



Contribution from Paxos



THE IMPACT OF TOURISM ON SMALL TOWNS AND VILLAGES

Friends and fellow villagers of Europe,

I am pleased to have the opportunity, today to state my case and discuss with you a subject of vital importance to our villages. Our host village Aldeburgh and Paxos, which I have the honor of representing, are particularly dependent on the economic and social activity which we call TOURISM, an enormous activity which is, of course, subject to the laws of the market place. Since ancient times people have been travelling in order to know other lands, other races and cultures, to be educated and diverted, gaining new experiences. The tourists of the past were, however, few in number, and the phenomenon was restricted, with no signs of having had any serious influence on the countries of destination. With the rise in the standard of living in the developed countries of the West, modern tourism was created, an activity which millions of people are involved in, either professionally or as tourists, a true 'industry' supplying services.

Tourists today are, then, mainly consumers who, while on holiday, try to combine a variety of recreational, entertainment and educational experiences. Tourist destinations and tourists themselves differ in their nature and needs. Small towns and villages like ours have a substantial share in tourism and receive a large, ever-increasing number of tourists. They offer a beautiful natural environment, picturesque habitations, recreation and entertainment, and, of course, a different culture from that of the large urban centers. These factors constitute the investment capital of each place and, as in the case of any business capital it must be invested correctly for these to be an assured long-term return.

The inhabitants of Paxos, over the last thirty years, have experienced total transformation of an agricultural to a tourist community based primarily on the supply of services. The transformation accomplished so far has not always occurred smoothly nor have the results always been positive. Today I would like to present you our conclusions, concerns and suggestions, based mainly on our own experience and the mistakes we have already made.

Friends,

Examining in detail the effects of tourism on our villages, we can distinguish three distinct areas for study:

- Economic activity and development.
- Social organization and human behaviour.
- Natural environment.

Starting, then, with the financial sector, we observe that tourism changes the productivity base and product relations. The primal and secondary fields of endeavour give way in favour of the tertiary. In certain extreme cases, agricultural activities are abandoned and people turn to service-supporting professions which yield greater income.

The economic changes are rapid at first and as income rises, a large proportion is invested in the creation of tourism infrastructure by private citizens and businesses. The standard of living improves quickly and new consumer needs are created.

Tourism is an international economic activity controlled to a significant extent by large multi-national enterprises (tour operators), and is influenced directly by international political and financial developments. Thus, development of a village such as ours, based exclusively on tourism at the expense of other areas of the economy, leads, in the long run, to economic dependence and uncertainty.

Tourist development is directly linked with development in the field of construction and creation of infrastructure. Visitors need hotels, restaurants, entertainment centers and places for sport, plus electricity, water, public transport, harbours, waste disposal installations, etc. These needs are defrayed by private initiative and are to a certain extent by the state, and they create many new jobs, something very positive for the village economy.

However, these must be correct planning, determination of how land is to be used, and rules for the protection of both natural and structured environment, as disorganised development leads to satiation and loss of worth.

My friends, in our country we have a number of bad examples of small villages developed without planning, which after a brief period of success, ended up on sidelines of the tourism market. Luckily, Paxos is not one of these and next year you will be able to see for yourselves how its natural beauty conceals mistakes which have been made.

I would now like to mention the effects of Tourism on human behaviour and the social organization of our villages. For a start, it is obvious that the change in economic status provokes immediate changes in social relationships. New economic forces make their mark particularly in the business field, and ownership of agricultural land is no longer a criterion in social position as it was in the past. The value of land is now determined by its potential for tourism exploitation.

The inhabitants' daily contact with tourists results in a variety of influences both positive and negative.

Among the positive ones we could mention the broadening of the knowledge, contact with different cultures and lifestyles, reduction of the conservatism and introversion often observed in small communities like ours. Tourism development brings new complex problems and challenges and the people organize themselves to deal with them.

Negative influences include the adoption of foreign life models (mainly consumer), loss of special culture and identity, and definition of economic profit as the main goal in life. As a result of these negative consequences, there is a serious loss of the social cohesion and solidarity, typical of our communities, which distinguishes ours from the urban way of life, and of which we should be proud. A high standard of education and preservation and projection of our particular cultural identity can reduce the negative factors and increase the positive ones.

Tourist development also has a direct effect on the natural environment. Utilization of land changes, natural resources are burdened, residential areas change in form, new techniques and materials are used for building. The particular features of each place define tourist development and determine its nature and character. For example, on a small island like Paxos, with traditional villages and small buildings, there is no place for enormous hotels, airports and large installations. Protection of the sea and shores from pollution, of tree-covered areas from building development, cleaning ancient footpaths, and the use of traditional colours and materials in construction, are measures which will contribute decisively to protecting the value of the natural investment capital and limiting the unavoidable impact of tourist development.

Fiends, the history of mankind is a continuous interaction between humans and their natural habitat, and the form, which the latter takes is determined by human activity, in other words it becomes 'manmade'. Our age is characterized by the existence of vast technical possibilities and resources, their rational utilization is, however still being sought. Easy as tourist development of a place may seem, it is equally easy to destroy it. It is up to all of citizens, local government, state, through our intervention, planning and decisions, to determine our future and us.

To sum up, I would like to restate those actions, which I believe essential for the maximum benefit of our villages from Tourism.

- Tow planning and definition of land usage.
- Careful planning of infrastructural works.
- Protection of the quality of natural wealth.
- Preservation and display of agricultural heritage.
- Development of ' mild' forms of tourism
- Improving the quality of service supply
- Preservation and promotion of cultural identity