

TOURIST INDUSTRY GROWTH PRESSURE ALONG THE BULGARIAN BLACK SEA COAST

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Abstract

Coastal zone representing the boundary between sea and land is a highly dynamical and sensitive area that comprises a large variety of natural resources. Population growth in the littoral causes rapid urbanization of the coast, development of infrastructures, transport system and so on. Therefore, coastal ecosystems experience pressure and become vulnerable to pollution, habitat degradation and loss, overfishing, and increased coastal hazards. Accelerated tourism development during the recent years is an extra risk factor for the Bulgarian Black Sea coastal zone. Considering that the coastal zone is a limited and very vulnerable land area, the high population increase due to tourism is one of the most hazardous factors for coastal zone sustainability. Although tourism growth and coastal development give rise to a number of economic benefits, they also could lead to loss of habitat, green space, and biodiversity.

Keywords : Black Sea, Coastal Management.

Introduction

Coastal zone is a highly dynamical and sensitive area that comprises a large variety of natural resources. This predetermines the attractiveness of the littoral for settlement and other human activities, like tourism, recreation etc. Population growth causes rapid urbanization of the littoral, development of infrastructures, transport system etc. Therefore, coastal ecosystems experience pressure and become vulnerable to pollution, habitat degradation and loss, overfishing and increased coastal hazards [1]. Vast sand beaches along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast, in combination with favorable climate and clean seawater, are valued preconditions for tourist industry development. The speeded tourism development during recent years is an extra risk factor for coastal zone. Both local residents and tourists cause pressure to the ecosystem, therefore population in the coastal regions is used as pressure indicator for ICZM [2].

Analysis

The Bulgarian Black Sea coast, situated in the Western part of the Black Sea, has a 378 km long coastal line, 140 km of which occupied by 78 beaches. 14 of 262 state municipalities [3] are located in the coastal zone. The Bulgarian Black Sea coastal zone is 5.21% of the country territory and hosts 8.85% of the national population.

Official census results [4] show that during 1934-2001 the total coastal population growth is almost six times higher than in the entire country. Thus, the Bulgarian Black Sea coastal zone is one of the most rapidly growing and developing areas at national scale.

Tourism and in particular coastal tourism is one of the fastest developing world industry sectors [5], and Bulgaria follows this tendency. Data for tourist international arrivals in Bulgaria during the period 2000 - 2004 show that the number of tourists has been continuously increasing: from 2 354 052 in 2000 to 4 010 326 in 2004, so the gain is more than 70 %. Rapid development of coastal tourism is analyzed on the basis of official data [6] and the results are presented in Fig. 1.

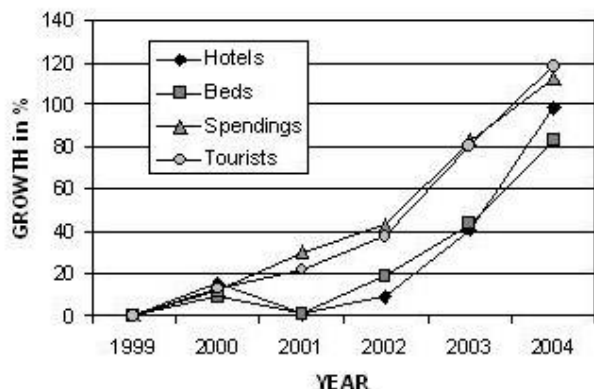


Fig. 1. Tourist industry growth along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast.

It is found out that from 1999 to 2004 the number of hotels in coastal municipalities increased from 322 to 640, almost 100 %, beds number increased in 82.8 %, and the spending in 112 %. The biggest growing is registered in the most famous Bulgarian Black sea resorts - Golden

sands, Sunny beach and Albena, which now represent 76.25 % from the hotels, 84.18 % from beds, and counted 88.33 % from all spending in the Bulgarian Black coast. There is also a big disproportion between these 3 municipalities and the remaining 11, which indicates that some coastal areas are critically overcrowded.

The number of tourists preferring to spend their vacation at the seacoast continuously increases as well. For the investigated period the growth is 118 % and the total number reached 1 450 188 that is more than twice the local coastal population. Most of the tourists (85.58 %) stay in the big resorts. Every tourist spends 7 days in average, but the busiest months are July and August. In these months, total coastal population increases with approximately 20%, but in some resorts more than 200%. The trend shows that at least a 10% yearly tourists' growth can be expected for the next few years.

In the analysis of human population pressure on the coastal ecosystem, it is assumed a total population of local residents plus tourists. In the last twenty years there is no significant local population growth. The continuously improved infrastructure has the capability to meet and reduce anthropogenic impact on the ecosystem caused by local population growth.

Conclusions

Tourist spate towards Bulgarian Black Sea coast dramatically increased during last fifth years and will continue to growth at least for few more years. The existing facilities in some municipalities are not able to meet this additional pressure and to reduce adequately anthropogenic impact to the marine ecosystems. Considering that the coastal zone is a limited and very vulnerable land area, the population increase due to tourism is one of the most hazardous factors for coastal zone sustainability. Although tourism growth and coastal development give rise to a number of economic benefits, they also could lead to loss of habitat, green space, and biodiversity, especially in case of new constructed tourist sites, some of which are in very low populated coastal regions or neighboring protected territories. Public policymakers and coastal managers are now facing the challenging task of finding a balance between benefits of tourism growth and mitigation of its effects on the coastal environment.

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