

Conferencia sobre financiación de áreas protegidas en el Mediterráneo

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Project LIFE Env. SelfPAs – Self-financing Protected Areas

The purpose of this short paper is the presentation of the project SelfPAs (*Self-financing Protected Areas*), co-funded by the European Commission in 2004 under the LIFE-Environment Programme, representing the most important initiative currently ongoing in Italy on the issue of PA financial sustainability. This conference represents the first opportunity for SelfPAs (www.selfpas.it) to disseminate its results at the international level with the aim of providing other PAs in Europe with guidelines, tools, best-practice and guidance on how to improve their financial self-reliance.

The project involves Federparchi (Italian Federation of Protected Areas) as technical assistance Partner and 6 Italian PAs of regional and national importance, namely : Parco Regionale della Maremma in the role of leader and coordinator, Parco Regionale dell'Alcantara, Parco Regionale dell'Adamello-Brenta, Parco Nazionale delle 5 Terre, Parco Regionale del Delta del Po and Parco Nazionale del Vesuvio. The PAs cover most of the Italian territory from north to south and are representative of a wide range of environmental and socio-economic conditions (i.e. coastal areas, mountains, wetlands, volcanoes etc.). These areas were purposely selected with the aim of testing self-financing mechanisms in a variety of contexts to improve the representativity and replicability of results.

SelfPAs primary objective is the improvement of the environmental management potential of Italian Protected Areas (PAs) through the identification, selection and application of self-financing mechanisms. The project will be implemented through a series of parallel experiences conducted in each Partner PA which will undertake the following tasks independently :

1. *Preliminary PA Analysis*, which is currently underway and will be concluded in March 2006, consisting of the review of PAs' current conditions (visitors type, potential and existing services/products, socio-economic context, running costs and revenue generation etc.) to assess their individual self-financing potential
2. *Financing options development & selection*, which be completed by the end of 2006, requiring the identification of tailor made self-financing objectives and mechanisms to be described in detail in a **Business Plan** for each PA
3. *Financing options testing & adoption*, lasting till early 2008, consisting of the full application of the Business Plan and testing of the selected self-financing mechanisms, evaluating the results obtained

At the end of the project (April 2008) all the know-how and experience acquired will be documented in detail to provide PA managers in Italy and Europe with specific tools and best practice guidance on how to develop self-financing mechanism tailored to their needs. In practice, SelfPAs aims at increasing at least by 10% the revenue generation from initiatives, products and services provided by Partner PAs before the end of the project.

The project is still in its very early stages, nevertheless some important elements have already emerged during the past Partners Meetings and can be shared to stimulate the debate on this topic :

- Italian PAs have an accounting systems which is not suitable to the clear identification of costs incurred and revenue generated by service or product (costs centers). This clearly undermines the ability of PAs to evaluate their financial situation and adopt management decisions based on reliable information. This problem might be relevant to many PAs in Europe and beyond. An appropriate accounting system will have to be set-up parallel to the statutory one to avoid this inconvenience. The best way to achieve this will be matter of study during SelfPAs.
- Business Plans should be somehow endorsed by the PA management once developed to guarantee successful implementation. Eventually the Business Plans should be formally integrated in the PA management systems but the best procedure to obtain this result is still unclear and will have to be investigated carefully during SelfPAs to guarantee sustainability of results.
- There is still a certain degree of "resistance" on behalf of decision makers administering PAs at the local and national level to adopt a pro-active approach to self-financing. The origin of this resistance could be cultural, political, institutional or other but it will have to be overcome slowly. The approach that SelfPAs intends to adopt is the use of demonstrative actions to prove that innovative initiatives can be a valid way to increase financial sustainability without compromising PAs environmental conservation mandates.

- PAs full time personnel is generally very limited (generally less than 10 employees) reducing the number of activities that can be promoted and followed up effectively. Clearly the more funds are available the more PAs will be able to acquire the human resources required to invest in new activities. Nevertheless, PAs in Italy are often constrained by national legislation or regulations in the number and type of staff they are allowed to hire.
- PPP (Public Private Partnership) is clearly essential to implement successfully most of the self-financing mechanisms. For this to be possible, the PA developing new goods and services must not be perceived as a competitor by private enterprises operating on its territory.
- There is certainly a large and varied range of local self-financing mechanisms (market-based fees, funds, donations etc.) that could be envisioned which is not currently documented in the scientific literature. There seems to be a need to promote local successful initiatives in a more consistent and coherent manner to stimulate the cross-fertilisation of ideas. SelfPAs is trying to collect all the available information.
- “Bad-practice” or negative experiences go largely under-reported despite their importance for the transfer of know-how being as much, if not more, of that of best-practice. One of the Partners of SelfPAs has recently outsourced all its services with negative results. This clearly does not mean that outsourcing is a mistake for PAs but that adequate provisions have to be made for outsourcing to be successful. This “bad-practice” experience will be useful to highlight which mistakes should be avoided.
- PAs do not live in isolation but are nested into complex territories with their strong contradictions and competition for resources. In many cases, PAs tend to undergo considerable pressure from users of different nature (local institutions, tourists etc.) demanding something off them without the opportunity to choose which requests they should satisfy. PAs need to try to reverse this trend by “colonizing” the territory around them and start controlling, or at least influencing, the type of demand to which they are exposed.
- Many PAs seem to be adopting a two tiered approach where 90% of users are carefully channeled through the park’s main attractions in a superficial manner to satisfy the “unsophisticated” demand of the average visitor. The remaining 10%, represented by the more “sophisticated” visitor (i.e. birdwatcher, hiker, photographer etc.), is offered a series of more tailored opportunities to enjoy natural and cultural resources. In financial terms, the sophisticated 10% seems to be the preferable target of most PAs as they have a limited impact (because of their limited number and of their high level of environmental awareness) but are ready to spend considerable sums to satisfy their specific demands for nature.
- PAs need to invest in the services they provide both directly and indirectly. If users perceive clearly the services provided by PAs (which is not often the case), they will be more motivated to support their activities financially or in other forms (e.g. volunteers etc.).
- PA visitors interviewed in Partner PAs believe that PAs should be mainly funded with public funds by the central or local government but are willing to spend money for entrance tickets to PAs and or donate money in other forms in return for specific services provided by the PA.
- Most people interviewed have confirmed that they would be willing to earmark part of their taxes in their tax declarations to environmental protection if this was possible.

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