



Exploring perceptions on participatory management of NATURA 2000 forest sites in Greece



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ABSTRACT

Several studies in the biodiversity management literature investigate the potential shift from state-based forest management to participatory management frameworks. A main challenge in this context is to identify social factors influencing the level of public acceptability towards co-management frameworks especially in countries where the state has had traditionally a very strong role in the management of natural resources. The present paper aims to investigate the social factors influencing the level of acceptability for participatory management frameworks in two forest protected areas of Greece differing in the date of their establishment: the Tzoumerka–Peristeri–Arachthos Gorge National Park and the Vikos–Aos National Park. Specifically, through the distribution of a structured questionnaire to local communities, we explored the influence of social factors (trust in institutions, social trust and social networks) on citizens' perceptions for a shift in participatory management frameworks. Furthermore, we explore the restriction that citizens perceive from the implementation of such frameworks. According to the study, there is clear preference towards a collaborative management framework which is based on the cooperation of local communities with state actors. Social trust, social networks and institutional trust have a significant impact on citizens' perceptions, especially for collaborative management policies which promote the cooperation of local communities with public actors. Finally, the level of restriction that citizens perceive from each proposed policy is also linked with the level of acceptability.

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1. Introduction

Improving biodiversity management is a main priority in the international field of environmental policy and planning (Rands et al., 2010). Several international policy frameworks have been developed for this purpose, such as the EU Habitat Directive, which are often planned in central level and need to be implemented in a national and local setting (Borrass, 2014). In this context, there is significant discussion in the literature regarding the effectiveness of participatory management frameworks for Protected Areas (PAs) (Berkes, 2004; CBD, 2004; Young et al., 2012) especially in countries with a strong culture of state-based environmental management (Dimitrakopoulos et al., 2010; Randulovic, 2008; Petrova et al., 2009; Petrova, 2014a,b; Cellarius, 2004). This discussion is triggered by a global shift to move from state-based policies to community-based management frameworks (Robson and Kant, 2007; Blomley et al., 2008; UNESCO, 1996). In such frameworks, local communities are encouraged to participate in the management of a protected area involved both in decision-making processes and management activities (Klooster and Masera,

2000) and to collaborate with civil society organizations, private actors and the state (Humphreys, 2006).

The shift to participatory management frameworks is accompanied with significant benefits both for ecosystems and the society (Klooster and Masera, 2000). From an environmental perspective, there is evidence that involvement of a community in the management of a PA can result to a more effective management of biodiversity (e.g. Blomley et al., 2008). This is mainly because participatory management frameworks promote sustainable management practices (Berkes et al., 2003). From a socio-economic perspective, a major benefit is the increase of social acceptability levels for specific protection frameworks (Stoll-Kleemann and Welp, 2008). Furthermore, the application of 'softer' and participatory management tools may assist in local economic development through, for example, eco-tourism activities and minimization of social conflicts (Misra and Kant, 2004; Chowdhury and Koike, 2010; Nuggehalli and Prokopy, 2009; Nayak and Berkes, 2008; Sandstrom and Widmark, 2007; Matose, 2006; Jones et al., 2012a). In addition, participatory management allows the use of local values and knowledge for the management of a specific area of high biodiversity value in combination with scientific information (Berkes, 2004).

Despite the numerous benefits of participatory management for areas of high biodiversity value, its' success depends significantly on

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finding a good balance between state involvement and the level of participation of civil society (Young et al., 2012). Furthermore, the shift towards participatory management frameworks may culminate in a significant challenge as several social factors may obstruct its' application (Jones et al., 2012b). For example, when the level of trust in management institutions is low and the density of social networks in a community is weak, management of natural resources becomes more difficult (Pretty and Smith, 2004). In such social circumstances, no strong common norms exist which could assist members to act in a collective manner in order to protect biodiversity (Jones et al., 2012b). However, it should be noted that facilitation techniques, in order to overcome such difficulties, have been identified, such as role-playing games and agent-based simulations (Briot et al., 2007). Consequently, it is necessary to explore social factors influencing the effectiveness of participatory management frameworks (Berkes, 2004) and it is even more important to identify and explore these social barriers during the policy planning stage (Thomas and Middleton, 2003; Oikonomou et al., 2011).

In this context, the present paper aims to investigate social factors influencing citizens' perceptions on three alternative management scenarios. The research was conducted in order to explore differences on citizen perceptions from state-based to more co-management frameworks and explanatory factors for these perceptions. Regarding the explanatory factors, we focus on three social aspects which have been recently identified as very important for the effective management of natural resources (Pretty, 2003; Jones et al., 2012b; Adger, 2003). These are: trust in institutions, social trust and social networks. Trust in institutions influences communities' perceptions for biodiversity management (Gong et al., 2010). Especially in the context of collaborative frameworks, where local communities have to collaborate with state and non-state actors, the level of trust that local communities have towards these entities will significantly affect the level of cooperation between them. Furthermore, management institutions are usually responsible for the effectiveness of control mechanisms for illegal exploitation of natural resources (Nayak and Berkes, 2008). Thus, weak institutional trust often results in irresponsible environmental behavior obstructing the management of a PA (Jones et al., 2012b). Second, social trust refers to the level of trust which is developed among members of a community (Putnam, 2000). This type of trust is strongly connected to the response of communities in collaborative frameworks (Pretty, 2003; Jones et al., 2012b). When high levels of social trust exist, citizens believe that their fellow citizens will act in a collective manner supporting the common good and promoting environmental responsible behavior (van Laerhoven, 2010; Pretty, 2003). Under such circumstances, citizens tend to be more positive towards collaborative management frameworks. Finally, social networks, refer mainly to the formal and informal organizations which exist in a community (Putnam, 2000). Social networks are important for the flow of information concerning environmental management (Nuggehalli and Prokopy, 2009; Jones et al., 2012a). As a result they influence the level of participation in management frameworks (Djambhuri, 2008), the level of environmental awareness in a community and also environmentally responsible behaviors (Jones et al., 2012b; Cramb, 2005; Wakefield et al., 2006).

In order to explore the role of these factors on citizens' responses to participatory management frameworks, we conducted an empirical study in two forest PAs in Greece. The selection of the specific country was mainly based on the fact that Greece has a strong tradition in managing natural resources in a centralized way (Jones et al., 2012c; Dimitrakopoulos et al., 2010; Papageorgiou and Vogiatzakis, 2006). An attempt to change this trend has been initiated in the past decade as several management authorities for protected areas were created by the national government promoting the participation of different actors, mainly state actors, local authorities, members of NGOs, members of local communities and environmental scientists (Vokou et al., 2014). Despite these efforts the absence of institutional consolidation of

protected areas, the lack of regular funding in order to assist in the management of protected areas along with the lack of support from the state has resulted in the questioning of the effectiveness of the specific policy initiative (Vokou et al., 2014).

2. Methods

2.1. Selection and description of research areas

The Tzoumerka–Peristeri–Arachthos Gorge National Park (Tzoumerka hereafter) and the Vikos–Aos National Park were selected as study areas. Both areas are located in the Pindos mountain range, the largest in size mountain range of Greece. Tzoumerka is located in the central part of Pindos, while Vikos–Aos in the northern part. A main difference between the two areas is their date of establishment: the Vikos–Aos National Park was founded in 1973 (Presidential Decree 213/73, Official Gazette 198/A/73) and since 2005 is part of the Northern Pindos National Park (Joint Ministerial Decision 23069, Official Gazette 639/D/14.6.2005). Tzoumerka was designated as a National Park in 2009 (Official Gazette 49/D/12.02.2009) and had no official protection status before that. Both parks support rich biodiversity (species and habitats) and include many sites of the EU-wide NATURA 2000 network, i.e. Special Areas for Conservation (designated under Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC) and Special Protection Areas (designated under Council Directive 2009/147/EC) (law 3937/2011). In both areas the main activities are agriculture, farming, forestry and recreation. However, in Vikos–Aos eco-tourism activities are more developed (Trakolis, 2001) compared to Tzoumerka.

2.2. Sampling

A questionnaire was created and distributed in the Tzoumerka site in spring–summer 2011 and in the Vikos–Aos area approximately a year later. Regarding the local population, in the Tzoumerka area the final sampling frame was estimated to 10,000 inhabitants living in 10 local mountain communities (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2001). In Vikos–Aos there are three communities which are in the protection zone and another 6 which are close to the park (Papageorgiou and Kassioumis, 2005) with a total population of approximately 850. Due to the absence of official lists of the total population in the local communities we applied a stratified random sampling based on the population of the local communities (Bryman, 2012). The main aim was to select a specific number of questionnaires from local permanent residents from each community of the research areas while taking into consideration the local demographic characteristics available (gender, education and age) (Hellenic Statistical Authority, 2001). In total 367 questionnaires were collected (response rate 70%), 200 from the Tzoumerka site and 167 from the Vikos–Aos area. The characteristics of the sample are presented in Table 1. When comparing these characteristics with those of the actual population these are in

Table 1
Demographic characteristics of the sample.

	Tzoumerka	Vikos–Aos	Total
Educational level (%)			
Up to 6 years	20.6	3.6	12.1
9 years–high school	11.6	16.2	13.7
12 years–secondary	32.2	31.1	31.7
Post-secondary	12.6	10.2	11.5
Higher education	25.1	33.5	29.0
Post-graduate studies	1.5	5.4	3.3
Gender (%)			
Male	66.5	59.3	63.2
Female	33.5	40.7	36.8
Age (mean)	42.7	44.7	43.7
Household members (mean)	4.09	3.76	3.92

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