

Minutes Workshop

Sustainable Development in Lake Areas: Empowering Local Initiatives and Civil Society

21 - 26 September 2010

Keramoti, Greece

Specific Workshop Objectives:

- *To further exchange experiences about different participatory implementation strategies by the participating partners*
- *To strengthen the relations between the organisations and partners of the first 3 workshops, leading to common projects on conservation and sustainable development*
- *To boost the sustainable development process in the Nestos National Park through publicizing the procedures and results of this workshop.*

Workshop Day I:

Overall situation & Stakeholder participation in Greece

The 4th workshop started with a welcome of hosts & regional authorities:

Dr. Manos Koutrakis, President of Management Agency Nestos – Vistonis - Ismarida National Park;

Grigoris Triandafillidis, Mayor of Keramoti;

Savvas Michaelidis, Mayor of Hrysoupolis, Board Member of National Park;

Georgos Kardaras, President of Fishermens Cooperative;

Lasaros Kirkasiadis, President of EPO.

The workshop programme and objectives were presented by Dr. Tillmann Stottele, Global Nature Fund, and Dr. Titus Bahner, Forum Synergies.

The overall situation in Greece, specific problems and possible solutions were illustrated with some examples given by local representatives.

Dr. Manos Koutrakis, President of **Management Agency Nestos-Vistonis-Ismarida National Park**, presented the management structure of the National Park.

The National Park is a completely public body being financed by the Ministry of Environment. It successfully cooperates with different NGOs in the area. The work of the National Park focuses on cooperation with both private and public organisations. The National Park authorities try to persuade the public authorities that bettering economic situation in a sustainable way is only possible by taking into account environmental aspects; moreover, it is possible to generate income from environmental activities, e.g. sustainable tourism.

The National Park employs 7 people. Their main tasks are patrol and observation; consultation of public authorities on contacts in the field of environmental protection and nature conservation.

Mr. Georgios Sylaios from **Department of Environmental Engineering** of the **Democritus University of Thrace** presented the situation on Mediterranean Lagoons. As main problems connected with fisheries he mentioned:

- Activities of the fishermen cooperative changing the natural lagoon environment
- Building activities (houses are being built very close to the lagoons)
- Changes in the lagoons made by man

The situation of Nestos is being aggravated by a high dependence on salinity grade, water temperature and exchange of salty and fresh water.

Prof. Dr. Vassilios Tsihrintzis from the **Democritus University of Thrace** explained the research and experiences working on technical wetlands to solve water quality problems in Greece.

In the afternoon an excursion to the freshwater lakes near Hrysoupolis took place. The results of EPO's Life Actions were presented by Hans Jerrentrup from EPO. The workshop participants had also the opportunity to visit the EPO-Centre for environmental education in Avramilia.

Rotary Club of Kavala: podium discussion with workshop participants

In the evening a **podium discussion** took place by the **Rotary Club of Kavala**. Representatives from authorities, science, fisheries and environment discussed the opportunities of sustainable development of lake regions; the local media attended the meeting. Several questions concerning the ecological and economic development of the region were touched upon:

- *What are the main ecological and economic challenges for Kavala nowadays?*
Environmental education, especially for younger generation: The problem is that when growing up, teenagers change their mind and concentrate mainly on activities bringing income without consulting environmental aspects.
An important task for Greek government is to combine the Greek environmental legislation with the European one. It is necessary to re-discover the inner part of the country using and developing existing opportunities like sustainable tourism, fishing tourism etc. for new economic chances.
- *What about actual (daily) importance of environmental education?*
Unfortunately environmental education is not a "big" issue in Greece, only in case of an accident. The term "environmental protection" is often being used as a counter-argument to economic development.
The discussion on environmental education is quite a new issue in Kavala and in the whole country. People tend to a negative thinking towards environmental protection: nobody can imagine economic development proceeding parallel to it.
On the other hand, there are already some positive developments: plans for a big oil refinery had been abandoned because of general protests.
- *At the moment the situation is quite complicated: economic and environmental crisis – how does it influence Kavala?*

The country is in a difficult situation, but if there are challenges, there are new opportunities: for instance, photovoltaic energy is one of possible sustainable solutions for people wanting to save money.

- *In times of crisis Greece got more dependent on EU-funding and needs to constantly prove what is happening in the country, if the things are becoming better. How is the influence the EU-standards on Greece, esp. on the region of Kavala?*

Greece has been in the EU for many years, European environmental standards have strongly influenced the country which is now dependent on European funds for development of new environmental opportunities.

- *How powerful is an official paper?*

Because of a high level of bureaucracy, sometimes the implementation of environmental standards is difficult (e.g. recycling), the general acceptance of such kind of papers is very low.

- *Where do you see the opportunity for development of your region?*

- * Implementing European environmental legislation is a chance for Greece and for the Kavala region in particular: both forcing and convincing people. Even the penalty regulations force cities & citizens to review their behaviour (e.g. 40.000 EUR for default in installation of recycling plants).
- * Several European networks give towns a great opportunity to receive funds for saving-energy measures.
- * Implementing environmental projects allows us to make our cities more attractive for visitors and to enhance sustainable tourism in the area.

- *Reflection from outside: Jaanika Kaljuvee, the representative of Lake Võrtsjärv Foundation (LVF)*

It is very important, to take care of environmental education, especially for the youngest generation. LVF is a winner of the European Destination of Excellence-Award in eco-tourism & eco fishery traditions, it could be a chance for Greece: to implement sustainable fishing methods & ecological food production.

Final statement: What is the main thing politicians should take into account?

- * We have to change people's mind through environmental education, organisation of seminars, and explaining by vivid examples but not speaking theoretically.
- * We must teach ourselves & our children to protect the environment both for nature conservation and avoiding penalties.
- * We have to develop recycling systems. Nowadays, batteries and machinery are already being recycled, but we still have to work on a system for glass and plastic.
- * Cooperation between different stakeholders is of a great importance.
- * We should promote advantages of environmental activities for economy.

Workshop Day II: Participatory Development Options - European Experiences

To reflect the first workshop day as well as the podium discussion, a role play in form of an interview was conducted by the moderators: international workshop participants had to interview the representatives of Greek side:

What is about environmental awareness of people/authorities?

It depends on the region in Greece. Among children the level of environmental awareness is very high, but when they grow, they concentrate mostly on profit.

Why had the importance of receiving funds been stressed so much during the podium discussion? We have to try to protect nature also without having money.

Like in other countries, people protecting nature in Greece are a kind of “romantic”, they do not need money, do not think of money. The problem are bad politics when authorities prefer just to give money and to look for easy solutions. Such people do not love nature, they have to work and they are just doing their job. Moreover, many people had moved to north eastern Greece from Turkey after WW I. They do not feel bound to the region that is why they often do not care of nature.

There is a lot of plans/regulations/a National Park in the region. How are the employees? Where are the rangers & tourist guides?

Within the National Park there are no rangers or guides.

Do you think that the structure in Greece (enough people, correspondent decision-processes) is sufficient to guarantee the implementation of environmental education, environmental plans etc.?

There is lack of people. But the main problem is the absence of will to do it, the lack of political willingness. The NGOs are being accepted, but not really as an important partner. There are very good people working with NGOs, but political pressure on them is too strong and comes from different directions complicating their willingness to support the NGOs. The media are “playing” on the side of the government.

Ideally, NGOs should play a role of a “service-provider” for the government.

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * There are agricultural & environmental development schemes but money-oriented * Strong environmental awareness among young children * Improvement of local stakeholders consultation over last 5 years 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> * There is not much awareness among general population * Environmental protection comes down to money * “Romantic” environmentalists are seeing to be apart from people * Bad politics offer “easy” solutions * Migration from countryside to town * Some population is not indigenous, so not bound to land * Poor agricultural practices * Lack of cooperative solutions * NGOs under pressure * Government favours “big”, not well-

	thought-through projects * National Park has no regulators
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Strengths & Weaknesses of the Greek system, completed by Gwilym Wren

After the interview reflexion some Europe-wide examples of agri-environmental measures, extensivation of land use and restoration of habitats were presented by workshop participants:

- * Radostina Tzenova:
Restoration of Bourgas Wetlands, Bulgaria
- * Roman Guziak, Stowarzyszenie Ekologiczne Etna:
Habitat Revitalisation in Poland
- * Dr. Nedim Özdemir, Muğla University, Fishing Faculty:
Present Situation of Environmental Problems in the Protected Basin of Köyceğiz Lagoon and Protection Strategies
- * Dr. Karen Ross, Wilderness Foundation:
Stakeholder involvement in lake preservation in Botswana

The international workshop participants also gave some practical examples, how to involve local stakeholders into management of lakes and wetlands as well as how to implement the international and European legal framework for conservation and sustainable development:

- * Ventsislav Vassilev, Bulgarian Biodiversity Foundation:
Stakeholder Involvement into Implementation of the Water Framework Directive in Bulgaria
- * Ilias Michaelidis, Riverland:
Sustainable tourism in protected areas.

In between the presentations, the workshop group visited installations and cooperative of the fishermen in Keramoti. The fishermen explained the functioning of their cooperative and invited the group to a lunch at the harbour with grilled local fish and Greek salad.

In the afternoon 3 further presentations were made to illustrate the NGOs and stakeholder participation in different lake regions:

- * Nenad Nikolic, Council of the local community Tomaševac, Serbia
Local authority and stakeholder involvement
- * Margit Saere, Lake Peipsi Foundation
Stakeholder involvement on transboundary Lake Peipsi (Estonia - Russia)
- * Gwilym Wren, Milverton Parish Council / Natural, UK
Protected site management involving NGOs

Common project ideas to be developed

In continuation of development of common project proposals started during the 3rd workshop in Slovenia, participants were asked, how can the project ideas become “functional projects”? Who will do what? How can we set up reasonable financing of the projects? Working in groups, they tried to re-work the proposals and presented the results to the group.

The summaries of the working groups are attached.

Workshop Day III: The Case for European Cooperation

The day started with a presentation about the **implementation of the 4th LEADER Programme in Greece** made by Mr. Achilleas Karagiosopoulos, President of LEADER-Development Company. He participated in implementation of three previous programmes.

Mr. Achilleas stressed that at the moment ecological production is being supported in Greece. Mostly it is fruit and vegetables production, the situation with milk and meat producers is more complicated.

Greece is now beginning to be on the way to more use of renewable energies increasing wind energy and photovoltaic, a number of small dams is planned Originally turf was the traditional material for energy production.

The LEADER-programme started in 2010. The programme will be implemented in 2010-2015. There are different focuses:

- "Classic" LEADER
- Focus on fishery activities
- Focus on agricultural development & protection of agricultural environment (cultural activities, processing of products, participation of civil society)

In total it is planned to invest about 20 Mio EUR into the programme implementation. In November the first documents are expected to be published. LEADER will be eligible for all over the area here, also for minorities. In this particular area agro tourism will be supported, small business that develop processing agricultural products, cultural activities etc. On the island of Thassos and in Keramoti for the first time fisheries will be promoted.

Basing on his experience during 3 previous LEADER-programme periods, Mr. Achilleas Karagiosopoulos emphasized that a lot had already happened: nice stone made bridges, houses, old water mills, possibilities to visit these sites; but there are still difficulties. So, farmers don't really realise the advantages of the programme. He stressed that he is open for cooperation: as some workshop participants have a lot of experience in working on LEADER, we could for instance establish a Network if there is will on their side. He also stressed that the responsible institutions will find the right people to carry out the LEADER Programme.

Concerning **organic farming**, Mr. Achilleas Karagiosopoulos pointed out his belief that agricultural support is wasted money. All "organic" producers will stop farming as soon as the subsidies stop. There are no consumers who want to buy this kind of products.

The only opportunity will be olive oil from the Island of Thassos. Most of organic farmers don't work full time; they are mostly retired people, former university professors, focusing on a "garden" kind of agriculture. But there is also a number of certified farmers producing Kiwi, Asparagus etc.

Current problems to be solved: Get rid of nitrogen in the fields; develop a strategy for economic migration from the neighbouring countries (Bulgaria, FYROM, Poland). People coming from these countries are an important element in agricultural development of the region. There is a very fast change happening in the agricultural population: 60 % => 8%, a lot of structural changes are happening, large areas are being rented as rice farms. At the moment Greece is rather a tourism oriented country, than an agricultural. But: Tourism should not be a monoculture, there is also need for people in the countryside.

Dr. Titus Bahner presented the current EU policy context and the actual reform debate of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). Forum Synergies co-organizes the "Agricultural and Rural Convention" (www.arc2020.eu) to formulate a coherent message from civil society towards the CAP reform discussion.

Mr. Achilleas Karagiosopoulos answered some questions related to the role of NGOs:

Do NGOs play a big role in the implementation of the programme?

Certainly. we organize ourselves and try to interfere into the politics. The current Prime Minister of Greece has a great affinity for NGOs, so their role is growing. We are influenced by consumer organisations and environmentalists.

What could be the role of NGOs in this particular area? GNF has been cooperating with EPO for years and we have an impression that its potential is not being fully used.

We have corporative background, we follow things happening in Brussels, we are interested in the support of food production. Our organisation is working on participatory processes, mainly with farmer organisations. We also try to bring our proposals to the EU-Commission in Brussels. We support NGOs, we are aware of EPO's activities, and try to support the organisation, but it works mostly in an ethical, not financial way.

The answer was commented by a representative of a Greek consumer organisation: The truth in Greece is that different stakeholders do not hear to each other.

A special emphasis on this 4th workshop was to derive a "political message" from the workshops and participants' case studies so far. This part of the workshop concept had remained somewhat in the shadow during the past events. So the third day was dedicated to politics: How can national and EU policies support local actors to take up the challenge of sustainable development?

In this context a more detailed review of the relations between local administration and civil society groups in the participants' projects was conducted. Reflecting the experiences of the preceding workshops was done in the light of the following systematic structure proposed by moderator Titus Bahner (as example):

The Role of NGOs and Administration:

Bourgas Wetlands, BG

	Administration	NGO paid by public money	NGO paid by priv. money	NGO unpaid
1 propose protected area		X		
2 define protection status	X			
3 organize stakeholder consultation		X		
4 defend protection politically				
5 organize scientific base		X		
6 write management plan		X		
7 enforce management plan	X	X		
8 monitor habitats	X	X		
9 restore / manage habitats	X	X	X	
10 control land use, tourism, ...		X	X	
11 communicate to win farmers / fishermen		X		
12 communicate to win local support		X		
13 raise funds		X		
14 initiate sust.dev projects				X
15 organize sust.dev. projects				
labeling projects				
tourism infrastructure		X	X	
large public event		X		
others				

The evaluation of several experiences – from Greece, Bulgaria, Poland, England, Estonia and even Botswana – led to the result that NGOs and civil society groups in almost all case studies played a significant role in implementing habitat protection, even if governments were legally entirely responsible. Activities were carried out from the very beginning of protective measures until the development of accompanying initiatives of integrated sustainable development. However, NGOs are rarely put in a responsible position by local administrations to do so.

On this basis we unanimously elaborated a "Declaration of Keramoti" as a summarizing political message from the findings of the "Sustainable Development in Lake Areas" workshops. The message was that

- NGOs play a crucial role in implementing EU conservation directives by their initiative, expertise and communication skills.
- But this work often relies on unstable structures, mainly due to temporary funding. Usually most of it, including highly qualified expertise, is voluntary and unpaid work.
- The potential of NGO contributions in the implementation of EU and national conservation policies is far greater than actually practiced.
- To realize this potential we need a better recognition of the role of NGOs in policy implementation; capacity building both for NGOs and local administrations; increased legal opportunities in national regulations to allow delegation of specific responsibilities to NGOs; and also financial support to maintain permanent structures. This support should be accessible by simplified procedures.

The declaration was signed by the participants and later put on the ARC website (in the context of a "nature 2000" thematic group). It influenced the final ARC declaration which was presented on 17 November 2010 to the EU commission..

Workshop Evaluation and Next Steps

What are you taking home from Keramoti?

Greece:

- Politicians are making politics, they are not going to change themselves. We have to spread our ideas among more people to gain the majority, then politicians will take them into account.
- This meeting helps to demonstrate to the decision makers that people from other countries are doing something, that lobby is taking place
- Greek activists will go to each new selected mayor to present themselves, their ideas, and the results of such meeting, hoping that they will be heard
- We've got the knowledge of all participants and have to use it
- (Hans) It is difficult to collaborate with politicians being a local NGO. So, we did involve Greenpeace to start a court process against pollution of Nestos river, not because we are weak but because we do not want personal confrontation. But the situation is changing: the Ministry of Environment is going now in a right direction, but we can not be sure that the direction continues if there will be any changes in the government. At the moment schools want to visit National Park, but there is no offer for environmental education activities, the mayor of Kavala can not support the activities in Keramoti because it is another county. An EU-application is running at the moment and gives hope. IUCN do not support EU-countries and can not sponsor any projects in Greece. 1990 – 2000 EPO run the Info-Centre, but it was closed because of lack of financing.

Comment of participants: a new environment education-offer should be developed by NGOs – Polish & Hungarian participants have a lot of experiences they can share. It is important to develop new educational methods which will make the proposal more interesting for potential sponsors; you just have to make concrete proposals.

- (Gwil) We need to show concrete experiences in concrete areas to convince people (e.g. organic agriculture)
- (Bulgarian colleagues) We face the same difficulties like our Greek colleagues
- (Croatia): The problem is that people try to fight on both sides: “I am the best protectionist” and “I am the best farmer”, they have to search for compromises, look for collaboration opportunities.

The workshop was concluded with a common field trip to Nestos riparian forest area and to the lagoons of Nestos Delta.

All the presentations can be downloaded on the webpage of Global Nature Fund <http://www.globalnature.org/development-lake-areas>.