

COEXISTENCE BETWEEN NATURE AND TOURISM IN THE DUBROVNIK REGION

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Croatia is an attractive tourist destination for millions of tourists worldwide, but mainly for European countries. In 2002, 6.9 million tourists visited Croatia, with 98 per cent from Europe and 2 per cent from the rest of the world. Alongside this, there are about 1.4 million domestic tourists included in the tourism trends. Most of the tourist traffic is realized in coastal areas (95.5 per cent in 2001), measured by bed-nights, as beach tourism is the dominant form of demand and supply in tourism. The concentration of tourist traffic in a relatively small area, and within a short time period (June – September 2002, 84 per cent), is visibly threatening natural sights. The region of Dubrovnik is a favorite destination for hundreds of thousands of foreign and tens of thousands of domestic tourists because of its cultural, historical and natural sights. Here, too, the concentration of tourism in a small area over only four summer months is obvious, which particularly burdens (creates pressure) on natural sights. The construction of hotels, vacation homes, marinas and roadways have upset the natural balance, but in a tolerant measure that has respected both aesthetic and substance criteria. Even though beach tourism has been greatly exploited both directly and indirectly, the testing of seawater purity at marine beaches shows that it is satisfactory and that it is in accord with national regulation criteria, which are set on the basis of WHO (World Health Organization) and UNEP (United Nations Environment Programme) parameters, which also correspond to European Union standards. The results obtained show that it is possible to develop harmless tourism on marine beaches when the preconditions for conservation and permanent control are met first. These conditions require the carriers of tourism activities to adapt their procedures to the conservation of natural resources, that is, the sea and the coastline, upon which they base their survival and progress. The results up to now in conserving the natural values of Dubrovnik can be considered as being satisfactory in part. However, problems are not permanently resolved with this, for lately, there is a growing pressure for continuing the construction of larger and smaller accommodation capacities and marinas in presently untouched marine bays, and other buildings associated with tourism (golf courses, tennis courts, roads, parking areas). Their construction should not be banned, but it definitely must be controlled and directed according to very strict aesthetic and ecological criteria, which must be adhered to by all investors. It is not enough to just declare opinions. Clear and unequivocal regulations, and urban planning with a high level of conservation of natural values have to be passed. Each construction, no matter how small, must be thoroughly controlled so that the «impact» of investors with mainly short-term financial interests can be continuously and rigorously monitored. Further development might seriously endanger natural values, the most important trump card of development, if a principled approach is lacking.