



Participation in the management of Greek Natura 2000 sites: Evidence from a cross-level analysis

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ABSTRACT

The governance of protected areas has experienced rapid advancement over the last two decades with regard to the inclusion of stakeholders and local communities into the management process. During the same period Greek biodiversity governance has been characterized by a shift, at least on paper, towards the adoption of participatory approaches primarily through the establishment of management agencies. However, this has not been institutionalized for the majority of Natura 2000 sites, thus posing questions on the existence, nature, and effectiveness of participation in sites with no management agency. This is the first conducted large scale, cross level participation analysis for Greek Natura 2000 sites enabling the formation of a representative picture of the situation in the country. We investigated the nature and role of participation in Greek biodiversity governance by exploring both general opinions regarding the national context of participation in Greek Natura 2000 network as well as site-specific opinions regarding three case study areas where Natura 2000 sites have been established. Overall, we analyzed the results of 96 interviews, conducted with national, regional and local level stakeholders and 734 questionnaires conducted with local communities of the three case study areas. Results indicate with non-significant difference among governance levels, or between case study sites, that stakeholders' participation exists mainly on paper whereas community participation is practically absent. Stakeholder engagement seems to take place through administrative documentation across levels and to be locally confined based mainly on personal contacts and initiatives. Interviewees and survey respondents indicated a preference towards improving stakeholders' participation and the community's engagement in the management of Natura 2000 sites. Overall, the results of this study revealed the urgent need for policy initiatives towards adopting meaningful, fair and collaborative two-way forms of participation through the development and implementation of facilitation, participation and engagement guidance and training programs.

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1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, ideas of collaborative approaches and increased stakeholders' participation have been gradually embedded into environmental governance (Berkes, 2009; Reed, 2008; Walker and Hurley, 2004). Collaborative and multilevel

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governance approaches advocate the participation and involvement of a variety of stakeholders and local communities in conservation strategies and policies for the successful management of protected areas (Allendorf, 2007; Borrini-Feyerabend, 1996; Buono et al., 2012; Cihar and Stankova, 2006; Graham et al., 2003; Krott et al., 2000; Liu et al., 2010; Pediaditi et al., 2011). Participation is assumed to result in a range of benefits including increased environmental awareness and knowledge sharing through social learning (Reed, 2008), whereas the failure to incorporate local perceptions to the institutional development of protected areas has been considered to lead to inflexible systems (Glaser et al., 2010). In this paper, participation represents all forms of exchange organised for facilitating the communication between stakeholders regarding a specific decision (Webler and Renn, 1995). As such, participation could be considered as any process that includes everyone who is

contributing in any way to multilevel governance, including the public (Wesselink, 2008).

In the case of the Natura 2000 network, the Habitats Directive (92/43/EEC) implicitly refers to participation and the need for local community involvement in the establishment of the protected sites. However, each Member State is responsible for developing and implementing its own procedures and there are no specific directions on the way that participation, consultation or incorporation of stakeholders and local communities perceptions will take place, while the input from the public is only described as “opinion” (Bouwma et al., 2010). So far, inadequate participation has been described as one of the main factors impeding the effective implementation of the Natura 2000 network and leading to the emergence of multilevel conflicts around the EU (Eben, 2006; Grodzinska-Jurczak and Cent, 2010; Hiedanpää, 2002).

In Greece the designation of the Natura 2000 network has reflected the general top-down administrative, expert-based, and protectionist approach of the Habitats and Birds Directives (Apostolopoulou et al., 2012a; Rauschmayer et al., 2009). This designation process rarely gave to the local people the opportunity to participate, to incorporate their needs, perceptions and interests (Apostolopoulou and Pantis, 2009, 2010; Hovardas and Poirazidis, 2007) or to be informed about the costs and benefits resulting from protected areas designation (Jones et al., 2011).

The last decade an, at least “on paper”, institutional shift towards more collaborative governance approaches has occurred regarding the management of some Natura 2000 sites through the establishment of management agencies, mandatory management plans, and public consultation processes. Greek Law 2742/99 allows for flexibility on the synthesis and membership of these agencies, which theoretically could allow for collaborative governance including representatives from multiple governance levels. Since 1999, 29 management agencies have been established in 94 of the 419 Greek Natura 2000 sites and two official management plans have been adopted. Therefore, the majority of Greek Natura 2000 sites do not have a specific governance mechanism for their management and, given the up-to-date rates of establishment of agencies, they are unlikely to obtain one any time soon. In fact, in the context of the economic crisis, the 29 management agencies have been recently merged to 13. However, decisions on Natura 2000 sites are being taken despite the absence of agencies, which gives rise to the following questions, which we aim to answer in this paper:

1. How does participation occur in the Greek Natura 2000 sites with no management agencies?
2. How do stakeholders acting at different governance levels and local communities perceive participation?
3. What are the main perceived barriers to effective participation?
4. What lessons can be learned and recommendations made for improving participation processes?

2. Research design and methodology

2.1. Research design

The research involves a cross-level analysis with the aim of ensuring input from national level to site-specific stakeholders and local communities, thus obtaining a wider picture of participation in Greek biodiversity governance.

In particular, in order to explore the national context of participation in Greek Natura 2000 sites as well as generic opinions of key stakeholders regarding the nature, scope and effectiveness of

current participation processes we conducted interviews with key stakeholders acting at the wider national level referred to here onwards as generic interviews (see Supporting Information I for details on types of stakeholders).

Our research design also entailed three case studies in areas with established Natura 2000 sites. In particular, we conducted interviews with stakeholders who have decision-making authority or are actively involved in the three sites, referred to here onwards as site-specific interviews (see supporting information I). The case studies also included local community surveys of the residents of the site municipalities (on the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods see also Bouton and Frederick, 2003; Denscombe, 2008 on mixed methodologies).

By combining generic with site-specific interviews as well as community surveys (Table 1), a more holistic analysis was possible given that in multilevel biodiversity governance no single level is likely to be effective alone (Termeer et al., 2010). From the case studies context specific issues and recommendations were identified, whilst with the generic interviews we were able to test their wider applicability.

2.2. Case studies description⁴

The three Natura 2000 case study sites [Chrysi (GR 4320003), Kedrodasos (GR 4340015), Falasarna (GR 4340001)] administratively belong to the Region of Crete and in particular in the municipalities of Ierapetra (Chrysi), Pelekanou and Inahoriou (Kedrodasos) and Kissamos (Falasarna) (Fig. 1). These sites were purposefully selected to be similar regarding their ecological-biophysical context as well as their institutional frameworks, allowing interpreting the potential differences in participation events and particularities. In particular, the three case studies are characterized by the presence of the priority habitat 2250* (coastal dunes with *Juniperus* spp.*, see Supporting Information II). Commonly all sites attract tourism, for their beautiful sandy beaches, and are also remote in relation to the local population. Through the on-site investigations conducted through the LIFE + Junicoast project, the main threats identified to the priority habitat were, restricted natural regeneration, tourism, lack of public awareness, solid waste disposal, fire, wood cutting and grazing.

With regard to their institutional framework all three case studies are similar. They are designated Natura 2000 sites and are also protected by several national laws for their natural and cultural features. In particular, Chrysi and Falasarna are protected by archeological designations, while Kedrodasos and Chrysi also by forest law. The requirements of the Greek environmental law 1650/86 are not being implemented in any of these areas and consequently, all areas lack an official Specific Environmental Study (SES), as well as the Common Ministerial Decision (CMD) and/or Presidential Decree (PD) necessary for the implementation of conservation and management measures. Similarly, the provisions of Greek law 2742/99 on the establishment of management agencies have not been enforced for these areas. However, in the Falasarna Natura 2000 site between 2004 and 2008 two LIFE-Nature projects were implemented covering a part of the site, and there have also been management plans covering part of the area as well as management of specific activities (e.g., tree felling). In Chrysi island EU funded and National projects have taken place in the past, indicatively a management plan has been developed, yet never adopted or implemented.

⁴ For a detailed description of the case studies see Junicoast site (www.junicoast.gr) and PEDIADITI et al. (2009a,b,c).

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