

A survey of visiting rate to National Parks of Greece

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Protected Areas of Greece amount to 127 sites (<http://www.ypeka.gr>) according to Law 3937/2011 and the National Parks (NP) of our country amount to twenty (Efthimiou 2015). The management of NP was done by the Forestry Service, as most of them were predominantly forestry. 16 years ago, in 2003, Management Bodies (M.B.) were established, which main responsibility was the management of Protected Areas (P.A.) in our Country. Until the end of 2017 there were 28 M.B., while by a recent law in 2018, 8 new M.B. are establishing. Ecotourism and alternative forms of tourism are the main human activities in National Parks.

Purpose of this research is to become an initial approach of trafficking in National Parks of Greece which are managed by a Management Body. Our research was conducted from May to December 2017, by sending questionnaires to the M.B., to gather information for registered visitors to them for the period 2010-2016.

Visiting rate in National Parks with Management Body

From the collected data, it appears that the Management Bodies (M.B.), do not systematically record visitors to their protected area of responsibility. Of the 28 active M.Bs only 27 used data. Visitor records are usually made by groups of students participating in Environmental Experiential Environmental Education programs of M.B., as well as the visitors (individuals, families, small groups, clubs), who passed through the information centers of the Municipalities. Only in NP of Samaria, located in Crete, has an outpost at the entrance and exit of the homonymous Gorge, so that all visitors are systematically registered, who are given a certificate to the visitors crossing the Samaria Gorge.

Visitors to the vast majority of PAs come from the same county or region where PA is administratively owned. The total number of visitors to the PA for the period from 2010 to 2016 it was about 4 million (3,952,689). From them, one quarter (23.66%) visited the NP of Samaria and 21.66% visited the NP of Olympus. However, Marathon Ropes, visited about 41% of the total number of visitors, a price that is indicative and high, it is reasonable because this park is near Athens, the capital of Greece with a population of over 5 million. Figure 1 gives the total traffic to NPs with MB of Greece, showing a steadily increasing number of visitors since 2010. Interestingly, shows the NPs which are located in tourist areas and islands, where the majority of visitors are from abroad, for example in the NP of Karpathos and Saria (81.50%), Karpathos, NP of Samaria (74%) in Crete, NP of Pindos (60%) in Epirus, NP of Zakynthos (59.46%) in the island of Zakynthos, NP of Strofylia (39.14%) in the Peloponnese and the NP of Evros Delta (35%) in Thrace, of visitors come from abroad. From 2014 onwards, there is a decrease in visiting rate in Greece's national parks, which is probably due to the financial crisis.

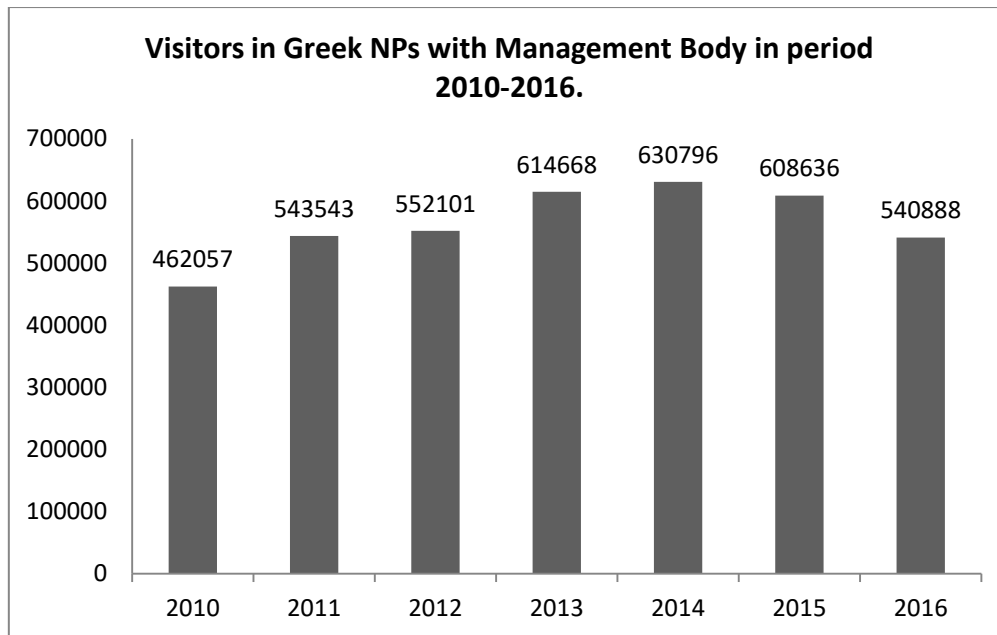


Figure 1. Visitors in Greeks National Parks with Management Body for the period 2010-2016, per year.

Problems of visiting logging

Although there are many methods of recording visiting in PAs regions globally (Gossen, 2014), in our country, there is no systematic recording of visitors to national parks (NPs). The recording of pupils and students visiting the NPs takes place at the premises of the MBs (information centers, museums, etc.). Easily accessed by visitors without controlled access to infrastructure creates a real problem in systematically recording of all visitors. The real value of the visitor is certainly much higher than the one already recorded by the M.B. (Figure 1), taking into account that one MB did not have data and 5 MBs began registering any visitors from 2013 onwards. Despite of any problems with the recording of visitors and the incomplete data from some operators, an initial approach to trafficking in PA was attempted of Greece to show the importance of recording such data for the rational management of NPs, resulting in the development of visitors management, as well as the creation of new strategic plans for managing tourism at the gateways of the National Parks (Fredman et al., 2016).

Proposals

Some essential prerequisites for correct and systematic registration of NPs visitors, controlled safe stay and exit from them are the following:

- The existence of a specific entry and exit in the NPs.
- Operation of a penitentiary at each entrance for the purpose of cutting an entrance ticket with symbolic fee or without
- Knowing the exact number of visitors who entered the National Park on a daily basis, it is possible to control the safe exit of all visitors from them
- Knowledge of the size of visiting in NPs over time, there may be better and safer management of visitors

- Controlled and directed visiting to NPs contributes to the protection of ecosystems and biodiversity of the park, as well as to the safety of visitors
- The implementation by MBs of a common record of visiting to NPs can provide reliable and credible data for a rational management of visitors to the protected areas of Greece

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