

Coastal Tourism Importance and Beach Users' Preferences: The "Big Fives" Criteria and Related Management Aspects

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Travel and tourism is one of the largest growth industries in the world [1]. In 2017, international tourist arrivals increased (respect to 2016) by 7% to reach 1.322 billion and are expected to arrive at 1.8 billion by 2030. International tourism receipts grew by 2.6% in 2016 with total earnings in the destinations estimated at US\$ 1.220 billion worldwide [1]. Tourism's role with respect to the worldwide gross domestic product (GDP) in 2016 was circa 5 percent and was the responsible for the employment of 1 out of 10 of the overall number of direct and indirect jobs worldwide [1]. Its average contribution to GDP is c. 10% and ranges from approximately 2% for countries where tourism is a comparatively small sector, to over 10% for countries where tourism is an important pillar of the economy, but for small islands and developing countries, the weight of tourism can be even larger, accounting for up to 25% in some destinations [2].

The United States, Spain and Thailand top the rankings in term of tourism receipts while France, United States and Spain leader the rank in term of number of international visitors [1].

Travel for holidays, recreation and other forms of leisure accounted for just over half of all international tourist arrivals in 2016 (53% or 657 million, there are not yet available data for 2017) and most of such visitors are interested in beaches [3], which worth billions of tourist dollars [4]. Many Caribbean and Mediterranean countries have developed proactive growth policies along the coastal area [5] with Spain, France, Italy and Greece accounting for 'the most significant flow of tourists... a sun, sea and sand (3S) market' [6]. In 2017, the Caribbean Region recorded an increase of tourist arrival of 4%, showing a clear recover after the impact of hurricanes Irma and Maria. In 2016, Colombia recorded respect to 2015, an 8.9% increase in international tourist arrivals recording 3,317,000 international visitors (corresponding to US\$ 4,773,000 incomes), and moved up to 8th place in the world rank for number of arrivals [1].

Wilson and Liu [7] observed as, despite the importance of the beach market, beach recreation has recorded small attention in the economic literature and Ergin et al. [8] and Williams [9] carried out numerous questionnaires concerning beachgoers preferences, finding out that travelling distance is, evidently, a selection criterion but five parameters (the "Big Fives") are of the greatest importance to coastal visitors: safety, facilities, water quality, no litter and scenery.

Safety refers to the presence of lifeguards, especially common in urban beaches, and different hazards. The most important is constituted by rip-currents, dangerous currents that drag swimmers offshore; they are responsible for 137 and 100 drowning per year respectively in UK and USA and are often related to a reflective beach morphodynamic state [10]. Serious invalidities and deaths are also frequent when beachgoers jump into water in rocky coasts or close to hard protection structures. Sandy coasts are especially dangerous for kids because of suffocation for submersion by the sand when digging a hole on the beach or the dune [10]. Actions addressed to increase beach safety must

be part of management schemes and be based on educational measures and risk advertisements by explicative panels.

Facilities refer to the presence of showers, toilets, bars, access ramps, etc. [9,11]. Beach users interested in natural, pristine and remote areas are not worried about facilities - none aspect to find facilities in rural and remote beaches, but they are mandatory in urban beaches and often constitute a necessity for families with children. Facilities are quite common in urban areas along Europe and USA coasts but also at many other countries. The presence of facilities is often reflected by beach awards, the most common is the Blue Flag but many exist, e.g., in UK there are several of them as the Blue Flag, the Marine Conservation Society Recommended Beach, the Seaside Award, the Quality Coast Award and the Green Coast Award. Beach awards usually indicate well managed beaches with excellent water quality and environmental education programmes and limited to urban, resort and village areas. The importance of beach awards in attracting tourists is not clear and McKenna et al. [12] carried several surveys of beach visitor motivation in Ireland, Wales, Turkey and the USA, highlighting as beach awards play an insignificant role in motivation to visit beaches. Nevertheless, a number of criteria, e.g. cleanliness and water quality, are closely identified with awards [12].

Water quality, which is one of the most important aspects for beach choice in USA and Turkey [12], is referred to visual aspects as colour, absence of algae, floating litter, etc. Water colour depends on both natural and human factors. Natural factors are: i) water-dynamic characteristics, e.g. the presence of an energetic wave regime that can affect water turbidity by removing sediments; ii) bottom and beach sediments, e.g. fine sediments are easily suspended and favour turbidity meanwhile gravel, pebbles and rocky bottom favour water cleanness, and iii) currents that can carry onto the beach abundant vegetation debris [13]. Human factors are related to the presence of floating litter, both discharged by beachgoers or of marine-based source [14,15], or linked to the presence of wastewaters [13]. No actuations are possible to improve natural parameters but litter can be reduced by cleaning operations and reducing their inputs by identifying their source [16].

Coastal scenery is very important too for beachgoers, especially

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for users interested in natural and pristine beaches [13,16]. As a result of numerous enquiries, Ergin et al. [8] observed as beachgoers are interested in cliffs, beach characteristics, dunes and other parameters. Their evaluation is very subjective and previous Authors developed a method, which has been tested at different countries, based on the evaluation of 18 physical and 8 natural parameters by the use of fuzzy logic analysis and parameter weighting matrices in order to overcome subjectivity and quantifying uncertainties. Obtained information is very useful and, since it is not possible to modify natural characteristics, efforts must be carried out to change human parameters by preventing further environmental degradation and hence improve the present scenic value of tourist destinations [16-18].

Last, it is important to mention as the importance of each "Big Fives" criteria ranges a lot because of age, cultural heritage, education, gender, etc. In general, in the Mediterranean coast and in the Caribbean area, tourists come to the beach for swimming and sun, so they are more interested in water quality, facilities and no litter. In UK beachgoers are more interested in scenery since bathing is not a common activity, so effective beach management involves knowledge of what are the preferences and priorities of one's customers [9].

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