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Governance of Sustainable Tourism in a Vast Area Surrounding a National Park

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Abstract

Policies for governance have become a key question within the sustainability paradigm. Researchers can play an important role in supporting the action of policymakers and responsible agencies involved in managing the sustainability of fragile venues, such as protected areas when pressed for tourism purposes. The Asinara National Park shows the peculiarity to be located in a small and non-inhabited island, close to the big Italian Island of Sardinia. The specific site is a very interesting case study for rethinking the importance of the so called collaborative governance, in comparison to the traditional top-down policy usually adopted in protected areas. The case study well illustrates opportunities and difficulties that the managing agency has to face and, in the same time, cannot avoid, if it will successfully run a governance of sustainability which can be eventually also the motor of the economy of the surrounding neighborhoods. The authors present a possible future local stakeholder partnerships based on structured governance. The findings are in line with the literature debate on how the local governance can be used to support sustainable tourism.

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1. Introduction: Aims, Focus and Research Questions

Protected areas have initially established around the relatively simple concept of large wild areas 'set aside' for protection and enjoyment and then complemented by an increasing emphasis on cultural values. After the 1960s, a

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broad understanding of the need for a systematic approach to resource planning and management arose within the scientific and managing community. The initially need of biodiversity conservation was progressively accompanied by other protected area objectives such as recreation and tourism, for the flourishing tendency for people to want to experience protected environments. Tourism grew in many parks and became a major element in the culture of society, so that tourism and recreation are current management categories in protected area [1]. Even when established by the State and public bodies, being managed by government employees, protected areas are increasingly bringing other stakeholders into the processes of decision-making [2], originating the necessity of paying attention to effectively reach planned goals.

Our paper has origins from a field experience in the Italian National Park of Asinara, located in the northern part of the Italian island of Sardinia. This area, as many other environmentally attractive but fragile destinations, needs a robust sustainable tourism planning in a framework of public/private often diverging goals. The still ongoing research put already in evidence problems and practical difficulties that public managing agencies actually face when designing sustainable tourism policies which want to involve the socio-economic community surrounding the protected area. In the present work, our focus is on the actual possibility to give effectiveness to sustainability policies by promoting collaborative governance among actors located about a protected areas. Thus, the focus of the paper is specified in the following research questions:

(i) Which are the relations between the main stakeholders of the Asinara National Park and those acting in the neighboring areas?

(ii) Are these relations oriented to attain a sustainable tourism?

For the above mentioned purposes, the rest of the text is organized as follows. The second paragraph discusses the distance between rhetoric declarations on sustainability and actual practices and the subsequent necessity for cooperation and governance. The third paragraph describes the methodology; the fourth one describes the area study, namely the Asinara National Park in Sardinia (Italy), and its features. The fifth and sixth paragraphs expose results and discussion respectively. The seventh paragraph reports our concluding considerations and proposals for future research and political decision among alternative possible scenarios.

2. Distance Between Rhetoric of Sustainability and Practices Claims for Governance

The increasing importance of the Travel and Tourism industry has determined many socioeconomic changes in the more developed countries and has become an attractive and an apparently unavoidable option for the economic growth of less developed countries. As tourism continued to increase, however, it became evident that a range of negative impacts was arising both at the national and international level. Many international organizations have produced proposals aiming at designing models of sustainable management and guidelines. A robust literature review on the topic, including protected area case studies, has been made by Cocossis in 2001 [3]. With specific regard to governance, since 1998 the IUCN-International Union for Conservation of Nature has published a set of studies entitled 'Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series' within which the 2014 no 20 issue is properly entitled 'Governance of Protected Areas: From understanding to action' [2]. The title itself underlines the dramatic distance between the willing to understand and the actual capability of effective action, as clearly stated in the concluding remark at the end of the book: 'We should now know what we have to do to conserve life on earth and protect our own future as a species. Yet, too often we fail to act, partly because our governance systems are not yet effective when faced with these global challenges. Could progress in governance at the level of protected area systems and sites perhaps inspire our leaders to step up to the task at the global level?' [2]. The challenge may even be more dramatic when policymakers aim at fostering tourism as the most proper tool for development even in protected areas, enforcing the perception of a clear distance between the rhetoric of ethical declarations of policymakers or common discourse and the operational level of running businesses and governing tourism.

The definition of sustainable development (and tourism) which 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' [4] is fascinating but still intrinsically lacking in meaningful content, because it casts very complicated questions such as 'what is a need?', 'who are

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