

High monetary land value and non-consultation with locals as major problems for implementing a “protected area” regime in potential tourism destinations, Akamas area - CY

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE ECONOMIC GROWTH: Balancing economic, social, cultural development whilst enhancing environment

2. Key Approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Knowledge-based
- Ecosystems based approach
- Socio-economic
- Technical

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

In the Mediterranean tourist coastal areas, locals (and land owners) often support massive coastal tourist development, since coastal land will have a maximum value. Sustainable alternatives are usually insufficiently supported, in terms of infrastructure and reciprocal benefits. Locals can not be expected to act in a sustainable way, when they live in a non-sustainable system, with not always “fair” development decisions, without providing them with efficient and fair development alternatives and a well structured public participation scheme.

4. Overview of the case

Akamas Peninsula in Pafos District is a very important area regarding its ecological and environmental value. 12 villages with appr 1,800 inhabitants are located in this area. Since the early 1980's, when tourism development went massive in the entire island of Cyprus, the government tried, and still tries, to “protect” this important area from uncontrolled development: a large part of the area is, since 30 years, under a temporary “development banning” regime, the well known “white zone regime”. Several unsuccessful efforts have been made to find a solution to the problem of “how to protect Akamas” and several conflicts (some severe ones) among the locals and the authorities have occurred. Several international organisations have been involved, unsuccessfully, until now. Decision-makers are reluctant to impose any protection regime without the acceptance of locals. However there is not a clear policy or a stable approach by the decision-makers. The “Akamas issue” is an unsolved and everlasting pending issue.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

The Akamas peninsula, covers about 230 km² and is located on the western tip of Cyprus. It is an area of great natural beauty unaffected by development. The uniqueness of the area for Cyprus, and for the whole of the Mediterranean, is centred on its precious ecology. The diversity of flora and fauna living in this relatively small area is truly impressive, e.g. out of a total of 128 endemic plant species of Cyprus, 39 are found in the Akamas peninsula. The history of the area is important and long: archaeological areas and ruins ageing from 3000 BC are scattered in the area. A vitally important characteristic of this peninsula is its beaches. Akamas is the last large unspoiled coastal area remaining in Cyprus and one of the very few

important sea turtle nesting areas in the Mediterranean. Despite all of this, the locals, who are the owners of the coastal land, would like to have the same future as other areas of Cyprus: become a tourist destination, develop massive tourism and be rich in no time. The conflict among government, NGOs and the locals has been an issue for 30 years, when the first protection plan was prepared. Since then, the area is under a temporary no-development regime. But 30 years of pending development decisions is a long time and a reason for continuous conflicts. There is much at stake in the area.

b) Objectives

The objective is to find a scheme that will protect the precious Akamas peninsula and at the same time satisfy the development expectations of the locals.

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Management

The authority responsible for the management and the development of the area is the Ministry of Interior.

b) ICZM tools

Several efforts have taken place during the last 30 years for implementing a management plan for the Conservation of the Akamas Peninsula. Most important are:

- July 1992, the Government requested the preparation of the Akamas Conservation Management Plan by METAP. The Plan was conducted by a team of specialists with the World Bank, EU and UNDP funding.
- July 1993, the government decided to freeze development in the core of the Akamas Peninsula, including the area around the turtle nesting sites, declaring it a "white zone" (while the World Bank conservation management study was under preparation)
- In 1996, the World Bank/EU Report was made available to the public. The main idea of this Management plan was to implement the "biosphere reserve", providing sufficient reciprocal benefits to the local population. However the report was available only in English, the locals could not even read it and there was no public participation throughout the preparation of the Plan. So, the locals resisted severely and the Plan was not implemented.
- In 1997, the Standing Committee of the Bern Convention on European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (Council of Europe) issued its Recommendation (no. 63) to the Republic of Cyprus which proposed ten recommendations for the protection of the Peninsula. These included the declaration of the Peninsula as a national park, the abolition of the tourist zone near Toxefra beach etc. All recommendations remain unimplemented.

7. Cost and resources

The cost of the "Akamas" issue is huge: a non-implemented series of studies and management plans, courts, illegal developments etc.

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

None of the efforts to prepare and implement a Management Plan for the Akamas Peninsula was ever implemented.

9. Success and Fail factors

Until now, the efforts for implementing any kind of management plan in the Akamas peninsula was an absolute failure. The main reason is that on the one hand the area has a high monetary value as a potential coastal tourism destination and on the other the efforts for protection, for a long time, ignored the interests of the locals. To summarise, the most important reasons for this failure have been:

- The decision makers and the experts that carried out studies during the 1980s - 90s were not honest with people and realistic in expectations. They ignored or underestimated the fact that the coastal zone, especially in the tourist Mediterranean, is an area of high interest and high monetary value. They just asked the locals to sacrifice their future, without being clear and concrete on the reciprocal benefits.
- Public participation was not effectively implemented: the locals did not participate in any crucial stage of the Management Plans that have been prepared. So they resisted. Public participation requires commitment and a well structured long term strategy supported by the Authorities, i.e. resources available to locals (financial, human), public access to necessary tools and information and support to be able to cope with complicated studies (e.g. provide technical support to the small communities of Akamas). This was not the case in the Akamas area where the locals had to find out for themselves what was in the complicated studies and how the decision-making processes worked.
- People did not trust the decision-making process and the operability of the legal framework. Corruption, bureaucracy and the very slow process of justice discouraged people from trusting the decision-makers.

10. Unforeseen outcomes

Development in the core of Akamas has been frozen for 30 years ago. However, now and then, there are some “relaxations” in providing development permits to developers and hoteliers. In the last 20 years, hotels and tourist villas have been constructed in parts of the Akamas that belonged to “big” developers and that should otherwise be protected. Now these developments enjoy and “sell” their unique environment: their privilege to be constructed in a protected area, since development is still frozen in the rest of the area!! It is a big challenge as to how to treat this problem within an ICZM approach.

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13. Sources

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