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BLUE ECONOMY AND SUSTAINABLE TOURISM MANAGEMENT IN COASTAL ZONES: LEARNING FROM EXPERIENCES

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Abstract

The sustainable management of coastal zones requires appropriate tools within the framework of the Blue Economy. This paper adopts a supply/coastal zone perspective to investigate key issues and aspects related to the implementation of coastal tourism initiatives. The main research question is: “What lessons could we take from practical experiences?” A related question is: “What are the critical factors for effective implementation?” The paper’s aim is to suggest a framework of essential factors and guidelines for successful and effective implementation of related projects. The study’s focus is on gaining insight and capitalizing on experience from Integrated Coastal Zone Management plans implemented in four countries.

Keywords: sustainable tourism management, coastal zone, integrated framework, implementation, critical success factors, case study

JEL Classification: M0, O2

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1. INTRODUCTION

Coastal zones are very important from environmental and economic perspectives due to various human activities, such as tourism and aquaculture (Boteler 2014). The latter cause negative effects on coastal environments, whose resources should be managed in a sustainable manner (Tonazzini et al. 2019). Coastal zones and marine environments are the main interest of the Blue Economy concept and framework. The Blue Economy encompasses activities related to many industries, such as fisheries, aquaculture, tourism, transport, and energy (UN/ECA 2016a). Hence, the Blue Economy is a concept and framework for policy making and investment aimed at preserving and properly exploiting the sea and coastal environment.

The Blue Economy concept is defined and described in various ways. According to the World Bank (2017), it is the “sustainable use of ocean resources for economic growth, improved livelihoods, and jobs while preserving the health of the ocean ecosystem.” The European Commission defines it as “all economic activities related to oceans, seas, and coasts. It covers a wide range of interlinked established and emerging sectors” (European Union 2018). The approach of the Blue Economy is premised on the sustainable use, management, and conservation of aquatic and marine ecosystems and associated resources (UN/ECA 2016a). The Blue Economy framework offers an integrated, systemic, dynamic, inclusive, participatory, and ecosystem-based approach, and environmental, social, and economic dimensions are intertwined and pursued for all Blue Economy activities (EU 2018). It is worth pointing out that the Blue Economy builds on Integrated Coastal Zone Management (ICZM). All over the world coastal countries are incorporating the considerations and framework of the Blue Economy into their development plans (UN/ECA 2016a).

Against this background, it is believed that there is a need for more empirical research and to capitalize on experiences of implementing projects in the field of sustainable tourism management (STM) in coastal and maritime zones. Literature suggests approaches, frameworks, and tools for achieving this aim; however, when these frameworks and tools are implemented they are faced with a series of challenges, issues, and barriers that make their efficiency and effectiveness questionable. It is the argument of this study that practitioners and academics can benefit from experiences of implementation. The approaches and ways adopted, and the issues and barriers encountered, can give us useful lessons for improving the performance in this field. Tourism is regarded as a pillar in these frameworks for sustainable coastal zone management (SCZM).

Against this background, this paper adopts a supply/coastal zone perspective and focuses on the interrelationship between tourism management and environmental protection in coastal zones. The main research question is: “What lessons could we take from practical experiences?” The purpose of this paper is to address this question and to suggest a framework of critical success factors (CSFs) and guidelines for STM. The paper uses the case study research method to achieve the aim. The study’s focus is on gaining insights and capitalizing on real-world experience from ICZM plans implemented in four countries.

Hence, this study takes a coastal zone perspective and focuses on STM – the sustainable interrelationship between tourism management and environmental protection – in coastal zones within the general context of the Blue Economy. Therefore, this study aims to gain valuable insights for implementation experiences. The main research question is: “What lessons could we take from practical experiences?” The purpose of this paper is to address this question and to suggest a framework of CSFs

and guidelines for STM. The paper uses the case study research method to achieve the aim, and the focus is on gaining insights and capitalizing on real-world experience from ICZM plans.

The paper is structured as follows. A review of literature is performed in Section 2, outlining and highlighting the main issues and challenges to address in the field of coastal management. This is followed by a synoptic presentation and discussion of four case studies on plans and projects in the field of integrated management of coastal areas with a special focus on tourism. Section 4 discusses the main lessons to take from the practice and identifies the CSFs for effective implementation of such programs. The article ends with conclusions, implications (theoretical and managerial), and the study's limitations.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Academic research has been (and is still) interested in the field of STM in coastal zones. Focusing on the scope and context of this study, a review of literature permits us to outline and highlight the specific issues and challenges to be addressed and the imperative of adopting an integrated approach in this field.

2.1 Issues and Challenges

Many issues and challenges for coastal and maritime tourism have been raised by scholars. The most critical challenge to managing coastal tourism in a sustainable manner is how to achieve a positive economic impact without negative effects of human activities on the resources of the coastal environment (Prasetyo, Muhammad and Sugianto 2018).

More specifically, coastal and maritime tourism is faced with a number of challenges, such as (WTO 2013; European Commission 2016): the limited sharing of benefits and value of tourism among local communities; poor investment capacity and limited access to finance; limited development potential; and the limited response capacity of local destinations. The “whole” zone must be perceived by tourists as appealing (in terms of safety, security, good health care, good transport, etc.). There is a need for coastal tourism communities to get access to information/knowledge and to understand global trends, so as to be able to derive the challenges or opportunities they incur for their particular strategies.

A summary of the main issues and challenges faced by tourism management in coastal zones, classified into three fields, is shown in Table 1.

Strategies and measures are needed to address the above outlined issues and challenges in order to achieve an STM in coastal zones (European Commission 2016). Literature suggests that an ICZM framework is a necessity and this tool should be adaptable and flexible, ready to take into account and to address the related issues and challenges in an effective manner (Cicin-Sain and Knecht 1998; Shi et al. 2001; Jennings 2004; Kanji 2006; Marafa 2008).

Table 1: Issues and Challenges in Managing Tourism in Coastal Zones

Fields	Issues and Challenges
Planning and management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Predominantly sectoral approach not contributing to an integrated management. • Development planning does not take into account environmental concerns. • Management focus: The prevalence of tourism and urbanization in coastal zones favors traditional land use planning instead of a focus on resource management. • National- and local-level administrative structures are not effective. • Resource management issues: habitat conservation and restoration, coastal hazards, promoting sustainable development. • Coastal safety: need to assess all potential risks, both natural and technological. • Support management decision-making: scientific research and information/intelligence, providing tools and supporting technologies.
Governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate models and schemas: suitable partnerships. • Participation and public awareness: difficulties in mobilizing local stakeholders. • Lack of stakeholder involvement and stakeholder support. • Institutions: limited capacity or inefficient institutions. • Coordination and cooperation: limited, inefficient, and lack of communication. • Information and capacity building through education.
Effective Implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The implementation of plans in coastal areas is not effective due to: • Partial and incomplete implementation. • Funding: insufficient national financial support for coastal programs. In some plans, more money towards marketing than sustainable actions. • Economic analysis/measurement: limited analysis of costs, benefits and their impact on stakeholders. • Monitoring of progress and performance evaluation with specific key performances areas (KPAs and indicators).

Source: Elaboration based on various sources, e.g., IOC/UNESCO 2001; Cicin-Sain et al. 2002; Sorensen 2002; Kanji 2006; UNEP 2009; Powell, Cuschnir, and Prakash 2009; WTO 2013; Coastal and Marine 2016; European Commission 2016; Prasetyo, Muhammad, and Sugianto 2018; Tonazzini et al. 2019.

2.2 Imperative for an Integrated Framework for Sustainable Coastal Management

UNEP (2009) points out that the main issue is about more responsible use of resources. Sustainable development “is a dynamic, continuous, proactive, and adaptive process of resources management for sustainable development in the coastal areas. It is achieved through physical, social, and economic constraints and within the limitations of the legal, financial, and administrative systems” (UNEP 2009, 65). ICZM has been accepted as a strategic management approach in achieving sustainable development of resources in coastal areas (Sorensen 1993, 2002; Cicin-Sain et al. 2002; UNEP 2009).

A robust definition, provided by Sorenson (1993), describes ICZM as “integrated management that provides policy direction and a process for defining objectives and priorities and planning development beyond sectoral activities. It adopts a systems perspective and multisectoral approach that takes into account all sectoral interests and stakeholder interests, and deals with economic and social issues as well as environmental and economic issues.” It is believed that ICZM is beneficial to all stakeholders and enhances long-term economic growth and environmental conservation by involving all stakeholders and using various instruments for coastal management (European Commission 2016). The tourism industry and tourist activities are considered to have the potential to contribute to sustainable growth within the Blue Economy framework (UN, Economic Commission for Africa 2016a). The ICZM framework is regarded as an efficient tool for coastal management with tourism as

a key pillar (Marafa 2008; UNEP 2009), while contributing at the same time to environmental preservation (Jennings 2004; Kanji 2006).

In recent decades the need to implement more effective ICZM has been increasingly recognized (Mestanza-Ramón et al. 2019). However, there are some issues to be addressed for ICZM as well, the main ones being the implementation (with economic, managerial, institutional, and legal aspects), the governance, the coordination between institutions, and administrative structures. It is worth noting that there are some criticisms about the ICZM framework; however, this is beyond the scope of our study. The focus of our study is on the effective implementation of coastal tourism management. It is argued that ICZM is the best approach contributing to achieve a STM in coastal zones. This paper has examined a number of case studies with the aim of taking some lessons from the management and implementation of ICZM programs and projects with a special focus on STM.

3. METHODOLOGY: CASE STUDIES

3.1 Research Method

The argument of our study is that experiences – initiatives and projects in the Blue Economy field – are very useful and beneficial. That is the reason why the study employed a qualitative research methodology, i.e., case studies, to address the study's aim – an exploratory case study focusing on a phenomenon within the context of real-life situations and aiming to find answers within the investigated topic. Case studies aim to analyze specific issues within the boundaries of a specific context or setting. This research method is widely accepted and used in the business area (Yin 2003).

Case studies that describe particular plans and management processes provide insight into the planning and management of coastal zones and tourism (Forde 2008). Practitioners (policymakers, planners, and managers) and scholars alike should take some lessons from experiences. The study's aim is to capitalize on international experiences to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of such programs. This aim is achieved by means of analysis of selected case studies with a specific focus on tourism. The information and data were collected from secondary data, i.e., published documents (reports, studies) and websites.

3.2 Case Studies: Brief Presentation

Many ICZM projects and initiatives have been developed all over the world. There were four criteria for selecting the four cases studies presented in the following subsections, namely: (i) representativeness: from various regions/continents – a broad geographical range, from Europe, Africa, Asia, and Oceania; (ii) implementation of the Blue Economy and STM projects; (iii) advanced stage of implementation; and (iv) the availability of information and data. The four cases are from Italy, Hong Kong, China, Kenya, and Australia and provide some valuable insights.

3.2.1 MUSES Project, Northern Adriatic Sea, Italy

This case study focuses on coastal and maritime tourism as a potential major driver for the development of multi-use (MU) opportunities – combinations that can be promoted and/or further boosted by using tourism as a development driver and taking into account the existing situation and previous experiences (Saba 2015).

3.2.1.1 Short Geographic Description

The area includes Italian Adriatic internal and territorial waters, including the Veneto and Emilia Romagna regions.

Coastal and maritime tourism represents the main socioeconomic driver in the area. The two regions have in common similar coastal and maritime tourism industries and include various maritime activities, such as transport, energy, and aquaculture (Meneghello and Mingotto 2016).

The MUSES project analyzed the role of coastal and maritime tourism as a major driver for the development of MU opportunities in the Northern Adriatic. The project investigated the potential role of coastal and maritime tourism as a driver of MU development involving other sectors that could greatly benefit from tourism-related MU. The project suggests four tourism-driven combinations: tourism combined with fisheries, aquaculture, environmental protection, and underwater cultural heritage (UCH). For the tourism-driven combinations, the project identified a number of driver, barrier, added-value, and impact (DABI) factors. The main DABI factors related to all four combinations are political, institutional/legal, economic, social, environmental, and operational (MUSES Project 2017).

3.2.1.2 Proposed Action Plan

The suggested action plan to promote the four tourism-driven combinations is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2: Suggested Action Plan

Focus Areas	Actions
1. Addressing Multi-Use	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promoting integrated tourist offering by developing a network of tourism-related MU initiatives. Improving the cooperation between different institutions, and promoting cross-sector policies. Creating specific networks to improve investment attractiveness and management capacity. Forming clusters to develop and manage MU.
2. Boosting Blue Maritime Economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support for monitoring and evaluation of progress, benefits, and results. Engaging stakeholders: strengthening the dialogue between and coordination among stakeholders. Concentrating and focusing on the implementation of specific action plans. Building capacity and awareness: educational and training initiatives to increase awareness about environmental issues. Strengthening cooperation and synergies between various actors (museums, etc.). Developing digital platforms for the Northern Adriatic Sea for engagement and communication purposes.
3. Strategic/Master plan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All the above actions should be incorporated into an integrated master plan, which should contribute to addressing the challenges and issues for sustainable development and management.

Source: Elaborated from MUSES Project (2017).

3.2.1.3 Main Lessons

The main takeaways/lessons from this case study are as follows. The elaboration of a vision and strategy/action plans is very useful. The vision must focus on the issues related to sustainability and environmental protection. Stakeholders' involvement, engagement, and consultation is a must. It is also crucial to develop an integrated

offering capable of linking natural, environmental, and historical resources and all activities together, and to create intersectoral networks capable of designing and promoting tourist offerings (this objective requires the involvement and cooperation of all actors). The legal and administrative barriers (fragmentation of competences and lack of cooperation between involved agencies and institutions) are usually the most important obstacles to support and implementation.

3.2.2 COAST Project, Watamu, Kenya

This case analyzes and highlights the Collaborative Actions for Sustainable Tourism (COAST) project within the framework of the Blue Economy in Africa. Their main purpose has been to provide a focus for action supported by the project in the field of coastal tourism.

3.2.2.1 The Context

According to studies and reports, the tourism industry has great economic potential if properly integrated and managed. Accordingly, stakeholders have been working together in Kenya on ICZM for some time and an ICZM action plan was completed in 2010. While the ICZM plan is helpful in considering and planning issues and strategies in an integrated fashion, the main challenge remains putting into practice and implementing specific action plans (WTO 2013).

3.2.2.2 The COAST Project

It is critical to ensure that tourism management is accompanied by adequate measures to mitigate its negative environmental and social effects. The case of the COAST project illustrates this approach. This project covers nine countries in Africa and focuses on coastal communities. The two main outcomes of the project are expected to be: 1) sustainable tourism approaches for reducing environmental degradation from coastal tourism; and 2) public mechanisms supporting sustainable tourism governance and management to enhance the adoption and implementation of best practices.

The demo site in Kenya is Watamu. This town is a well-established small resort of 20,000 inhabitants with a number of significant coastal hotels, tourism suppliers, good beaches, and community tourism activity around a lagoon/forest. Kenya is currently implementing demonstration projects in three areas, namely: (i) ecotourism; (ii) environmental management systems; and (iii) reef and marine recreation management.

The COAST project demo site in Kenya has focused on training and capacity-building workshops to provide the required support for implementation of the project. The members have also planned the purchase of 80 beehives and their issuance to community groups involved in ecotourism. The project also provides financial support to enhance ecotourism activities (United Nations, ECA 2016b).

3.2.2.3 Main Lessons

The main lessons from this case study are as follows. The ICZM approach constitutes a framework contributing to sustainable management with a long-term vision. The prerequisites for successful planning and implementation are: the stakeholders' collaboration, crafting and implementing small-scale projects, appropriate linkages of various activities, suitable governance structures and management processes. The challenges/weaknesses needed to be overcome by local communities include improvement of engagement, building capacity, mechanisms of monitoring and performance evaluation.

3.2.3 Marine Protected Area Parks, Hong Kong, China

This case from the PRC highlights the imperative to integrate tourism in sustainable management of coastal zones. The strategic aim in marine protected areas is to seek a customized resource management approach (Mestanza-Ramón et al. 2019).

3.2.3.1 The Context: The Coastal Zone

Hong Kong, China is situated on the southern coast of the PRC and encompasses over 260 islands. Some of the islands of Hong Kong, China offer a wide array of nature-based attractions. In Hong Kong, China, tourism constitutes a pillar of the economy and a significant factor in the transformation of the coastal environment. Hong Kong, China is endowed with natural resources that could be used for planning and management of coastal tourism. It is believed that there is an imperative for an STM in order to ensure that tourism will be environmental-friendly (Marafa 2008).

3.2.3.2 Protected Area System: Marine Parks and Reserves

The local authorities planned and managed marine parks and reserves for protection purposes. Generally, protected maritime and coastal areas are increasingly used for tourism and recreation (Eagles, McCool, and Haynes 2002).

More access and visits to marine parks and reserves imply increasing pressure on resources. The institutional/regulatory framework in Hong Kong, China was established in 1995 with the aim of managing sensitive areas of the marine environment for preservation and tourism and leisure (

There are four marine parks and one marine reserve located in various areas of Hong Kong, China, covering zones with different geological structures, the largest being “Sha Chau and Lung Kwu Chau” and Yan Chau Tong located in the west and northeast, respectively (Marafa 2008).

The increasing visitation of marine parks and reserves and related tourism activities puts pressure and has a negative impact on marine biodiversity and habitats. It is felt that a framework for a multiple-use approach should be implemented in sustainably managing marine parks (Marafa 2008).

3.2.3.3 Main Lessons

The main lessons to take from this case are the following. The main aim for the creation of protected areas in coastal zones is to protect biodiversity without neglecting the increased interest of social and economic dimensions (Maestro et al. 2019). However, there is a need for a more integrated approach to incorporate STM into ICZM plans. Plans for tourism management should respect the natural resources and the local population in coastal areas. Tourism management plans should be sensitive to local stakeholders’ expectations. These plans should be crafted and managed based on all critical elements and dimensions – economic, environmental, and social – that tourism activities involve. It is not only about a “protected” status for a marine zone; the main challenge is sustainable management to achieve desired outcomes.

3.2.4 Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, Australia

This case focuses on sustainable management strategies in protected natural environments. It discusses the strategies for effective and efficient partnerships between tourism activities and environmentally sensitive areas (Jamal and Stronza 2009).

3.2.4.1 Short Description

The Great Barrier Reef Marine Park (GBRMP), which was established in 1975, was one of the world's first marine parks. The GBR World Heritage Area accommodates 1.8 million visitor days and 2.3 million passenger transfers each year (GBRMPA 2019). The GBRMP Authority (GBRMPA) employs a range of regulatory tools and management plans to ensure that tourism is managed in a sustainable manner.

This case highlights the key strategies of the GBRMPA in managing tourism and its leadership in balancing tourism development with environmental protection. Detailed information on the GBR can be obtained through the interactive spatial tool (<http://www.gbrmpa.gov.au/>).

3.2.4.2 Tourism and Management Strategies

The key underlying principle of the GBRMPA approach is that a protected area and tourism activities could and should coexist in a mutually beneficial pairing creating a positive impact in both fields. Stakeholder management and collaborative partnerships are regarded as central to the achievement of sustainable tourism on the GBR (Jamal and Stronza 2009; Briggs et al. 2013). These partnerships have the following benefits: 1) they are mutually beneficial to all stakeholders; 2) active engagement in all activities with a focus on shared knowledge; and 3) learning and open communication.

The engagement with, and consultation of, stakeholders is carried out through effective mechanisms and platforms allowing shared expertise and competencies among involved stakeholders. These mechanisms facilitate the achievement of a shared vision and interests, while at the same time contributing to addressing potential conflicts and problems. It is worth noting that an Environmental Management Charge (EMC) paid by visitors through tourism suppliers is the principal source of funding of the GBR Park. Nowadays, the GBRMP is facing the challenges of climate change with limited financial resources. Thus, it is important to facilitate suitable partnerships and appropriate communication with tourism operators in order to foster stewardship (Morrison 2019).

A series of tourism- and leisure-related activities on the GBR have developed (e.g., recreational and game fishing, snorkeling and diving, whale and dolphin watching), with negative impacts on the GBR. That is the reason why management strategies have been elaborated to minimize the impacts of these activities. Hence, the GBRMPA succeeds in promoting tourism while simultaneously protecting marine life resources through collaborative sustainable practices to manage sustainable tourism experience opportunities that create positive outcomes for all stakeholders (Sigala 2013). At the same time, management can measure the progress made. The two main challenges are: (i) minimizing/mitigating the negative impacts of tourism activities by implementing sustainable practices; and (ii) designing and implementing a comprehensive crisis management strategy to address unforeseen emergencies and crises, such as accidents and natural phenomena.

3.2.4.3 Main Lessons

The main lessons to take from this case are the following. Tourism can play an important role in the preservation of marine protected areas and collaboration is a cornerstone concept in the management of relationships between tourism and environmental protection. Suitable strategies and effective mechanisms include participative forms and consultation to achieve a balance between the needs of tourists and the environment; as well as local and regional alliances and partnerships to create benefits for all stakeholders.

4. DISCUSSION: MAIN LESSONS FROM EXPERIENCES AND CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The sustainable management of coastal and maritime tourism is of critical importance within the context of the Blue Economy framework and is an imperative due to the multifaceted challenges and issues. The only strategy to surmount these challenges is to have a multidisciplinary approach to resource management (UNEP 2009; Coastal and Marine 2016). Based on the synoptic discussion of case studies from different regions around the world, this paper argues that there are some lessons to take from experiences.

4.1 Main Lessons: A Synopsis

The most important lessons learned from the four case studies are outlined hereafter. First, there is a requirement to take a broad holistic perspective to ICZM due to the complexity and diversity of factors influencing coastal zones. Collection and analysis of intelligence regarding local conditions is required to achieve this goal. Second, there is a need for long-range planning that ensures that management plans will have short-, medium-, and long-term positive impacts on coastal zones. Third, adaptive management, a flexible approach to developing and implementing ICZM plans, should be used. Fourth, participative planning is required involving the collaboration of all stakeholders in all stages of ICZM plans, from the design through to the implementation. The last lesson is that effective implementation of ICZM also involves suitable use of a range of tools and mechanisms (Maccarrone, Filiciotto, and Buffa 2014).

In order to achieve an STM within the context of the Blue Economy, the following considerations, aims/objectives, and actions are needed, classified into three areas.

Approaches: Tourism can play an important role in the protection and preservation of coastal zones. The Blue Economy, along with the ICZM approach, provides the appropriate framework for an intersectoral approach linking all sectors together in coastal zones and for sustainable planning and management.

Management Strategies: Strategy and action plans are very useful. Collaboration among all stakeholders contributes to the success of projects. Stakeholders' involvement, engagement, and consultation are a must. Participative forms and consultation contribute to achieving a balance between tourists' needs and the natural environment. Governance and management structures should be strengthened to ensure that tourism serves as a driver contributing to preserving the natural environment, to mitigating its negative impact, and to boosting the prosperity of local populations. Governance mechanisms among and within tourism industries should be improved to enable proper planning, monitoring, and regulation. Appropriate governance structures and coordination mechanisms should be established for effective management, as should a stakeholder network for promoting collaborative sustainable practices and coordination.

Implementation: Control, Progress Monitoring, and Evaluation of Results: The practical implementation of the ICZM approach should be accepted and recognized. Forming and operating suitable local/regional partnerships is an efficient tool. Progress should be monitored and the resulting benefits should be measured and evaluated. There is no robust evidence of measurement of the progress made from the implementation of plans, with the GBR constituting the only exception. Lastly, there is a need to developing a set of indicators to measure the outcomes and to disseminate best practices.

The above-outlined lessons confirm the suggestions and recommendations formulated by related tourism and environment literature (e.g. Dowling and Pforr 2009; UNEP 2009; WTO 2013; Coastal and Marine 2016; EU 2018; Tonazzini et al. 2019). They also point out the imperative for an integrated framework for coastal management. Most importantly, the best and the most useful lesson to take from the analysis of case studies is that the main concern and focus should be on implementation of plans. In other words, to recall Elliot, “management decisions are not worth the paper they are written on unless the policies and decisions are implemented... through appropriate plans” (Elliot 1997, 97).

The literature and experiences also indicate the determining elements for achieving effective/successful implementation.

4.2 Critical Success Factors for Successful Implementation

The previous discussion on practical experiences of implementation have demonstrated that a series of factors are very important to the effective implementation of projects (WTO 2013; Coastal and Marine 2016; Tonazzini et al. 2019).

The study’s focus is on the specific CSFs for the implementation stage of coastal and maritime tourism plans in the context of sustainable management. The implementation is absolutely essential, *sine qua non*. The most important elements of successful implementation of these plans are:

- Setting priorities and providing a focal point.
- Crafting specific action plans to help to achieve specific goals.
- Establishing suitable collaborative forms and competent project teams.
- Ensuring sustainable operations, providing socioeconomic benefits to all stakeholders with fair distribution.
- Setting proper arrangements and committing/dedicating sufficient financial resources. One of the most successful examples (GBRMP, Australia) demonstrated substantial investment in support of implementation.
- Attaining the involvement and active participation of local stakeholders.
- Monitoring progress in a comprehensive way with adequate tools and indicators.
- Assessing performance and outcomes through specific metrics to demonstrate the benefits to all stakeholders involved and gain their continuous support.
- Using quantitative instruments and assessment tools to evaluate performance and impacts.
- Increasing awareness along with progress by educating the local population, industry operators, and visitors.
- Utilizing available technologies for various purposes (decision-making, monitoring, evaluating).
- Taking advantage of, and benefiting from, best practices and know-how.

The above elements are all essential to effective and successful implementation of plans.

5. CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS AND STUDY'S LIMITATIONS

This paper adopted a supply/coastal zone perspective to explore the sustainable management of coastal tourism within the general context of the Blue Economy. It has discussed some STM plans in coastal zones by focusing on the lessons that we can take from experiences. The main research question was: "What lessons could we take from practical experiences?" A related question was: "What are the critical factors for effective implementation?" The question was addressed by applying the method of case study analysis.

Firstly, a literature review was performed aimed at outlining the main issues and challenges to address in the field of coastal tourism management and at highlighting the imperative of adopting an integrated management approach. The paper indicated that ICZM is a suitable tool for achieving sustainable management of coastal tourism, highlighting the main elements of STM and governance.

This was followed by a synoptic presentation and discussion of four case studies on plans and projects in the field of integrated management of coastal areas with a special focus on coastal and maritime tourism management. These case studies were drawn from diverse situations and contexts, demonstrating the varying settings and circumstances of coastal zones. It has been possible to glean lessons from each case in terms of planning approaches, management processes, and strategies for coastal tourism management, as well as the essential factors determining their effective implementation. It is believed that really effective management of coastal/maritime tourism is hard to achieve and the implementation of related plans is a required management function. Then, the main lessons to take from the practice and the CSFs for efficient implementation of such projects were outlined.

It is believed that this study can make a contribution to the body of knowledge. Firstly, from a theoretical perspective, it extends the knowledge and provides a deeper understanding of specific issues and challenges regarding the implementation of coastal and maritime tourism plans in the context of sustainable management and the Blue Economy. A series of concrete and precise elements, essential to take into consideration in managing and implementing these plans, were indicated and highlighted. These suggestions extend and strengthen the 4Cs approach initially postulated by Owen, Witt, and Gammon (1993) in the field of sustainable tourism development. The 4Cs reflect the extent to which a governance structure/body should achieve four aims simultaneously, namely *compromise* (by attaining a balance between tourism management and environmental conservation); *commitment* (by recognizing that sustainable coastal tourism management requires implementation and action and less discourse); *cooperation* (by recognizing the need for partnership at various levels); and *control* (by setting a framework for effective regulation, monitoring, and performance evaluation). Our study envisages this approach as a suitable framework for sustainable coastal tourism management and puts the emphasis on efficient and effective implementation. It *suggests two additional Cs, standing for coordination* (by attaining a shared vision, strategy, and action plans between all stakeholders) and *commitment two* (by dedicating sufficient human and financial resources).

Secondly, the study's findings provide management implications. The implementation stage is of critical importance – the biggest challenge for industry practitioners in the field of coastal/maritime tourism. The suggested framework of CSFs and guidelines for implementation of STM plans is of practical importance and very useful in attaining effectiveness and efficiency in related projects in coastal zones. These factors point to

and emphasize the deployment of appropriate management tools and techniques in performing the required functions and attaining the desirable outcomes.

Finally, it is worth acknowledging the limitations that our study encompasses. The study has the inherent limitations/drawbacks of a qualitative research project. The number of cases is relatively limited and they were selected based on specific criteria, one being the availability of data. Another study might have chosen a different set of cases. Furthermore, the cases are based on secondary research by authors. A cross-case analysis was also used for an integrated overview of related issues and aspects and to draw upon a series of lessons as conclusions. It is worth noting that the cases represent snapshots of reality, which is dynamic and evolving. That is the reason why the conclusions cannot be robust. There is no validation of generalization of the lessons learned from this study. Therefore, there is a need for more research by scholars and increased dissemination of best practices by industry practitioners alike.

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