Niche tourism in Cyprus: conceptualising the importance of social entrepreneurship for the sustainable development of islands

Nikolaos Boukas*

Center for Sustainable Management of Tourism, Sport & Events (CESMATSE), European University Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus 6 Diogenes Str. Engomi, P.O. Box 22006, Nicosia 1516, Cyprus Fax: +357-2259-0539 Email: n.boukas@euc.ac.cy

*Corresponding author

Pieris Chourides

Department of Management and Marketing, European University Cyprus, Nicosia, Cyprus 6 Diogenes Str. Engomi, P.O. Box 22006, Nicosia 1516, Cyprus Fax: +357-2259-0539 Email: p.chourides@euc.ac.cy

Abstract: The idiomorphic character of islands makes them important destinations worldwide. However, in an effort for islands to be competitive in the global economic sphere, their resources are often overutilised for the sake of tourism and the unregulated pressures of human development. Cyprus is an example of an island that, despite its long past in regard to tourism, faces problems of saturation, decreased competitiveness, and unbalanced development. As such, sustainability concerns regarding islands’ future are raised and more emphasis towards their sustainable development is needed. Nonetheless, social entrepreneurship focussing on the creation of innovative products and procedures that would benefit the entire local community could become an important vehicle for sustainable development of sensitive destinations, such as islands. The aim of this conceptual paper is to explore the notion of social entrepreneurship in an island context focusing on the island of Cyprus. In this regard, the paper explores how islands’ distinctive elements as small destinations can address the concept of social entrepreneurship in a sustainable manner. The paper proposes that niche tourism products and more specifically, volunteer, cultural heritage and eco-tourism, under the prism of social entrepreneurship, can become the means towards islands’ product diversification and long-term environmental, social, and economic sustainability.

Keywords: Cyprus; island tourism; niche tourism; social entrepreneurship; sustainable tourism.

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1 Introduction

The unique attractions that many small islands possess such as remoteness, variety of natural and cultural characteristics, climate, landscape, and so forth make them top destinations worldwide. However, in the global economic sphere and in an effort for islands to be competitive as destinations, their characteristics are often overutilised for the sake of tourism and the unregulated pressures of human development (Andriotis, 2001; Baldacchino, 2011; Herzfeld, 1991). In this respect, islands’ qualities become vulnerable, raising important sustainability issues for their existence. Hence, the challenge is to find ways for the islands to be competitive as destinations and thus, has the economic means to survive and grow without harming their authentic mosaic of resources and altering their ecosystem and social fabric in the long term. However, a series of islands’ idiosyncrasies makes the solution of this problem challenging. Consequently, the following question arises: is sustainable development for islands a reality or a utopia?

Cyprus is a representative Mediterranean island destination that meets the aforementioned characteristics. Despite its long history in terms of tourism development - as well as a dynamic hospitality industry that characterises its tourism product - for the last 15 years Cyprus competitiveness decreases (in terms of arrivals as well as revenues) (from 2,696,732 arrivals and €2,182 m revenues in 2001 to 2,441,231 arrivals and €2,023 m revenues in 2014, respectively) (Archontides, 2007; CTO, 2015). Indeed, mass tourism development that dominates on the island (and in the past helped the growth of the Cypriot economy) is not as efficient as it was in the past, while its negative impacts (i.e., seasonality, unregulated development, emphasis on only coastal areas, service quality issues) (Archontides, 2007; Sharpley, 2002) hinder a prosperous future. Despite the efforts of tourism policy to confront the challenge of the island’s reduced competitiveness, in an environment hit by the global and national economic crises, and deal with Cyprus tourism problems (Boukas and Ziakas, 2013), the situation in tourism remains more or less the same. Moreover, the chronic structural problems of the island’s tourism challenge this state (Boukas and Ziakas, 2014). In this respect, methods to boost
the attractiveness of Cyprus as an island destination, minimising at the same time the negative impacts of mass tourism, and looking towards more sustainable practices of tourism development need to be proposed and applied.

Undeniably, strategies to find more balanced means of islands’ development are needed (Andriotis, 2001; Boukas and Ziakas, 2013; Kakazu, 1994; McElroy, 2003; Ziakas and Boukas, 2015). A relatively recent trend that could deal with this matter efficiently is the concept of social entrepreneurship. As opposed to individual entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship invests in innovative techniques to generate opportunities and benefits to the society of the host destination, helping local communities and protecting the character of the place (and its resources). Social entrepreneurship then could become an important vehicle for the sustainable development of sensitive destinations, such as islands. Based on this suggestion, the aim of this conceptual paper is to examine the dynamics of social entrepreneurship in the island context focussing on the island of Cyprus and realise how the peculiarities of islands as small destinations address the concept of social entrepreneurship in a sustainable manner and how niche tourist products aid towards this aim. Finally, the paper examines practices in Cyprus that incorporate social entrepreneurship for the sustainable development and marketing of islands to be effectively accomplished.

2 Islands as destinations: characteristics and challenges

Many islands are appealing destinations since they present features that structure a unique tourist experience, such as feelings of remoteness and isolation, peaceful and quiet environments, unique landscapes, and sense of timeliness (Keane, Brophy and Cuddy, 1992; Sharpley, 2012). Hence, islands like Mediterranean, Caribbean, and South Pacific ones have become significant destinations worldwide, generating important income to their economy (Butler, 2008). Islands’ unique elements offer a tourist product imbued with mystery and adventure (King, 1997), while their natural and cultural attributes provide an attractive environment for leisure travel (Butler, 1993). It is evident that especially for southern islands, the physiognomy of the landscape and their climate play an important role in their tourism formation. For instance, in the case of the Mediterranean islands (i.e., Cyprus, Greek Islands), great emphasis has been given upon the sea, sand, sun (3Ss) elements, creating therefore ideal insular destinations for mass summer vacations (Boukas and Ziakas, 2013). In this respect, it is clear that the majority of islands as destinations within the Mediterranean basin has been planned to satisfy mostly mass tourism expectations. The fact that islands provide unsparingly all the core components of mass tourism (sea, sun, sand) led to the creation of a whole industry around this model (resort hospitality industry in coastal areas). Paradoxically, factors that establish the touristic appeal of islands could be also considered as factors that become their challenges for their long-term successful tourism development. Indeed, the same elements that make islands the attractive destinations, such as their remoteness, geographic segregation, and small size, create a series of problems in regard to their overall growth and prosperity. Most of these deficiencies are related to the limited resources, overdependence on certain markets, structural problems of the tourist system, unbalanced development on only certain areas where other areas remain degraded, inflation, seasonality, limited accessibility, dependence on foreign investments, social and environmental problems, and so forth (Boukas and Ziakas, 2013, 2014;
Carlsen and Butler, 2011; Hall and Page, 1996; Sharpley, 2012). All those weaknesses create a tourism product characterised by instability and disharmony in regard to its long-term development.

In this respect, Niles and Baldacchino (2011) discussing the future of island tourism suggest that there are two contradictory forces that the tourism system currently deals with. On the one hand, islands need to find ways to maintain their ecological integrity and therefore protect the limited - by their nature scarce - natural and cultural resources. After all, these resources are the main components of their tourism product. On the other hand, islands need to find ways to develop economically and therefore provide a proper quality of life to their residents, an urgent need for their overall preservation and prosperity.

Considering that many small islands in southern areas are developed mostly as mass destinations (with evident problems of overutilisation of resources, unbalanced development, and seasonality) (Bramwell, 2004; McElroy and De Albuquerque, 1998), those two forces are difficult to be dealt effectively. It is evident that mass tourism generates income necessary for islands’ growth (Bramwell, 2004). However, the unstructured, unplanned, and unbalanced development that mass tourism often brings and creates a monothematic tourist product associated with problems of resources’ insufficiency, sociocultural obstacles, and over-reliance on foreign investments and the global capitalist system (Boukas and Ziakas, 2013, 2014; Carlsen and Butler, 2011; Lewis-Cameron and Roberts, 2010). As such, a balance between the aforementioned forces is difficult to be maintained in an islands’ context. The question generated is, ‘how islands can be developed and managed effectively in the long term, to be both competitive as well as sustainable?’

A solution to this difficult equation is the adaptation of the Ritchie and Crouch’s model of destination competitiveness and sustainability (Goeldner and Ritchie, 2009). In this model, the authors suggest that a series of axes should hold the entire tourism system when it is planned. This series includes as follows:

1. core resources/attractors
2. supporting factors/resources
3. qualifying and amplifying determinants that outline the scale of tourism development
4. destination planning, policy, and development
5. comparative versus competitive advantages
6. macro- versus micro-environment.

According to these determinants, the island destinations are endowed by a sequence of resources that make them capable to be compared with other destinations. These are the comparative advantages. Based on this model, however, the comparative advantages of an island are not enough to make them competitive in the long term. These resources need to be utilised properly (by the tourism policy makers as well as all tourist stakeholders and communities) and managed to become competitive advantages. The success of a competitive destination is a mixture among economic, sociocultural, and environmental variables. In this respect, islands need to compete in a worldwide level maintaining their magnitude but at the same time sustaining their attributes for future exploitation and development.
3 Tourism development in the Mediterranean island of Cyprus

Tourism for the south-eastern Mediterranean island of Cyprus (The Republic of Cyprus) was always an important generator of the economy, while a whole industry providing direct and indirect jobs in tourism has been noticed (Archontides, 2007; Boukas and Ziakas, 2014). The establishment of tourism in Cyprus starts together with its independence from the British Empire at the beginning of 1960s. The post-colonial era for the new-born state was difficult in economic terms. For this reason, great attention was given by the authorities to mass tourism development to capitalise on the island’s comparative advantages (sea, climate, and island landscape) and target northern-European markets (Ioannides, 1992). Indeed, tourism started being methodically shaped and achieved great growth rates: a quick increase of international tourist arrivals of approximately 900% in nearly 13 years (from 25,000 arrivals in 1960 to 225,000 arrivals in 1973) (Witt, 1991).

Nonetheless, this growth was suddenly interrupted by the Turkish invasion of the island in 1974 and its occupation (till today) of the 37.3% of its northern and most attractive (in terms of tourism) areas (Ioannides, 2001). This incident affected dramatically not only tourism on the island but also created a series of socioeconomic and political challenges to the Republic (Witt, 1991). However, for reestablishing the state in the new circumstances, the government of Cyprus invested again in tourism development. A new airport was built in Larnaca for replacing the previous one in today buffer zone of Nicosia, while the coastal areas of Ayia Napa, Paphos, and Limassol substituted the previous destinations of Famagusta and Kerynia (currently occupied). These efforts worked relatively quickly. Characteristically, in 1980, tourist arrivals reached 348,530, contributing CYP 71 m (€121 m) to the economy (CTO Information Centre, 2005). For those times, mass tourism was considered as an important contributor to the local economy that generated jobs and income to the republic.

Nevertheless, under these conditions, any tourism development was done quickly and unplanned. Together with the economic renaissance, mass tourism brought also other challenges such as seasonality, unbalanced development, and lack of quality in many tourist services (Archontides, 2007; Sharpley, 2002). For instance, the majority of tourism occurs during the summer period (from May to October) in mostly five coastal areas, where other mountainous and continental places remain poor and unexploited. Furthermore, several problems such as the decreased visitation/revenues, the escalated pricing, and the recent economic crises’ impacts alter the competitiveness of the island further (Boukas and Ziakas, 2013, 2014). As a result, the Cypriot tourism reached its peak in 2001. After that year, the arrival of international visitors in Cyprus started to decrease. Indeed, the tourist product of Cyprus became saturated and less attractive (Archontides, 2007; Boukas and Ziakas, 2013). In this regard, attention needs to be paid to the methods to revitalise the competitiveness of Cyprus, considering this time the premises of sustainable development for its long-term viability as a southern island destination. Social entrepreneurship could be viewed as an appropriate tool towards environmental, economic, and social sustainability of islands.
4 Social entrepreneurship and sustainable development

In contrast to individual entrepreneurship, social entrepreneurship incorporates innovative thinking and creative conceptualisation to spread improvements in a social context (rather than an individual one). The holistic process of social entrepreneurship integrates the synergy of more individuals, supports the fact that societal innovations create favourable opportunities, and at the same time, can act as a catalyst to deal with risks and uncertainties (Tetzschner and Herlau, 2003) evident in today’s globalised world. Under this perspective, social entrepreneurship could become an appropriate method towards islands’ more effective exploitation of resources, spreading therefore the benefits of tourism towards local communities and leading to sustainable tourism development.

With regard to the connection of social entrepreneurship and sustainable development, Dees (1998, p.4) argues that the first makes referral to a series of credentials needed for an effective and contributing utilisation of sustainable development. According to the author, these elements are as follows:

1. adopting a mission to create and sustain social value
2. recognising and relentlessly pursuing new opportunities to serve that mission
3. engaging in a process of continuous innovation, adaptation and learning
4. acting boldly without being limited by resources currently in hand
5. exhibiting heightened accountability to the constituencies served and for the outcomes created.

A thorough analysis of these credentials suggests that innovation is a critical factor between both learning and resources, given that there is a clear mission and objectives.

In addition, in contrast to conventional development, social entrepreneurship under the premises of sustainable development needs to incorporate the added constraints of social and environmental pressures, as well as consider future activities and concerns. In this respect, its application is usually more complex, because there is typically a wider range of stakeholders, and more ambiguous, as many of those stakeholders have contradictory views as their understanding varies. Indeed, according to Boukas and Ziakas (2014), many opposing sights may put obstacles to the smooth application of tourism policy measures and strategies.

Sustainable development is also influenced by the core competencies and capabilities of those stakeholders and by the globalisation in the form of various systems/models and innovation approaches (Bessant and Tidd, 2011). This underlines the importance of knowledge and knowledge management. According to Chourides, Longbottom and Murphy (2003), knowledge is a profound element of sustainability, competitiveness, and survival. Social entrepreneurship, to deal with today’s challenges, needs to capitalise on it. In line with Roper and Cheney (2005), knowledge is a fundamental component in innovation, learning and resource management that enables strategic intent and targets to realise, and at the same time develops sustainable competitiveness. Nonetheless, Cash et al. (2003) refer that the effective knowledge system is often characterised by numerous units that accomplish specific functions. By itself this creates a complicated system, evident in tourism. Amidst such complexity, sustainable development in social
entrepreneurship is often difficult and highlights the need of the proper usage of combined know-how for creating new core competences and capabilities.

Facing such difficulty requires investments in knowledge creation, (enhancing innovation) for improving environmental, social, and economic standards. Patzelt and Shepherd (2010) argue that knowledge dissemination facilitates entrepreneurs to discover new business opportunities, overcoming the challenges to sustainable development. Furthermore, knowledge could be the source for innovation. As Ateljevic (2011) claims the concept of innovation includes a number of elements such as knowledge creation and its diffusion, creation of human capital, development of new products or services, synergy with other economic activities, building/replaceing new institutions/organisations, and protection of the natural environment. Under the challenges of mass tourism development, the aforementioned elements are of crucial significance because innovative products and techniques may help dealing with its negative impacts apparent on islands such as Cyprus.

Knowledge, therefore, should constitute the basis of social entrepreneurship in tourism. However, in a constantly dynamic environment and under the pressures of sustainability, social entrepreneurship needs to consider the revision of business thought and models as well. As Meso, Troutt and Rudnicka (2002) argue, changes are required in capturing and transferring of knowledge for the creation of new knowledge. In its turn, this knowledge will contribute to the innovation and sustainable competitive advantage. This new core capability will enable and enrich successfully social entrepreneurship because innovation is one of the primary means, by which not only organisations but also individuals can achieve sustainable growth. As Shane (2000) emphasises, when the individuals possess prior entrepreneurial knowledge (e.g., knowledge of markets, ways to serve markets, and customer problems) sustainability initially and then growth will be developed.

Furthermore, Bessant and Tidd (2011) focus on the significance of social interaction, within and between organisations, as well as individuals that empowers current approaches/activities for innovation. These relationships are strengthened when factors beyond knowledge, such as individuals’ networks (Ozgen and Baron, 2007), cognitive structures (Baron and Ensley, 2006; Krueger, 2007), and values (Davidsson and Wiklund, 1997) may influence the acknowledgement of sustainable development. This approach will develop an intelligent complex network of relationships between participators in tourism who share values, norms, meanings, history, and identity, something that social entrepreneurship aims to achieve and sustainability relies on.

5 Social entrepreneurship and island tourism

As mentioned, in a highly competitive environment, islands face severe problems related to their limited resources (water, space, workforce, etc.), segregation and unbalanced development (Ziakas and Boukas, 2015; Niles and Baldacchino, 2011; Sharpley, 2012). Tourism’s economic contribution for islands often creates challenges for these locations (i.e., monothematic tourism, seasonality, and crowdedness) creating an unsustainable future. Social entrepreneurship could become the means towards sustainability, in regard to tourism, a necessary tool for islands’ growth and prosperity.

However, can entrepreneurship overall be meaningful for the entire island destination? The dominant type of entrepreneurship in islands deals with the economic
Conceptualising the importance of social entrepreneurship

Even though economic entrepreneurship focusing on profitable opportunities (Kirzner, 1973), somehow provides to entrepreneurs the means to create something of value (Roberts and Woods, 2005), and hence gain more benefits from tourism development, it is noted that it cannot be fully functional in any context. As Shaw and Shaw (1999, p.80) argue, despite the fact that opportunities are available for local entrepreneurship, either formal or informal, to take a share of the market, providing advantages to local people: “… such notions do not apply to resort enclaves, where external control becomes all important”. The external control that globalisation brings seems to hinder the development of entrepreneurship in islands and underlines the importance of placing more emphasis upon it during destination planning.

It is undeniable that islands as destinations with limited resources face changes due to global tourism transformation. Indeed, their over-reliance on tourism creates unequal relationships and dependencies with the rest world (i.e., global markets, internationalisation of products and services, foreign investments, etc.) (Shaw and Williams, 2004). These dependencies make them difficult to survive, unless adjusting themselves (both products, people, and ultimately character) to the global markets and foreign investors’ demands. In this respect, the effective sustainability of islands as destinations is under threat. Indeed, islands become dependent on mass tourism development (controlled by larger international corporations) while many of them (i.e., Cyprus, Balearic Islands, Greek Islands, etc.) are already in the decline stage of their destination life cycle: they are well known but not attractive and thus, competitive anymore.

Under these circumstances, the full appreciation of entrepreneurship and mostly the holistic process of social entrepreneurship for the host community is complicated (Herlau and Tetzschner, 2001). Though the importance of product innovation as a method to revitalise the existing saturated tourist experience of islands, and therefore rejuvenate islands’ destination cycle, becomes a necessity. Innovation and creation of something really new rather than replicating existing enterprises and processes constitute one of the main premises of social entrepreneurship (Tapsell and Woods, 2010). In this respect, social entrepreneurship could be the way for enhancing the tourist experience, creating new concepts - other than the conventional ones - providing benefits both to tourists and also locals, and helping to reposition the island destination to the global tourist market. This complies also with the manners of tourism’s sustainable development.

Yet, despite the crucial role of sustainable development in a rapidly changing and demanding environment its full application could be difficult, especially for insular destinations. The overdependence of islands on foreign capital and markets makes them more sensitive, in regard to global crises. As Boukas and Ziakas (2014) studying Cyprus’ economic crisis argue, the exposure of islands to various global disruptions and crises can lead to the formation of chaotic environments, seriously damaging their economies and altering their systems. In addition, the authors claim that in the context of tourism crisis management, linear approaches overlook the chaotic characteristics and transformations of the complex tourism system and neglecting endogenous and exogenous events that shape their systemic transformation. The authors conclude that for mitigating crises (evident in today’s world), island destinations’ policy-makers need to realise that crises and sustainability are not linear processes, but evolving systemic configurations that necessitate the preparedness of tourism policy-makers and stakeholders (including indigenous people and local entrepreneurs) to anticipate change and swiftly respond. To achieve this, the authors propose a communication mechanism that would implicate all
the islands’ stakeholders and motivate them to reach an agreement through negotiating trade-offs for the efficient sharing of tourism benefits to satisfy environmental, social, and economic concerns, and therefore lead to sustainability.

Through this communication scheme, tourism policy could stress the utilisation and reinforcement of the social entrepreneurship’s principles, since the last underlines the need for risk minimisation through the initiation of small-scale investments, emphasising to the creation of value for the entire local society (Tetzschner and Herlau, 2003). In this regard, smaller-scale investments of domestic character will strengthen the local environment of islands, empower them in the overall tourist market, reinforce their independence, and finally shield their preparedness to more efficiently deal with global crises. Moreover, social entrepreneurship also proposes the need for social change and reconstruction, characterised by people who will keep trying to address major problems (Tapsell and Wood, 2010) and create benefits for local communities. In this respect, social entrepreneurship is not only a way to create social value to the sensitive island systems but also a way to prevent and/or deal more effectively with crises that the globalisation may bring.

Nonetheless, even though tourism is a worldwide phenomenon of significant size and therefore global nature (Cole, 2009; Shaw and Williams, 2004; Theobald, 2005), its consumption happens in a local setting that is considerably (re)organised by universal stimuli that require variations and diversity (Meethan, 2001). This brings into the surface the query whether globalisation of tourism is a force of homogenisation or diversity (Chang et al., 1996; Meethan, 2001; Teo and Li, 2003). In this regard, Gotham (2005) argues that the procedures of commodification as well as homogenisation that describe international tourism is not one-dimensional. In contrast, the author claims that various spatial and institutional stages, from the macro-level of globalised institutes to the micro-level locals’ daily life elements, interfere among each other. In other words, international tourists ‘escape’ from their normal environment and travel to many islands to experience the diverse, ‘exotic’, characterised by ‘otherness’ setting that they offer, even though there is an obvious influence from externalities. In this respect, social entrepreneurship plays a pivotal role to the destination’s identity creation and projection. According to Chell (2007), social entrepreneurship connects with social and community values to achieve social outcomes. Therefore, in the field of tourism, it is a strong carrier and projector of local identity.

As McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly (2001) argue, social movement as one of the most important streams of insight for social entrepreneurship that emphasises social transformation and focusses on collective action frames and identity formation. Based on this suggestion, the role of islands’ local residents as social entrepreneurs is of crucial importance, since collectively, in an organised community level, can become ambassadors of islands’ locality and character. To further extend the above argument, we need to realise that the contribution of local residents to the structure of an identity is critical. In line with Gotham (2005) suggestions, locals are able to change and assemble global tourist trends of homogenisation, standardisation and commodification, and to systematically encompass - in synergy with tourists - in the new construction, original meanings for the destination. As such, local residents are able to assign new meaning(s) to the global forces of commodification and to express them into a local level.

Therefore, despite the evident complexities and obstacles in island tourism environment, it is concluded that there is a tight relationship among social entrepreneurship, sustainable development, and island tourism growth. In this respect,
island destinations need to find out strategies that will clearly enhance and exploit the practices and benefits of social entrepreneurship to increase islands’ attractiveness, use more effectively their scarce resources, create real value for the local residents, and thus establish competitive sustainable advantages in the long term.

6 Social entrepreneurship in Cyprus: niche tourism towards holistic sustainable development

The holistic nature of social entrepreneurship comes in agreement with the premises of sustainable development: for a destination to be in the long-term viable, it needs to protect its environmental, social, and economic fabric. As OECD (2010) argues, social entrepreneurship explicitly targets to offer innovative solutions to unsolved social problems, putting in a central position social value creation for enhancing individuals’ and communities’ quality of life and well-being. As discussed, globalisation and the intensive competition that it brings put obstacles towards achieving holistic value for the destination, especially in the case of islands such as Cyprus due to their peculiarities and characteristics. Therefore, social entrepreneurship practices need to be adopted by the tourism policy of islands to help moving their future towards sustainability.

For counteracting the negative impacts of mass tourism that characterises the majority of island destinations, several authors propose the application of niche tourism activities as remedy (Chapman and Speake, 2011; Hall, 2002). Niche tourism is defined as “special interests, culture and/or activity based tourism that involves a small number of tourists in authentic settings” (Robinson and Novelli, 2005, p.9). It includes different micro-niches and relates specialised products directed to markets with specific travel needs and wants. By its nature, niche tourism is of small scale, while it gives the opportunities for more benefits to be diffused within the local society. Niche tourism, expressed by social entrepreneurship, can be developed by various governmental bodies (i.e., destination marketing organisations) (McGehee, 2007) or even non-governmental agencies (Lyons and Wearing, 2008) and can have a great impact on island destinations (Bull and Weed, 1999). In addition, niche tourism’s nature boosts the sustainable management of island areas by projecting their local character.

In this regard, niche tourism has been recognised by Cyprus as a method for upgrading its tourism product-service mix based on sustainable manner and enhance this way its competitiveness. Indeed, tourism policy especially during the last few years keeps incorporating niche tourism within Cyprus’ product portfolio, even though mass tourism still dominates. Several attempts have been introduced on the island for diversifying the existing tourist product to eliminate the problem of seasonality and harmonically spread tourist flows on the island. The majority of niche tourism activities concentrate mostly on rural areas (Ziakas and Boukas, 2015) and many integrate entrepreneurship. In this paper, three forms of niche tourism and social entrepreneurship such as volunteer, cultural heritage, and eco-tourism are discussed.

6.1 Volunteer tourism

A representative example of niche tourism that could use the practices of social entrepreneurship is volunteer tourism. According to Wearing (2002), volunteer tourism deals with those tourists that are voluntarily organised in a way to undertake holidays that
include the support of certain groups’ material poverty in a society, the rejuvenation/re-establishment of sensitive environments, or the study of specific issues within a social context or environment. In other words, tourists as volunteers offer their work on certain projects that emphasise local community’s life’s improvement. Callahan and Thomas (2005, p.184) add that “the importance given to altruistic desires over profit motives presents volunteer tourism primarily as alternative to mass tourism”. Thus, through this process, tourists satisfy their self-actualisation needs and their satisfaction from their contribution act as an intrinsic reward. Moreover, they are actively involved in the host destination, develop better and more meaningful relationships with locals, and ultimately interpret/appreciate the destination in a more holistic way.

A case of volunteer tourism in Cyprus is the organisation of work camps where volunteers from around Europe meet and interact. Work camps usually include youth travellers from different countries who gather in certain places for some weeks and work together on certain projects related to community and environmental support. These work camps are organised by local communities, environmental groups, non-profit organisations, and other stakeholders interested in promoting volunteerism internationally (European Youth Portal, n.d.). Furthermore, volunteers work closely with local inhabitants and spend their free time participating on activities and excursion with other volunteers and members of the local community (European Youth Portal, n.d.). Hence, benefits are spread within local society.

Several projects occur in Cyprus related to volunteerism. For instance, SCI-Hellas organised a work camp in the island with the purpose to better comprehend the political conflict that exists since 1974. Volunteers worked together to repair houses in a deserted former Turkish-Cypriot village on the free part of the island and they visited the only remaining village where both Greek-Cypriots and Turkish-Cypriots reside (Coordinating Committee for International Voluntary Service, 2009). In the same lines, the ‘Agros Youth Group’ a Voluntary Community Youth Centre and non-profit organisation, based on the mountain village of Agros, organises various events that aim to support the participation of young people in the development and progress of the community, and enhance their environmental conscience. For instance, volunteers are invited to work to support youths or elderly people in Agros village and together they have an insight about their culture/abilities/ideas (Agros Youth Group, 2010). This way the lifestyle and character of rural Cyprus can be effectively promoted by dealing with first-hand experiences and interacting with the local element.

According to Tomazos and Cooper (2012, p.1), volunteer tourism is quite a new form of travel that “proposes to simultaneously meet a supply based demand for assistance, but also simultaneously satisfy a segment of tourist demand as well: delivering revenues and profits to the broker-organisations and convey an ethically sound message to the morally conscious or even altruistic tourist”. In this respect, the cooperation between both tourists and locals solves important social problems in the society contributing positively therefore, to the destinations social (in the case of projects that help the society), economic (since volunteers are often deal with projects that aid boosting the local economy), environmental (projects to improve natural environment), as well as cultural (i.e., restorations), environment. Nonetheless, despite the power of volunteer tourism for Cyprus tourism product diversification, more efforts on the establishment of such model needs to be given in a more organised form. Islands as small environments could invest greatly in volunteer tourism for diversifying their tourist offering.
6.2 Cultural heritage tourism

Another form of niche tourism that could be applied on island destinations similar to Cyprus and utilise the premises of social entrepreneurship is cultural heritage tourism. Cultural tourism is a distinct product category (McKercher and du Cross, 2002), and culture is one of the most significant tourism resources (Boukas, 2012, 2013; Mason, 2008; Richards, 2007). As McKercher and du Cross (2002) claim, cultural tourism elements are attractors of tourism demand as they unite a place’s remarkable features that mirror its culture, history, or environment. Cultural tourism is of small scale and can be efficiently managed (ICOMOS, 2003). Moreover, its educational character facilitates particular interests and communicates cultural notions, which are engraved on monuments and cultural essences to visitors (Boukas, 2014). Finally, Cuccia and Rizzo (2010) suggest that cultural tourism is an increasing form of tourism that leads to the reduction of seasonality, evident on islands. As such, cultural heritage tourism can contribute to a more balanced sustainable tourism development.

Nevertheless, how cultural heritage tourism can work under the prism of social entrepreneurship? Islands are important carriers of tangible (i.e., monuments, sites, etc.) and intangible (i.e., festivals, music performances, traditions, etc.) cultural elements, spread on their whole surface (not only on resort places). In this regard, cultural tourism can be developed in isolated or degraded areas where other traditional tourist types (i.e., leisure tourism) cannot be built.

A representative example of cultural heritage tourism development on Cyprus is the organisation of local festivals on the mountainous villages of the island. In contrast to the resort areas of Cyprus, the mountain locations receive less tourism and they are often isolated regarding tourism development. The mountainous cultural events offer unique experiences to tourists as they are one of the main cultural heritage tourist attractions of Troodos Mountain (CTO, 2008a). The Cultural Week of Mountainous Resorts, for instance, is a festival where the communities of Omodos, Mandria, Kato and Ano Platres, Pera Pedi, Moniatis, and Koilani actively participate. In this festival, local and international tourists have the opportunity to partake in various activities (in a different community every day) such as demonstration(s) of local food production and participation in them, excursions at community museums, meals in local restaurants, guided tours to wineries and archaeological/religious monuments, presentation of local dances (CTO, 2008a). The festival gives the opportunity to tourists to study and appreciate the life and character of Cyprus’ mountainous areas.

In addition, the ‘Troodos District Communities Development Agency’ in an effort to upgrade and differentiate the tourist product of the island, plans and organises thematic events of cultural character for the projection of the mountainous resorts of Cyprus. The agency working closely with the area’s communities aims to connect the cultural and natural heritage of Troodos with the primary and secondary sectors of the economy and incorporate them into the tourist activity. This is done to ensure job creation for the locals, to generate income to the local community, and attract young people to remain in the area (Troodos District Communities Development Agency, n.d.). In this regard, cultural tourism development aids to the revitalisation/rejuvenation of Cyprus rural areas. Cultural tourism boosts community and local development while a participatory planning and process is also evident, since locals know better than anyone else their culture and act as ambassadors of it, while they themselves produce and manage it.
As such, cultural tourism can not only directly use locals, but also can utilise them as the main planners and carriers of cultural heritage products and activities. This means that a substantial amount of money generated by cultural tourism goes directly to the local community, which is one of the major representatives and performers of culture in the destination (Sloan, Legrand and Simons-Kaufmann, 2012). Besides, cultural tourism promotes cultural beliefs, traditions, and lifestyles to tourists who usually have higher disposable income and spend it to the local community contributing therefore to the economic sustainability of the place. Through this way, more benefits from the tourism activity are channelled to the island destination.

6.3 Eco-tourism

A third type of niche tourism that can work along with social entrepreneurship in islands is eco-tourism. Eco-tourism utilises the natural characteristics of destinations - evident in plethora in Cyprus and other islands - to attract environmental conscious tourists. Similarly to cultural tourism, locals are an integrated part of the natural tourist experience. In the case of Cyprus eco-tourism is met on many rural areas (i.e., Troodos, Paphos, Limassol, etc.), Paphos forest, for instance, is endowed with rich fauna and flora and its unique species of plants and animals compose an idyllic landscape for eco-tourist activities. Indeed, several eco-tourist excursions are met on the area; a number of companies (i.e., F.I. Nature of Cyprus) organise walking trips where tourists can explore canyons, valleys, and/or the Akamas peninsula on the west of the island, while tourists are demonstrated by professionals the landscape of Cyprus and its particularities (CTO, 2008b; F.I. Nature of Cyprus, 2012).

The importance of eco-tourism for Cyprus is great. As Kouloumis (2013) argues, eco-tourist activities in Cyprus do not have the pure eco-tourist character but they deal mostly with adventure tourism in nature. Nonetheless, the author argues that during the recent years there is an ongoing demand for environmental friendly tourism as well as eco-tourism, especially on the areas of Troodos Mountain. Tourism policy recognised the significance of eco-tourism for the island by initiating the European project ECOTOUR that is implemented under the auspices of Leonardo da Vinci program and is co-funded by the European Commission. The project focuses on the education/training of people of the tourist sector, entrepreneurs and small and medium enterprises’ professionals/managers about eco-tourism, and deals with four basic thematic pillars: basic principles of eco-tourism, program of eco-tourism development, development of eco-tourist products, leading and crisis management competencies (Kouloumis, 2013). Kouloumis claims that eco-tourism provides income to the local community and contributes to the development of areas based on sustainable standards while it aids to the conservation of the natural resources and the area’s bio-diversity and eco-system.

As Situmorang and Mirzanti (2012, p.398) add: ‘More than just offering beautiful unspoiled panoramic, ecotourism provides a learning process to protect and to care the nature, and to improve the welfare of local communities surrounding or within the area of ecotourism destination’. According to the authors, social entrepreneurship is oriented towards social change for the improved welfare and education. As such, social entrepreneurship provides knowledge to people about their nature as social beings, who in their turn are in charge for improving quality of life and sustaining their environment. Kouloumis (2013) argues that for the case of Cyprus, eco-tourism planning requires the active participation of the local residents; otherwise it is not successful. This is the reason
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where ECOTOUR project emphasise people development and their incorporation in eco-tourism development. In this respect, locals play a pivotal role in creating eco-tourist activities. Island destinations such as Cyprus are significant eco-systems that need to be protected. Eco-tourism provides the means to fully appreciate islands’ environment and create awareness about their sustainability.

7 Conclusion

Islands with similar characteristics to Cyprus need to understand that their long-term existence and growth should be based on sustainability, since their scarce resources are under threat due to their direct exposition at the global forces, as well as the overdevelopment and frequently unruly expansion. This could probably be the only effective way for their comparative advantages to be transformed into competitive ones.

For addressing this situation, the study adopting social entrepreneurship’s values proposes that niche tourism could work positively towards the creation of opportunities that would generate the multiplying effects channelled within local society. However, to successfully link niche tourism with social entrepreneurship, we need to recognise that tourism should be developed and managed in cooperation with the various stakeholders (local communities, organisations, institutions, etc.) as well as the public (Sloan, Legrand and Simons-Kaufmann, 2012). Cyprus as a characteristic example of a Mediterranean destination that focusses mainly on mass tourism development needs to capitalise on the knowledge that all stakeholders in tourism have and invest in niche tourism. In this respect, individual social entrepreneurs with the collaboration of cultural and/or tourism policies, environmentalists as well as local communities, could build synergistically upon the natural/cultural heritage of rural areas. Synergy among stakeholders is of great importance for avoiding misunderstandings and disruptions while, based on cumulative knowledge, it will lead to the proper delivery of a quality and meaningful tourist experience and the generation of more benefits to the local community.

Furthermore, the amalgamation among different niche tourism activities could construct a stronger multidimensional tourism product that would emphasise mostly innovation and unique momentous experiences. Social entrepreneurship could contribute to this project by focussing on the creation of participants or agents comprised by networks or teams of tourism providers that together would share the risk and the uncertainty (Herlau and Tetzschner, 2001), exchanging know-how, and therefore maximising possibilities for success and creating a general advantage for the entire community. For instance, the Troodos District Communities Development Agency cooperates with tourist providers and communities from several places around Troodos Mountain for a joined and common effort to project the entire area and not only certain villages’ attractions.

These cooperative schemes could actively be involved to the formation of a more concrete tourism product-service mix. As such, collaboration could exist not only among all the stakeholders that take part at the staging of the niche tourist activity but also among the different small-scale types of niche tourism development. For example, volunteer tourism’s aspects could also incorporate eco-tourism (i.e., study of flora/fauna of islands) and/or cultural heritage tourism (i.e., help restoring a monastery on Cyprus), ensuring, therefore, the structure of a more solid and stronger tourist product. In the case
of Cyprus, this is evident when festivals incorporate natural, cultural, religious, and lifestyle characteristics in their programmes.

Through this way, islands, such as Cyprus, can form their own unique identity. This identity would differentiate them from other similar destinations and would help reposition them in the global tourism arena. Apart from the economic advantage that this movement would have, it would also spread more aid towards many stakeholders creating a network of solidarity and mutual support in the local level. Ultimately, this would lead to the environmental, social, and economic sustainability of island destinations.

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