

Protected Areas as Spaces for Creative (Tourism) Development: The Case of Greece

1. Introduction

Nowadays the protection of the natural environment is one of the main objectives for sustainable planning and development in almost all countries (OECD 2001). The realization that the natural environment is at risk and suffering from ever increasing deterioration led to the emergence of networks of Protected Areas (PAs) - at national and international level - with the aim of protecting not only of endangered species of flora and fauna, but also of protecting natural ecosystems as integrated spatial and environmental entities (Conseil de l'Europe 1998). These areas are protected by legislation and enjoy special management status with a view to their conservation and improvement.

Greece could hardly remain "indifferent" towards the worldwide effort to protect and conserve the natural environment, being a country of rich and remarkable natural heritage. However, in Greece, the protection of nature as an integrated and coherent policy does not have a long tradition. The last ten years, many efforts have been made to formulate such a policy and to elaborate a national action plan in the field of nature conservation and protection. In this respect protected areas become a very important planning tool not only for the natural environment but also for local economy and local sustainable development (Beriatos 2002).

On the other hand, tourism in Greece have played an important role for the national economy and socio-economic development. However there is a fundamental contradiction: Although natural and cultural environment constitutes the main tourism resources of the country, in many cases tourist activities destroy the environment which nourish them. Therefore there is a great need of environmental protection and sustainable development in the light of recent European Community Policy in the field of environment, tourism and recreation activities. More particularly, regarding the areas of ecological and historical value (Protected Areas considered as tourism resources), there is a great possibility of promoting new kinds of environmentally friendly tourist activities.

In view of this trend it is important to investigate the possible sustainable ways of making economic activities compatible with environmental management in protected areas (sites of Natura Network) ie contributing to the integration of development and tourism in local environmental policy and vice-versa. Through land use control, building regulations and other measures an effort is attempted in achieving the goal of conservation of natural habitats and the encouragement of leisure and recreation activities. To this purpose a greater consideration is given to the examination of the existing situation and perspectives of the most important protected areas (mainly national parks) in Greece in order to learn from concrete experiences.

More particularly this paper refers a) to the past and existing situation of the network of protected areas in Greece giving emphasis on the main problems and causes of malfunction and inefficiency characterizing this network as well as to the organizational and socio-political parameters, which influenced this evolution, b) to the recent developments regarding the completion of the institutional framework and especially the scientific, technical and legal procedures required for the creation and the appropriate operation of new administrative structures in the most important sensitive natural areas c) to the role of the newly established managing authorities (law 3044/2002) which could play a constructive role in the environmental management as well as in the economic viability of protected

areas, in the context of a national policy for spatial planning and tourism development in Greece.

2. Planning and management principles

Generally speaking, it could be said that the development of the philosophy (in other words, the ideology) for the protection of nature and the PAs passed through different phases/perceptions during past decades when the environmental awareness was born and spread all over the world. As regards now the management of protected areas, attitudes and views developed also progressively with the passage of time. Protected areas were initially conceived of as a defense mechanism, enjoining strict prohibitions and restrictions and aiming at preserving the most valuable elements of the natural environment (natural reserves). Subsequently, protected areas were touted as a means of protecting the environment with the preservation of biotopes and ecosystems outside production activities, within a context of sustainable development in general and finally as model-areas for comprehensive and integrated sustainable management to serve all contemporary social, economic and cultural needs (IUCN 1994).

Today the prevalent view supports an 'active management' of these areas so as to highlight all their values and functions (ecological, aesthetic, historical, cultural, etc.) without disregarding the aim of protecting them. The necessary condition for this is the establishment of an integrated planning, economic and social policy, within which environmental planning will serve as a catalyst in order to secure its effective implementation. On the basis of such a general "doctrine" one may establish a set of principles or planning objectives, which are required both for the establishment and rational operation of protected areas :

- Achievement of protection through rational use and management with the aim of sustainable development. Therefore the crucial question is not so much whether an area is to be protected, but how. Additionally, in this manner we shake free of the traditional (false) dilemma 'protection or development'. This approach enjoys very wide support, attendant on the international developments in the environmental field, both in philosophical and scientific terms.
- The need to protect all ecosystems, and not only the most important among them, the leading ones (e.g. nature reserves in national parks). Therefore, we must protect ecosystems until recently regarded as insignificant but nevertheless entailing important ecological and other values. Furthermore, so called 'humble' ecosystems can serve as buffer zones for the 'elite' amongst protected areas.
- Networking of protected natural areas. We are forced to include all kinds of protected areas under one single network. In other words we are talking of an intertwined net of protected areas that are networked either spatially through natural 'corridors' or through the collaboration of their managing authorities.
- Integration of local populations and societies in the protection process. In our era we cannot achieve the effective protection of nature unless we take into consideration the consensus of local societies (participatory process). Anyhow, this was demonstrated by the history of the nature protection movement. The question is how is this to be done.
- Self-financing of nature protection. We must examine (and possibly amend) the institutional framework, since protection can be self-financed just as other activities of environmental character are self-financed.
- Interdisciplinary approach (osmosis between different scientific disciplines). We need give and take between scientific disciplines and cooperation between agencies and services. The motto here is "interdisciplinary approach and intersectoral implementation". In this new conception, there is no room for dividing lines between areas of scientific pursuit,

since the achievement of the objectives before us requires the cooperation not only of all specialists but also the collaboration of specialists with laymen.

3. Existing situation: Institutional framework and management problems

Regarding the institutional framework of protected areas in Greece one could say that is still not fully clarified. There are significant areas in respect of nature protection, which are as yet to be secured under special protective legislation, while other areas have been designated protected areas albeit no special measures for their protection have been taken. There are also some ecologically significant areas for which protective measures have been taken though they do not enjoy full legal status as protected areas. Generally speaking, protected areas are acknowledged as such as a result of their being so designated on the basis of existing Greek legislation (Legislative Decree 996/1971 and Law 1650/1986), or as a result of their being so declared by the European Union, within the context of pertinent Community Directives, or as a result of their recognition as such under International Conventions and Treaties ratified by Greece.

More specifically, the main categories of protected areas in Greece are so designated and managed on the basis of forestry acts and especially Legislative Decree 996/1971 (the initial legislation for national parks through which were established the first five national parks was set by the Law 856/37). These areas are distinguished between National Parks (NP), Aesthetic Forests (AF) and Natural Monuments (NM) comprising 118,242 hectares, i.e. 0.90% of Greek territory. There is another category of protected areas enjoying protection under hunting legislation, namely Game Reserves that include 500 Wild Life Shelters (WLS)(refuges), 21 Game Breeding Stations (GBS) and 7 Controlled Hunting Areas (Game Farms-GF), comprising a total of 11,500 hectares. Furthermore, on the basis of the Forest Code and legislation 'on archeological sites' there are two categories yet to be delimited as protected areas: Protection Forests and Natural Beauty Landscapes (Hellenic Ministry of Agriculture 1998).

On the other hand the Institutional law 1650/1986, introduced by the Ministry of the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works, contains a special Chapter regarding "Protection of Nature and Landscape" which codified and modernized previous laws on nature protection issues, in several respects. The act also provides for the future institution of additional classes of protected areas, such as eco-development, marine parks etc. through forthcoming legislation. Two Marine Parks have been designated under this act (North Sporades and Zakynthos), which comprise 110,000 hectares.

In the context of International Law and Community Directives that promote protection of the natural environment, important habitats in Greece have been listed as protected areas, without however their institutional acknowledgment under Greek law. Specifically 11 wetlands have been considered as most significant and meriting protection for their natural diversity, under the RAMSAR Treaty. These wetlands comprise 96,000 hectares. Also, under Directive 79/409/EEC, 26 areas are already listed under Special Protected Areas (SPA), while another 26 have been proposed to the European Union as new areas. Furthermore, under Directive 92/43/EEC (Natura 2000 Network), Greece has selected 236 areas on the national list, which include all the protected areas already mentioned (around 20% of Greek territory).

Table 1. Protected areas (as % of the national territory)

Protected Areas/Major Categories	Percentage (%) of total National territory
Designated NP, AF, NML	0.90 (118 242 H)
Game Reserves WLS,GF, GBS	0.09 (11500 H))
Marine Parks	0.83 (110 000 H)
RAMSAR Areas	0.73 (96 000 H)
Natura 2000 Network (national list of 236 areas)	16.20

Source: Ministry of Environment, Physical Planning & Public Works (2000) and OECD (2000)

According to Legislative Decree 996/1971 (article 3), areas of especial interest, (wild flora and fauna, geo-morphological formations, water resources and other natural values) can be designated as national parks. Their protection must be combined with scientific and research purposes as well as with the fulfillment of social, aesthetic and spiritual needs of the local population and also for sustainable tourism development.

From 1938 to 1974, ten National Parks were designated.(It is worthy to say that mount Olympus, the most famous of Greek mountains, thanks to Greek mythology and history, was designated the first protected area in1938). Five of these parks are composed only by a core area without any peripheral zone. The total area of the cores amounts to 34,378 hectares, while the total area of peripheral zones is 34,354 hectares. It must be must pointed out that according to the Management Projects, the overall size of National Parks is planned to grow significantly and from the current 68,742 hectares (0.52% of national territory) is to reach 196,787 hectares (1.5%).

National Parks are affected by serious management and protection problems. For instance the Forestry Service which is the competent agency par excellence, is faced with serious problems in finding resources, as is evident in its infrastructure deficiencies, its dearth of specialized personnel etc. Besides within the existing institutional framework, there is some manifest confusion and numerous overlaps regarding the responsibilities of the various competent agencies and bodies. This situation is preventing an integrated, coordinated and ultimately efficient management and protection of National parks from emerging, and the same is generally true of nature protection in Greece. The most significant problems and dysfunctions that affect protected areas are insufficient administrative organization of forestry and other competent services, dearth of specialized personnel, significant shortcomings in technical and other infrastructure, lack of participatory procedures, difficulty in getting benefit from available financial resources, obsolete operational rules, regulations and byelaws, lack or inadequate know-how in elaboration of protection and management projects, significant risks and pressures caused by human activities (hunting, grazing, expanding housing), inadequate provision of information and services to tourist visitors etc.

On the other hand the scarcity of new National Park designations for some decades now, is proof of the institutional rigidity and ineffectiveness of the system. It has been aptly pointed out that there are no National Parks in important geographical regions of Greece (East Macedonia, Thrace, Thessaly, Peloponnese), while the most recent designation occurred 25 years ago and important areas are still to be accorded protected status, which under existing pressures poses a serious threat of deterioration.

As an answer to these management problems, the so called Special Managing Authorities (SMA), without being a cure-all, can serve as catalysts for the achievement of the economic and socio-political objectives of an effective policy for protected areas and especially for national parks. In the light of these developments, several efforts have been undertaken, the last five years, in this direction, both at the legislative and financing levels. In fact, within the 3rd Community Support Framework (CSF), a National Master Plan (NMP) regarding the

natural environment was elaborated, which undertakes a first-ever comprehensive treatment of the issue, within the context of which the managing authorities are called upon to fulfill an important role. (Hellenic Ministry of the Environment, Physical Planning and Public Works, 1999) In this Master Plan the sites of the Natura 2000 network have been grouped into 162 protected areas that constitute integrated geographical entities with spatial continuity and contiguity. The geographical distribution of the protected areas – at least of the most important ones is balanced and spans all of the Greek territory (Map 1). Of course the management of all these protected areas requires a certain flexibility in the choice of institutional instruments provided by Greek legislation, as well as in the selection of the suitable type of Managing Authority in accordance with Institutional Law 2742/99, (article 15) the enactment of which filled the void in an explicit manner, as regards Managing Authorities. Finally on the occasion of the Law (3044/2002) on the Transfer of Developments Rights, 25 Managing Authorities of the respective 25 most important Protected Areas are established (directly by the law) that are also prescribed along with others by the National Master Plan. Among these are included all National Parks along with all Wetlands of the Ramsar Treaty.

Map 1 : Master Plan of Protected Areas in Greece



Source: Ministry of Environment, Spatial Planning and Public Works

4. Protected Areas in Relation to Tourism Development. Examples from Greece

Greece and Mediterranean has always been important tourist zone (tourist destination) in quantitative and qualitative terms. More than 60% of Europeans prefer the Mediterranean coastal areas for their vacation (European Commission 2001). Traditionally most of these

tourists (mainly north Europeans and north Americans) head for the western part of the Mediterranean basin. In the past two decades, however, with world and Mediterranean tourism having more than doubled, there has been an increase in the flow to the East Mediterranean, and of course to Greece, where, at the dawn of the 21st century, the annual number of tourists has reached and exceeded the country's population (11 million plus) (Tsartas P. 1998). Indeed, throughout the post war era, with the exception of certain times of political turmoil (e.g. 1967, 1974) there is a manifest trend of ongoing growth, which is however accompanied by great spatial and temporal inequalities (Beriatos 2003). But although tourist activity in the whole Greece, is sharply seasonal and sea shore oriented statistical data and assessments of a more qualitative slant acknowledge that in recent years we have been witnessing the emergence of new models for tourist development. These new ways comprise a broader spatial distribution of tourism from the coast line to the hinterland and particularly in its less developed and unsaturated -but not less interesting – areas.

On the other hand Greece has a variety of natural resources, still 'unexplored' and 'underdeveloped' from a point of view of sustainable tourism development. Among these tourist resources are all kinds of the above mentioned sensitive and protected areas with a great variety of landscapes in a human scale (verdant coves, natural ports, sandy beaches, mountains and valleys). The natural environment in particular is known for its rich fauna and flora, and also for the very good condition, so far, of its habitats and ecosystems and therefore constitutes the main pole of tourist attraction. Besides, the natural environment coexists harmoniously with historical monuments, traditional settlements and architectural heritage. This cultural heritage and local cultural traditions have a corresponding significance though not so much for tourists, who are mainly interested in the natural beauties of the environment. An other point is that although tourist activity in the whole Greece, is sharply seasonal and sea shore oriented (ie concentrated in space and time) statistical data and assessments of a more qualitative slant acknowledge that in recent years we have been witnessing the emergence of new models for tourist development. These new ways comprise a broader spatial distribution of tourism from the coast line to the hinterland and particularly in its less developed and unsaturated -but not less interesting – areas.

However, as it has been said in the introduction, there is no significant link between available natural resources and appropriate tourist activities which means that there is no successful policy so far in the field of a alternative and environmentally friendly tourism in Greece. On the one hand there is a mass tourism development, with no care for the natural and man made environment of the country and on the other hand an old fashioned policy for nature protection, which still follows - in a strict way - the 'don't touch' doctrine for the sensitive and protected areas. Obviously this policy, very often leads to the abandonment and/or destruction of these areas. Besides there is still a lack of Know - how in the sustainable management and the organization of the protected areas.

Among the top 25 protected areas (national parks) only a few of them have been promoted, so far, in a successful way. (It is worthy to say that this success has been possible thanks to local initiatives and to special interest shown by NGOs and not by any action of the national government). These areas are considered as the best examples compared with the PAs of the rest of country and represent different types of ecosystems (mountainous, marine, wetland) They are the following:

PA 1: Marine Park of Zante

This marine park is the habitat of the world-renowned turtle caretta-caretta, Given the unplanned and the uncontrolled development of the sea shore the irreversible deterioration of the biotope was a matter of time. However, thanks to the building regulations and the land

use restrictions enforced by the Presidential Decree which established the National Marine Park of Zante in 1999, there has been a substantial upgrading of the whole situation in the area. Another important measure was the acquisition of 33 hectares of land in the core of the Park, by the NGO WWF – Hellas, which allowed the protection of the biotope and the above mentioned endangered specie of turtles. Later on, after the establishment of the managing authority, the board of directors decided to subscribe the park to a European network of PAs, the ‘Europark Federation’ the members of which are obliged to implement the provisions of the ‘European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas’ a basic document of guiding principles of the European Council for alternative tourism. All these developments had as a result the safeguard and preservation of the biotope and the continuation of its attraction for foreign tourist flows and thus contributing to local economy.

PA 2: Dadia Forest in Thrace

The forest of Dadia in northern Greece is one of the most precious biotopes of Greece where one could meet 43 out of 47 species of wild birds of the whole Europe! The ecological importance of this forest has been presented firstly by WWF International and had as a consequence its designation as Protected Area by a ministerial Decision in 1980. Since 1992 WWF established a permanent local team which played a constructive role in helping and convincing local society to combine forest protection with economic development. Furthermore various projects, elaborated and conducted with the support of European Union, helped all villages of the region to develop important economic activities, including agriculture and eco-tourism (50000 visitors in 2001). An other positive effect is that emigration has been dramatically reduced in all human settlements of the area.

PA3: Samaria Park in Crete

As for Samaria Park in Crete it is necessary to say that this is the only national park that serves as financial resource for all the others. Actually, in the early ‘90s, the administrative authority of this park implementing relevant legislation (Law 2052/92) introduced a system of fees of entrance in the park (ticket). No other national park used the above legislation for self financing purposes. This system had as a result an annual income of about 750000 euros 70% of which were and still are distributed to all National Parks through the ministry of Rural Development. The other 30 % of the amount was given to neighboring local authorities as an incentive. Thanks to a very successful management (on behalf of the forestall services in the beginning and later the managing authority) there has been a flow of visitors, during the last two decades, who paid without complaint the price of ticket fixed each year by the ministry in cooperation with the local authorities of the region.

PA 4: Lake Prespes in Northern Greece (Pamsar Wetland)

In this important wetland of northern Greece designated as national park many years ago, NGO, the Society for the Protection of Prespes (SPP) in order to convince local society to cooperate in the protection of the natural and human values of the region. To this purpose SPP hired a specialized architect who elaborated a study dealing with the methods and techniques of restoring traditional buildings. This study was distributed for free to local population. Besides the architect employed by SPP was available for advising and assisting all inhabitants of the villages around the lakes, in their effort to improve and restore their houses. This SPP itself restored a traditional building according to local architectural patterns in order to use it for its headquarters and as best practice of sustainable management. As a consequence, this house worked as an example to local people and several of them restored their houses in a traditional way and used them for ecotourism purposes (Svoronou E. 2003).

All the above cases show that nature protection can be a unique way for the achievement of the sustainable development of the countryside and not only. These examples also show that there is at least quite a possibility of financing the operation of protected areas and consequently nature protection policy. Of course other means and methods of self financing - except entrance fees- can be used. Among these are: Tickets for entrance to environmental education / information centers or other points where a facility is offered within the PA, sale of articles or goods relative to the PA (such as books, maps, guides, clothing), hiring of the PAs logo for some products or services of quality etc. Also other methods and ways of fund raising can be promoted in order to improve PAs finances as for instance the establishment of associations of PAs friends and/or supporters, the adoption of endangered species of concerned PA, permission of use of the PAs territory under certain conditions etc. In Greece, these tools have not been used –at least to a certain extent – not because of the above mentioned ‘don’t touch’ doctrine but also because of organizational reasons. Thus the presented examples although the best ones in the country, do not constitute comprehensive experiences that can formulate a coherent policy of nature protection in Greece.

5. Conclusions and suggestions

According to what has been said in previous chapters the overall conclusion is that the operation of the protected areas system in Greece is anything but satisfactory in view of significant weaknesses in implementing a modern and integrated management policy. Certainly the recent institutional reforms (L2742/1999 and 3044/2002) for nature protection contributes to the transcendence of significant dysfunctions and opens up a course ahead for an effective promotion of the enhancement of PAs. More specifically the possibility of establishing decentralized Managing Authorities i.e. legal entities with the participation of Central Public Administration, Regional and Local Authorities, Non-Governmental Organizations constitutes, for Greece, a new approach and it is a real challenge to be faced within national planning system for the protection of natural environment. Undoubtedly their introduction in the Greek institutional framework was a turning point for national environmental and spatial planning policy.

Furthermore the development of consensus processes between central and local agencies through their participation in the MAs -without being a panacea -constitutes a fundamental prerequisite for the successful implementation of this policy. A key element for the whole operation is the elaboration of a Special Framework of Spatial Planning and Sustainable Development, referring to the natural (and eventually cultural) heritage and protected areas, in accordance with article 7 of Law 2742/99, in order to enhance coordination and to make the overall nature protection mechanism more consistent and efficient and also provide input for plans and planning process on lower levels.

Protected Areas can actually be transformed into spaces of creative sustainable development in their broader region on condition that a) they will be managed in a creative way b) they will be recognized as tourist destinations par excellence that can contribute to job creation and c) there will be a parallel upgrading of the organizational capacity of the PAs system as well as of the related overall spatial planning system at all levels.

In the context of such a planning policy the recommended fields of action might be: a) the classification of Protected Areas under categories at national, regional and local levels so that they may harmoniously become organic part of the existing administrative structure and b) their horizontal grouping on the basis of geographical proximity (this has already progressed through National Master Plan for the Natural Environment). Strategic guidelines and instructions must be developed not only for launching the institutional and actual establishment of Special Managing Authorities but also in order to ensure their substantial

and continuous operation in the framework of regional development policy supported by the 3rd and 4th Community Support Framework (2001-2006- 2012). It is also necessary to disseminate significant know-how from competent ministries to the local and regional authorities and the SMAs so that they may fulfill their mandate. The objective is a complementary action between center (strategy) and periphery (management and implementation)

As far as tourist development is concerned there is a great need for promoting the unexplored hinterland of current tourist resorts (practically all tourist activity at present in Greece, occurs within a belt ranging in width from half to a maximum of one kilometer from the waterfront while there are mountainous areas of remarkable beauty which tourists never visit) It is needful and feasible to channel coastal tourism towards the interior where there is the majority of all kinds of protected areas, natural habitats, forests, monuments, archaeological sites etc.) There is a great possibility of obtaining substantial financial resources from European Union which sponsors transnational projects especially geared to mountainous areas (Carraud M.-Servoin F. 2001). These projects, which are in the framework of CSF, provide for the promotion of mild and environmentally friendly tourist activities e.g. alternative tourism, ecotourism etc.

An other element is the proper use of secondary accommodation in protected areas which happen to be the countryside's main comparative advantage, and is linked to the specific 'identity' of each region. This of course cannot be accomplished everywhere, nor should it be permitted in the anarchic fashion now prevalent. Nonetheless, it remains as a viable option in certain rural areas, or traditional settlements (using existing historic buildings as the Prespes example), since it is thereby possible to prevent harm to the built and natural environment of the areas in question. For that matter, such is the rationale behind the relevant programs, projects and initiatives in agrotourism and ecotourism that are being promoted by the European Union, e.g. LEADER initiative community, which aims to achieve sustainable forms of tourism and development in rural and sensitive areas. Tourism activities in protected areas contribute not only to the growth of local economy but also to what we could call 'environmentalisation' of tourism which is very important in the process of sustainable development

6. References

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