Blue Flag: a Symbol of Environmental Protection

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Abstract

Blue Flag is a high standard symbol of environmental protection and it is awarded to the beaches and agreement ports by the Foundation of Education for the Environment. The beaches having been awarded this distinction warrant particular protection for their visitors, which is a particular point of tourism attractiveness: the result, they are preferred by tourists and, therefore, by tour operators selling tourism packages for the littoral. In 2009, Romanian beaches were not awarded any Blue Flags.

Keywords: Beaches, Blue Flag, Romania, tourism facility

1. Introduction

The Blue Flag Programme developed by an international non-governmental organisation in 1985 in France has also become a European programme due to the efficacy of managing issues related to the disposal of waste waters and to the maintenance of bathing water optimal parameters. The responsibility for these activities belongs to the European Commission, the concept of Blue Flag designing one of the most important laws related to waste management or to beach protection and management. In addition, besides beaches, harbours also have been put on the contest list. By 2005, Blue Flag had been awarded to 2,472 beaches and 635 harbours, with 35 nations taking currently part to this programme through the Foundation for Environmental Education (F.E.E.), a foundation that cooperates with the World Tourism Organisation (W.T.O.) and with the European Commission [1].

Though the F.E.E. decided the criteria for the awarding of the Blue Flag, criteria meant to make it similar within a region, they nevertheless vary from one region to another, since it has to take into account specific environmental conditions.

2. Materials and methods

Beaches and harbours that observe the criteria for the Blue Flag award are subjected to a control procedure that are analysed by a national jury made up of experts from the country and then by an international jury. In the present paper, we present the situation of the 20,000 beaches from the Baltic Sea, from the Mediterranean Sea, from the North Sea, and from the Black Sea, together with the top list of these beaches for the year 2009 [2,3].

3. Results and discussion

first condition to get a Blue Flag for a season is to have met minimal F.E.E. Programme criteria for the previous season. Results from the season are recorded and they are used in the assessment process of the location.

The samples are taken from certain points where swimmer density is maximal and where there are potential pollution sources, in order to draw the most unfavourable scenario in locations with the highest risk of pollution. Samples are taken 5-17 days before tourism activities start on the littoral,
and at least every two weeks during the summer. Beach assessment will not be done if less than 5 samples per season have been taken. 

Blue Flag award is done for a single summer season by the European Jury based on the propositions of national committees and on 29 criteria covering the following fields:
- environmental management;
- water quality;
- security, services, and facilities;
- education and information concerning the environmental protection.

The main criteria concerning environmental management are:
- the beach should meet all the norms affecting it by both location and services, coastal area planning, and environmental laws;
- the beach should be kept clean;
- the beach will have garbage cans and facilities for the collection of recyclable materials, sanitary facilities, and sewage systems;
- equipment and buildings belonging to the beach should be maintained properly;
- vehicles, campers, and pets shall not be allowed on the beach subjected to assessment.

Water quality should meet the following criteria:
- bathing water should meet operational standards;
- there should be no sewer on the beach;
- there should be no algae or other type of vegetation.

The criteria concerning environmental education and information are:
- the postage of water quality information;
- the postage of beach conduct code;
- the postage of Blue Flag information;
- the postage of coastal environmental protection.

The security, services, and facilities criteria are as follows:
- properly equipped beach watch;
- beach management strategy;
- drinking water source;
- service and facilities map.

Taking into account the special implications of the Blue Flag Programme on littoral tourism development and on environmental protection, Romania started implementing it passing through all the stages and, in May 2006, five littoral resorts (Mamaia, Eforie Nord, Neptun, Venus, and Saturn) and the tourism harbour of Eforie Nord were awarded the Blue Flag.

Public authorities represented by the National Blue Flag Committee should meet the following criteria:
- carry out feasibility studies for other coastal areas as well;
- suggest measures meant to improve bathing water quality;
- equip the beaches with necessary equipment;
- develop training and education programmes concerning the environment in accordance with the requirements of the Blue Flag Programme.

For the year 2009, the European Commission made a report concerning European beaches on the ground of mandatory criteria ad on non-mandatory values and awarded the Blue Flag to those countries that have the best bathing waters and that meet European hygiene criteria: the winner then was Cyprus, with 98% of its beaches. (Table 1)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Blue Flag Beaches %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>98.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>97.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>96.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At present, there are in the entire world 3,200 beaches in 32 countries from Europe, Africa, and America. The country with the largest number of Blue Flags in 2009 was Spain, followed by Greece and Turkey. (Table 2)
Table 2. Top of the best European Beaches in 2009 (in numbers)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Number of Blue Flags</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>442</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greece</td>
<td>416</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Turkey</td>
<td>258</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>225</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Italy</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Croatia</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Kingdom</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Romania has no Blue Flagged beach. Though it has the best beaches meeting all four Blue Flag Award criteria of the F.E.E., and though it hold the record of the largest percentage of high quality beaches (98%), Cyprus has only 52 Blue Flagged beaches.

4. Conclusions

The Blue Flag Programme has, on long term, the role of ensuring the sustainable use of coastal resources and of raising the awareness of all the users and of those involved in their management concerning the need for the integrated management of these locations. By introducing the Blue Flag Programme, Romania will increase the quality of its coastal tourism services, though there was no Blue Flag awarded for 2009. Though it is not among the countries with the best beaches and though it got no Blue Flag, the Ministry of Tourism will manage, through good measures and true concern, to increase the quality of littoral services and to improve bathing water quality by observing the 29 criteria required to get this award.

References