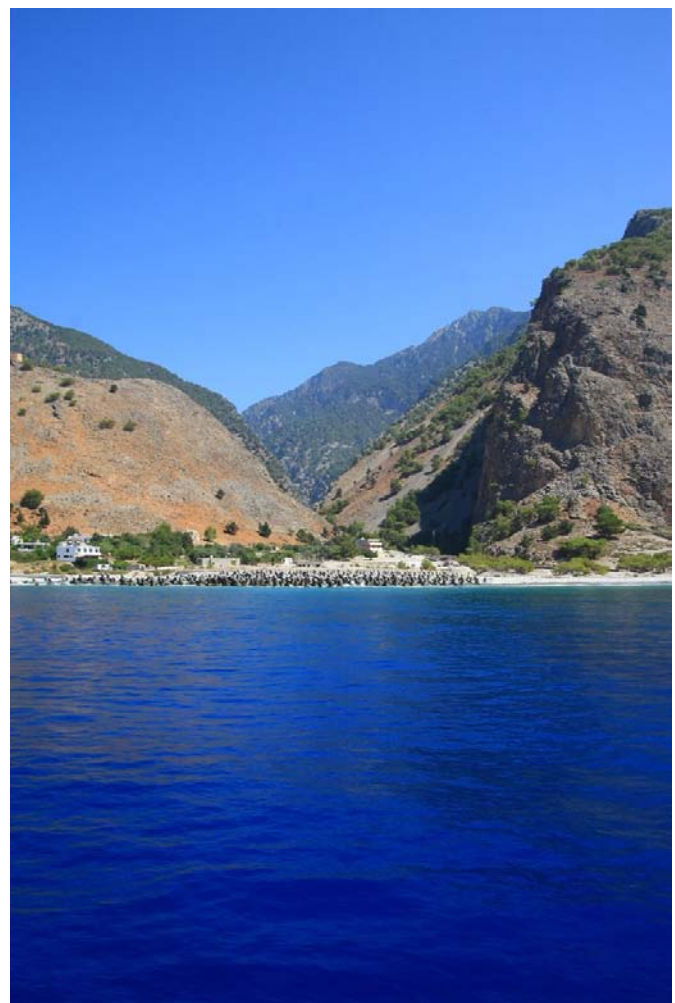
I) To Continue the monitoring projects of the natural environment of the National Park and promote the results to selected international destinations in order to attract visitors having the natural environment as the main driving force for their choice of destination. The monitoring projects of the species and habitats of the National Park and their presentation to as many operators, apart from the obvious scientific interest, will become a magnet for visitors who choose destinations according to the specific elements of nature.

²⁶ Karagiannis Stephanos-Tsoukatos Evangelos: Spinaloga Heritage as an Alternative Tourist Product: The Case of the Spinaloga Islet in Crete, Anatolia, an International Journal of Tourism and Hospitality Research, Vol.14, No 2, Winter 2003, pg. 161-167

²⁷ Integrating business skills into ecotourism operations. Switzerland: IUCN and Kuoni. 80pp.

- II) Information and training of local tourist businesses on using the best practices in order to reduce the environmental cost of their operation. The profile of eco-tourists dictates the choice of destinations and infrastructure should be led to a demonstrably sustainable use of the natural resources. Furthermore, the application of practices for reducing the environmental cost of the operation for each tourist infrastructure will enhance the economics of the business.**
- III) Creation (where required) with emphasis on methods of low cost, infrastructures of environmental awareness and minimal visual impact and maintenance of existing ones. Signs and signaling environmental content, adapted to the natural environment and the peculiarity of the region with targeted content, minimalist brochures, developing ICT applications for environmental information (e.g. smartphone applications) etc. will highlight with clarity and adequacy the information an eco-tourist is looking for while giving a clear message on the issue of development and implementation of sustainable methods of viewing.**
- IV) Creation and promotion of the environmental interpretation of terrestrial and underwater paths. The routes of environmental interpretation and especially underwater trails will place the White Mountains on the map of contemporary eco-tourism destinations while simultaneously act as an indirect means of protecting sensitive areas.**

- V) Adaptation of ecotourism products in managing the requirements of the National Forest. Any ecotourist activity must be perfectly adapted to the objectives and requirements of the Management Plan of the area and provisions on the conditions of the proper use of land and natural resources.**
- VI) Integration of friendly methods of traveling as an integral element in any ecotourist package. Using methods of travel-friendly environment (eg bicycle) would bring a major prestige to the ecotourist package; provide an interesting and desired activity while reducing the environmental and financial costs of the package.**
- VII) Redefinition of the authentic cultural identity of the area by local businesses providing**



Picture 22. View of Agia Roumeli by the sea © Dimitris Poursanidis / terraSolutions

products and tourist services. The ecotourism packages must highlight the cultural identity of the region. Eco-tourists choose these destinations in order to come into contact with the local culture, cuisine, architecture, processes, etc. The tourism infrastructure must comply with this eco-friendly profile in a direct manner, avoid adaptation to certain habits of tourists but "impose" the specificity of their identity.

VIII) *The integration of the authentic cultural identity of the region in every newly-designed tourist infrastructure.*

IX) *The development and promotion of an eco-tourist product with reciprocal economic benefits to the natural environment.* One of the practices that was applied internationally in tourist products implemented in protected areas is the direct link of the revenue collected from the sale of the product with actions to protect and promote the natural environment of the area. Thus, a transfer rate of about 5% or less, of the net proceeds of the sale of the tourism product in action e.g. cleaning and marking trails, wildlife protection, etc. while communicating this process to prospective ecotourist package will enhance the profile of any environmental - friendly product.

3rd PRINCIPLE STRATEGY for the DEVELOPMENT of ECOTOURISM

► Development and dynamic improvement of the Ecotourism Experience

ACTION PLAN

- I) *Development and promotion of ecotourism packages for small groups and targeted recipients. Ecotourism will not replace the existing form of tourism. On the contrary, it will strengthen and improve it. The activities within the scope of ecotourism should best be implemented in small groups and must be tailored to the profile of the ecotourists who chooses them*
- II) *Development and promotion of ecotourism packages oriented to providing quality experiences, products and services within a reasonable period of time while taking into account the region's potential and the experiences offered regionally. It is beyond dispute that ecotourists who choose the White Mountains, and particularly those from overseas markets, will try to combine their experience with a visit to other local, regional or national destinations (Knossos, Chania, Rethymno , Acropolis etc.). Each ecotourism package should take this fact into account and adjust the time limits respectively. This raises additional requirements in the case of the White Mountains.*



Picture 23. Loutro village © Dimitris Poursanidis / terraSolutions

III) *Development for the integration of combinatorial activities (mountain - sea sports - gastronomy, activities day - night) in each ecotourism package. The White Mountains have to offer a plethora of experiences. The inclusion of , if possibly, most of the activities in a balanced development will highlight the area's identity.*

IV) *Continuous training of local business in the world market trends of ecotourism. The ecotourist market, like any tourist market is changeable and is based on strong social, political and economic factors both in the country of destination and the countries of origin. The business area should be constantly aware of current market trends in order to take timely decisions on any adjustment to their products.*

V) *Continuous recording of the opinions held by ecotourists, optimal adaptation to the requirements of the latter, development of a visitor service "after the experience» (after sales). The provision of tourist products and services requires to record the user's views*

both during and after the use of products in order to be able to make the necessary adjustments and improvements. Providing a guest service system "after the experience» (after sales) will greatly enhance the visitor's trust and act positively in promoting the business.

VI) *Development and integration of short ecotourist actions (small ecotourism packages) to the existing mass tourism services. The ecotourist packages are not intended to substitute the existing product form of the White Mountains. Instead, the aim is to act cooperatively in order to improve it. In this context, the integration of existing tourism services with the short ecotourist activities will significantly improve the elapsed experience, an enterprise which does not aim at modifying the existing shape.*

✚ 4th PRINCIPLE STRATEGY for the DEVELOPMENT of ECOTOURISM

Promoting the Ecotourism Experience

ACTION PLAN

I) *Certification of local services and products within an ecotourism certification quality system.. The certification of products and services in one unified system acts, generally, positively in a propellant level and improves customer loyalty to the service provider. The signa??l quality of products and services developed by the Management Body of the National Park can be a direct, cost-free, solution for businesses that do not have the*

qualifications nor the financial ability to support a heavier system.

II) Targeted promotion of the natural and cultural features of the region in international instruments on the projection of ecotourism destinations, focusing on web applications. The internet has proven to be the main source of information for visitors to the National Park of Samaria. Furthermore, it is imperative that a web platform be created where all the tourist infrastructure of the White Mountains will be able to advertise their tourist products and ecotourism packages offered.



Picture 24. Ecotourists at the White Mountains ©Natour – Lab

III) Promoting ecotourist packages to selected tourism operators and businesses, nationally and internationally. The ecotourist packages should be targeted at a specific audience and as a result, tour operators in this sector ought to be different from those of mass tourism. Businesses, organizations (private and governmental) must look at these markets, develop networks and promote ecotourist products. The MEET project and the actions that will develop during and after the

completion of the program will greatly assist in this measure.

The Ecotourist package and possible scenarios - a first approach

One of the issues of the MEET project, in the framework of this Pilot Action which will become a field of the participatory consultation but also will be tested for its effectiveness, is the conception, development, test, final proposal, promotion and management of an ecotourist package. The final product (ecotourist product), after the test face and if it is complete and effective, will have the opportunity to be promoted by the General Secretariat of the MEET Project in selected foreign markets and especially to Canada, U.S.A., Australia and Japan. Also, the Management Body or any other entity, private, public or mixed, will be able to forward the packet to the markets of their choice and to manage it appropriately.

What is necessary to be taken into account during the development process of this product are the natural peculiarities of the area, the predefined finance cost (150-200 € per day/person) and most importantly the fact that this product will be tested for the duration of the period starting in late September – early October (maximum early November), when there is a strong dependence on the weather conditions. Consequently, at this stage it is proposed that two packages are developed, one primary and one alternative for a period of five days (four nights) and a group of people from 8-10. The existence of endogenous activities is also possible to be happening for each of the days

included in both of the before-mentioned distinct packages.

So, the key ecotourist package may include:

BASIC ECOTOURIST PACKAGE

Title: A snorkel on the mountain

Target group: 8-10 people, families with children aged over 12, with medium to good fitness, moderate hiking experience, certified (e.g. PADI certification) as divers (for adults), good knowledge of swimming skills for children.

Duration: five days (four overnight stays)

Period: 20 September – 15 October

Program:

Day 1²⁸

Morning:

- Arrival to the island of Crete – meeting with the team leader at Chania airport.
- Transportation with a van – either rental or from the company that will accompany the clients up to the Omalos Plateau.
- Arrangements for accommodation in a traditional guesthouse, and team meeting following afterwards.
- Breakfast preparation with local products and placement in lunch packs.
- Short hiking trail from Omalos Plateau to the Kallergi refuge through the trail that starts above the north entrance of the National Park.
- Team gathering at Kallergi refuge, light lunch on site and then information given by the

²⁸ The first day program will be configured depending on the arrival time.

leader on the basic characteristics of the National Park and the program.

- Return to the traditional guesthouse
- Free time

Afternoon – Night:

- Team gathering(19:00)
- Culinary seminar and dinner with the preparations of the seminar (19:00-21:00)
- Video projection of the National Park (21:00-22:00)



Picture 25. The Gates, the narrowest location of the Samaria gorge ©ΔημήτρηςΠουρσανίδης / terraSolutions

DAY 2

Morning:

- Team gathering, Breakfast preparation with local products and placement in lunch packs.
- Assembly at the entrance of the National Park of Samaria and information talk on the safety

rules from the responsible team leader group.
(10:30)

- Downhill of Samaria gorge (11:00)

Midday:

- Rest and lunch in the old village of Samaria – Information about the way of life of the old resident of the gorge and the basic characteristics of the settlement (14:00-16:00 - around 2 hours)

Afternoon:

- Completion of the gorge downhill and arrival in Agia Roumeli village (18:00)
- Accommodation in a local guesthouse (18:30)
- Free time for relaxation and/or swimming in the beach of Agia Roumeli (18:30 – 21:00)

Noon:

- Culinary seminar and dinner with the preparations of the seminar on the beach of Agia Roumeli (21:00 – 23:00)

DAY 3

Morning:

- Team gathering, Breakfast preparation with local products (after 8:30)
- Luggage collection and meeting at the port of Agia Roumeli (10:00)
- Transfer by taxi boat or by the boat of the diving center to Loutro (11:00 – 12:00)

Arrangements for accommodation in a guesthouse of Loutro

- Transfer by taxi boat or by the boat of the diving center to the area of Lykos – Foinikas or to the wider area of Loutro (13:00)

- Information on the aquatic environment of the National Park and diving or snorkeling in a predefined underwater path as well as identification of the flora and fauna of the area. (13:00 – 15:00)

Midday:

- Return to Loutro and lunch in a restaurant with local traditional products (15:00-16:00)

Noon:

- Free time (16:00 – 20:00)

Night:

- Overnight stay in Loutro for safety reasons due to the diving activity
- Culinary seminar and wine tasting (optional) (20:00-22:00)

Day 4

Morning:

- Team gathering (early in the morning), breakfast preparation with local products (07:00)
- Equipment preparation and trekking from Loutro to Anopolis Sfakion (09:00 – 13:00)
- Accommodation in a guesthouse of Anopolis or Agios Ioannis (14:00)

Midday:

- Culinary seminar and lunch in the guesthouse (14:00-16:00)
- Free time

Noon

- Trekking in the path of Agios Ioannis – Kakos Poros (18:00-20:00)

Night:

- Dinner in the guest house and concert with traditional Cretan music (20:00 – 22:00)

Day 5²⁹

Morning:

- Team gathering (early in the morning), breakfast preparation with local products(07:00)
- Departure of the team with a van – either rental or from the company that will accompany the clients – and direction towards Vrysses Apokorona
- Visit to a local winery
- Departure towards the city of Chania and to the airport

END OF THE BASIC PACKAGE

The alternative ecotourist package is formed in the case of failing to achieve cleavage of the National Park and inability to transport visitors from Agia Roumeli due to bad weather conditions.

ALTERNATIVE ECOTOURIST PACKAGE

Title: A snorkel on the mountain

Target group: 8-10 people, families with children aged over 12, with medium to good fitness, moderate hiking experience, certified (e.g. PADI certification) as

²⁹The program of the 5th day will be arranged according to the departure time.

divers (for adults), good knowledge of swimming skills for children.

Duration: four days (three overnight stays)

Period: 20 September – 15 October

Program:

Day 1s³⁰

Morning:

- Arrival to the island of Crete – meeting with the team leader at the airport of Chania
- Transportation of the team in a van – either rental or from the company that will accompany the clients – and direction towards the area of Imbros
- Arrangements for accommodation in a guesthouse of the area and team meeting afterwards
- Breakfast preparation with local products and placement in lunch packs.
- Short trekking from Imbros Plateau to Tavis refuge
- Meeting of the team at Tavis refuge, light lunch and information given by the team leader on the basic characteristics of the National Park and the program.
- Return to the guesthouse
- Free time

Noon – Night:

- Meeting of the team
- Culinary seminar and dinner with preparations
- Video projection of the National Park

³⁰ The first day program will be configured depending on the arrival time.

DAY 2

Morning:

- Meeting of the team, Breakfast preparation with local products and placement in lunch packs.
- Meeting in a predefined location and preparation of the cycling equipment
- Downhill by bike from Imbros to Chora Sfakion with the escort of the van

Midday - Noon:

- Transportation of the team in a van – either rental or from the company that will accompany the clients – and direction towards Anopolis or the area of Agios Ioannis
- Arrangements for accommodation in a guesthouse of the area
- Lunch in the guesthouse
- Free time

Night:

- Culinary seminar and dinner with the preparations in Anopolis or Agios Ioannis (21:00 – 23:00)

Day 3

Morning:

- Meeting of the team, Breakfast preparation with local products (after 8:30)
- Transportation of the team in a van– either rental or from the company that will accompany the clients – and direction towards the entrance of Aradaina gorge
- Crossing of the Aradaina gorge
- Arrival in the area of Marmara
- Snorkeling/Diving, if the sea conditions are favorable.

- Lunch in a local restaurant

Midday - Noon:

- Transportation of the team in a van – either rental or from the company that will accompany the clients – and direction towards the entrance of Aradaina gorge
- Return to the guesthouse
- Free time

Some of the characteristics of a “good” ecotourist package¹³:

- **Provision of information dissemination prior to the trip on the culture and the environment of the place**
- **Provision for written instructions on the proper equipment and clothing - footwear before arrival and verbally during the duration of the package**
- **Provision for detailed information on the geographical, social and political characteristics of the site as well as the social, environmental and political challenges on visitors’ arrival. Full escort and well-designed guide tours by skillful and certified local tour guides are provided throughout the package duration**
- **Provision for the opportunity to meet and interact with the local community on a basis that is clearly non-commercial**
- **Adequate understanding of the characteristics of the locals’ daily life and their traditions as well as the topics that are suitable for discussion even before the social interaction**
- **Provision for the possibility of sponsoring a local NGO**
- **Reassurance that all equivalent inputs are completely covered**
- **Provision for appropriate and adequate accommodation**

Night:

- Culinary seminar and wine tasting
- Culinary seminar and dinner with preparations
- A night outing with a concert of traditional Cretan music

DAY 4³¹

Morning:

- Team meeting (early in the morning), breakfast preparation with traditional products (07:00)
- Departure of the team in a van – either rental or from the company that will accompany the clients – and direction towards Vrysses Apokorona
- Visit to a local winery
- Departure towards the city of Chania and then to the airport

³¹The program of the 5th day will be arranged according to the departure time.

Conclusions – Suggestions 1stPhase

From the data that have been presented up till now in the 1st Report of the Pilot Action «A snorkel on the mountain» the following can be summarized below: :

- ✚ The Pilot Action has as its main target the extension of the tourist season and the economic activity based on tourism, hoping that such a plan will act in a positive direction towards providing environmentally friendly services and strengthening of economic opportunities for local private initiative. Moreover, the Action will provide a new vision to the local community about the importance of the coastal and marine area of the National Park, thus influencing in a positive way the reduction of the negative impact of tourism on the marine environment and the diffusion of the touristic pressure to the terrestrial environment via the equal distribution of human presence in more places than the already existing ones.

- ✚ Ecotourism in the area of the National Park exists, with important infrastructures. Yet, these are far inferior to the standards abroad and the sustainable management to make it a proposed destination internationally. Remarkable is the fact that there is an inverse relation between the ratings of the National Park and those landing at the airport of Chania. The number of the visitors to the Park of Samaria in the last 20 years has decreased by

53%, raising the problem of sustainability practices in most dimensions

- ✚ Ecotourism in the National Park should be treated as a "journey to a relatively undisturbed or uncontaminated natural area which has been designed for the study, admiration and enjoyment of the scenery and wild plants and animals and the existing cultural expressions found in this region"

- ✚ The first and most fundamental step that must be made about the social and economic sustainability of ecotourism, the improvement of the ecotourist experience and generally on the development of a comprehensive, sustainable and realistic strategy of ecotourism in the area of the National Park is to create an informal forum of participatory processes with participation and engagement of representatives from each sector both public and private.).

- ✚ The development of the ecotourist strategy should not be contrasted to the existing tourist activity in the area. Ecotourism should not be active in the current competitive form of tourism, but instead it should improve the provided experiences and strengthen the existing framework.

- ✚ The strategic development plan of ecotourism should be dynamic in order to become sustainable

- ✚ The strategic development of ecotourism should be elaborated in a realistic and workable time frame of five years, an action plan involving both private and public initiative.
- ✚ Under the Pilot Action an ecotourist product (ecotourist package) will be developed, designed, organized and ultimately tested with the commitment of the local entrepreneurs for implementation. The product will emerge from the terminal and participatory processes and must be adapted to the social, economic, environmental peculiarities of the National Forest.
- ✚ The touristic product which will be developed, after the positive recommendation from the team of experts that will constitute the test group, will be integrated into a list of ecotourism addressing the markets of Canada, the US, A., Australia and possibly Japan.
- ✚ The management of the ecotourist product can be undertaken by private initiative (e.g. a group of local businesses) with the support and supervision of the Management Body
- ✚ The aim of the ecotourist product produced is not the product itself, but the dissemination of its philosophy around the tourist sector in the region in order to start the process of networking between business and the development - management of additional ecotourist packages.

This deliverable is the first report of the Pilot Plan and not the endpoint product. Instead, it will be updated at every stage of the implementation of the Pilot Action, supplemented with new data in the hope to reach a comprehensive development plan on ecotourist strategy and the determination of one or more ecotourist products. Projects, analysis on the feasibility of proposed interventions on infrastructures or services, economic analysis of proposed ecotourism products etc. will clearly emerge y from the participatory processes and will be incorporated accordingly.

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«A snorkel on the mountain»

In the framework of the Project

“Mediterranean Experience of Eco-Tourism” (MEET)

1st Report



Financed by:



Project
funded by the
EUROPEAN UNION

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