

Chapter 80

Exploring the Development of New Tourism Activities in the Municipality of Kerkini by Using the Area's Natural Resources Sustainably, Municipality of Kerkini, Greece

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ABSTRACT

Work in the 354 km² Municipality of Kerkini studied ways to increase ecotourism without harming rich local biodiversity, in cooperation with government, NGOs and private stakeholders. Routes were mapped for hunting, horse-riding, walking and climbing.

INTRODUCTION

The Greek case study focuses on the Municipality of Kerkini, which lies in the northern part of Greece (Region of Central Macedonia) and is adjacent to the artificial Lake Kerkini (see Figure 1). Figure 2 gives an aerial overview of the area.

The case study area is of great significance, as it is a designated National Park since October 2005, and offers food and shelter to lots of species. In fact

it is one of the most important wetlands for protection of birds in Greece, as it gives shelter to over 300 species of birds. It is also one of the 10 Greek wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention and one of the 196 Important Bird Areas (IBA) in Greece. In addition, the vast majority of water buffalos in Greece live around the Kerkini Lake. In the mountains surrounding the 354 km² Municipality of Kerkini, there is a plethora of fauna and flora which are considered

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Figure 1. The location of the Municipality of Kerkini in Greece



to be rare and/or under threat of extinction, such as rare species of birds, either settled permanently or passing through during the migration period.

THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROJECT

The title of the socio-economic project was “Exploring the development of new tourism activities in the Municipality of Kerkini by using the area’s natural resources sustainably.” The main objective of this project was to bring together the local community, local authorities and other stakeholders with special interest in tourism activities, in order for them to implement a network which will work for the benefit of the area’s biodiversity while developing and expanding tourism.

Local people rely heavily on tourism for their income, and the area welcomes tourists from all over the world especially for bird watching as well as horse riding, canoeing and other recreational activities. Moreover, the Women’s Association of Ano Poroia (a settlement within the Kerkini mu-

Figure 2. An aerial photo of the Municipality of Kerkini area



nicipality) collects herbs and fruits like chamomile, oregano or wild blackberries to produce traditional dishes and beverages. Local people also exploit water buffalos for several products.

Since local people tend to engage more and more in ecotourism activities to raise their income, it is very important to conserve the area’s biodiversity, especially endangered species like certain birds, and the water buffalo along with the socio-economic benefits arising from animals and plants. As a result, the goal of this project was to address on one hand the need for welcoming more tourists and expanding tourism activities and on the other hand the need to preserve biodiversity.

In particular, the objectives of the project were:

- To encourage local awareness of social and economic benefits of conserving biodiversity.
- To assess the economic value of the area’s resources for each group of stakeholders.
- To help the locals to identify possible ways to develop new activities related to ecotourism.
- To help them attract new groups of tourists with special interests.

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