

Theme 2: Ecological Restoration and policy

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An innovative approach to mitigate the conflicts between local communities and park management to favour long-term conservation of grasslands in Gran Sasso Laga National Park

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1. Introduction

Our Park is a public body, with financial autonomy, planning ability and a very strong decision-making power. The experiences made by the Gran Sasso national park in the past LIFE EX-TRA Project (LIFE07NAT/IT/502) has shown that traditional technical, legal and economic measures alone are not sufficient to mitigate the conflicts between conservation polices and local communities.

These insights encouraged us allowed to apply an innovative methodology in order to manage the conflicts observed during cooperation procedures, negotiation procedures and mitigation of conflicts, through specifically planned meetings between institutional and non-institutional actors, mediated by facilitators. These meetings led to common and shared solutions, which took into account investments and direct interventions on the ground.

In our protected area the first action (2009-2010) to apply an innovative methodology was the stakeholder analysis of conflict and attitudes carried out in the Life EX-TRA project. The analysis drew attention on the presence of tensions and situations creating complex conflicts, while showing a degree of consensus and positive attitudes toward the large carnivores issue.

The social and territorial research carried out in the national park has shed a light on the roles and attitudes of the different involved stakeholders categories, as well as on many different points of view, dissimilar positions and interests between all involved parties, including the park administration. The understanding of these divergences has been the starting point of a process that aimed at the common search of solutions for conservation in cooperation with all involved parties.

In particular, today this process continues not only within other activities, but also in the frame of the LIFE Praterie Project, which aims at reaching the following goal: The long-term conservation of grasslands and pastures in the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga National Park, by encouraging good pasture practice and a more sustainable utilization of the precious habitats of the Park.

This also involves a specific concrete action: some consultation activities aimed at the optimization of pasture management in order to restore the priority habitat 6210*, 6230*, 5130

The LIFE Praterie project is currently involving many stakeholders categories in order to commonly develop community regulations for pasture management, as a tool of long-term conservation of grasslands.

2. The social and territorial research: theoretical and methodological framework

The theoretical base of the research is the “environmental governance¹”; it is composed by the analysis and comprehension of the power dynamics between stakeholders.

¹ Governance is the framework of social and economic systems and legal and political structures through which humanity manages itself" World Humanity Action Trust (WHAT), 2000.

We referred to a particular type of governance, related to the coordination methods of local actions, in which a plurality of actors operate on a given area, each one having decision-making power (Lewis & al. 2003, Turco 2009a). These powers are far from being well-defined, but are often intertwined. Furthermore, they are not solely based on legislation, but also on cultural heritage and informal social arrangements. In this perspective the spatially defined approach that was applied gives a significant contribution to environmental conflict prevention and management (Faggi & Turco, 2001) since it involves shared planning in a bottom-up negotiation approach.

The phase of the preliminary stakeholder assessment phase was followed by the application of a methodology that aimed at the management of conflicts through negotiation with local stakeholders and participatory planning.

In a protected area, an inclusive decision-making process starts with the combination of two key factors: Environmental Protection and Local Development, based upon three theoretical cornerstones:

- ENVIRONMENTAL GOVERNANCE: as a way of interaction among the different institutional and non-institutional levels, Co-management between local development and conservation
- TERRITORIAL APPROACH: The territorial peculiarities have to be taken into consideration (as regards the analysis of environmental conflicts and the encouragement of participatory process)
- CONSENSUS BUILDING PROCESS: through the best practice (microproject programmes)

Within the different Projects (Life Ex-tra and Praterie), we used this theoretical framework in order to develop more and more specific actions aiming at the implementation of the following steps:

- identification and analysis of the stakeholders
- implementation of the adequate methods of participatory management, of negotiation and consultation (inclusive process)
- verification and assessment of the project

In general, the key element of the Human Dimension (research method and participatory management programs moving from people's attitude towards the conservation issue) is the creation of new communication channels between institutions and local communities. These communication channels were developed during the projects toward a common objective: to mitigate conflicts and to assess and to manage the experienced tensions without interrupting the interaction process. So, even beyond the projects, all the partners, at different levels, will not stop this process that now seems irreversible.

The strategy of LIFE+ Community Program takes into the right consideration the stakeholders' awareness and active participation.

2.1 Identification of the stakeholders according to the concentric zone model

This inclusive process began with the construction of a “Map of Actors” (fig. 1) (Turco 2009b), a tool that identifies three typologies of persons and bodies that are at various levels affected (positively or negatively) by the addressed issue. Each of them is characterized by their territory of origin, their different profiles, issues and strategies.

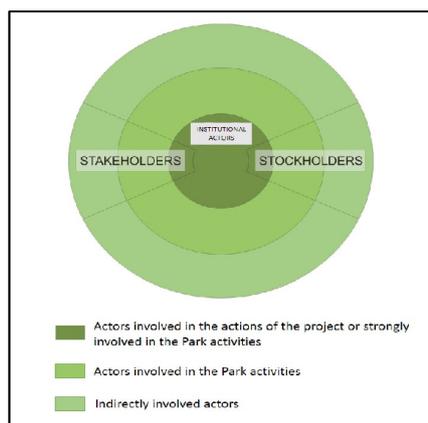


Fig. 1. Classification of actors identified in the stakeholder analysis carried out in the three involved National Parks in Italy in the LIFE EX-TRA Project, 2009.

- **Institutional actors:** institutions and functional agencies empowered by law, with specific profiles and tasks.

- **Stakeholders:** private and public bearers of interests. Their point of view can contribute to conservation and to create consensus around the undertaken actions. This group includes livestock raisers, hunters, veterinarians, foresters, persons involved in local tourism et cetera. Stakeholders are selected on the basis of their representation (boards and institutions, associations), their effective presence on the ground, and the fact that they have something to say about the addressed issue (Bobbio 2004).

- **Stockholders:** a special category of stakeholders, who are interested in investing in specific tasks of a project or issue, in order to make a profit (tourist operators, farmers, construction companies), or for image strategies (biotechnological industries, green business). They can have direct interests (investors) or indirect ones (sponsors).

Such a map of actors functions as a tool to briefly communicate the specific situation in one particular moment, but it can be integrated and modified over time.

The actors are also divided according to the level of their involvement in the targeted issue (Faggi & Turco 2001).

- **The first circle** (core actors) included all the institutional actors as well as the stakeholders and stockholders who were closely and directly involved in the addressed issues

- **The second circle** included interest groups that were less strongly involved in the addressed issues

- **The third circle** included only those actors who were indirectly affected by the addressed issues

The construction of a map of actors has been a first important step in order to identify all people and groups to be involved more or less intensively in the following steps.

2.2 Territorial analysis of the stakeholders

The analysis is essential in order to identify and understand the different levels of tensions and conflicts (which are the issues? Who are the actors involved? What is the involved timing?) and in order to use the most suitable participatory ways (atelier, open space technology, workshop, etc).

In the frame of the analysis we used the “**3-stage methodology**” (Turco 2009a), in which the conflict dynamics were divided into three stages, each of which requires specific management interventions. In all three stages, interventions and specific behaviour can cause a decrease of the conflict level or an increase. If the conflict level strongly increases it develops into the next step:

1. An initial disagreement develops into a permanent **tension stage**. In the **tension stage** diverging positions among current actors emerge, regarding more or less well-identified issues or interests, but do not cause open disputes and severe negative attitudes.
2. If the causes, effects, dynamics and time frame of tensions are not properly identified, and if they are not appropriately managed, they can evolve into a real **conflict stage**. In this stage diverging positions are well defined and are expressed in severe negative feelings and attitudes and in clear and open disputes. This stage requires an accurate diagnosis in order to put in place proper mitigation and management strategies.
3. If adequate mitigation measures are not applied the arising disputes might spread or connect to other previously existing issues of any kind, developing into the **conflict network stage**. At this stage, controversies grow, developing new conflicts, spreading into new areas, involving new actors and dynamics. This event can exacerbate the negative feelings, creating a climate of suspicion and hostility.

We have to keep in mind that a stage model of conflict entails a three-level system: tensions, conflict, networking. In its upward dynamic, the 3-stage model prefigures an initial disagreement,

due to very different motivations, degenerating into a permanent tension. If its causes, effects, procedures and time frame are not properly identified, and if it is not appropriately managed within the relationship between stakeholders, it can evolve into a real conflict. The conflict, in turn, requires an accurate diagnosis in order to put in place proper mitigation and management strategies. Otherwise, the arising dispute could spread, or connect to other previously existing disputes, of any kind, so creating too many conflicts. This event can exacerbate the feelings, creating a generalized climate of suspicion, if not preconceived hostility.

The identification of the different positions and the conflict diagnosis did not exclude, but rather clearly indicated the opportunity to go a step further in the analysis of the general framework.

Under these conditions, our priority was to neutralize the upward dynamic of the stage model, by channelling it towards a virtuous circle: to manage conflict and tensions, stopping any potential networking

2.3 The participatory methodology

The participatory process has two objectives: neutralization of the stage model, as regards nature, intensity and dynamics of disputes and increasing consensus around the involved Parks: not only and not so much with regard to their individual actions, but also as stable institutions serving environmental protection and stimulating regional potential.

The innovative and shared management of the resources to be protected involves all the classical instruments of conservation: prevention - control- information- knowledge.

It is not based on antagonist logics (generating conflicts); on the contrary it is based on co-operative logics (generating cooperation and consensus). The next table (Fig.2) highlights the two different logics:

ANTAGONIST LOGIC	COOPERATION AND PARTICIPATORY LOGIC
Decision Reaction Repression CONFLICT	Problems and interests Negotiating meeting Shared alternative solution NO CONFLICT

Fig. 2 Different logics of resources' management

During the organization, development and implementation of negotiating tables the involved steps were:

- Analysis of the problems and identification of the opportunities
- Development of a shared vision of the future goals
- Negotiation of a shared strategy and of specific actions aimed at implementing this shared vision
- Formalisation of the agreements

During the negotiation process we developed several permanent participatory processes by using different techniques:

- Feedback meetings
- Participatory ateliers
- Open space technology
- World café
- Workshop

The different techniques that were applied were chosen with the aim to reach shared solutions and formalised agreements as well as to mitigate tensions.

We produced the following agreements: tender procedure for the allocation of instruments aimed at preventing and improving the Park management (within Gran Sasso National Park), review and

development of regulations (Wolf damage, Pasture damage, crop damage), specific projects (guard dogs), development of community contracts and community projects.

We made constant comparisons with the other Human Dimension experiences, in particular as regards community projects such as the international event was organized in October 2012: "WHAT DO YOU THINK? Engaging local communities in Nature Conservation". One aim of this meeting was to develop a "toolbox": 30 different experiences and methodological approaches were compared, witnessed by HD experts from various countries around the world.

The conference offered a very rich and varied framework, which presented other significant experiences of participatory approach in landscape and biodiversity management, illustrated by Jasna Mulej, LIFE SLOWOLF project, Gaetano Ladisa, of LIFE Cent. Oli.Med made in Apulia and Greece, Angela Tavone of Life DYNAMO, Domenico Nicoletti, University of Salerno, Jenny Glikman, Memorial University of Newfoundland (Canada) and Marisa Cengarle, who explained the role of the "Comitato Amministrazioni sensibili" in facilitating participatory processes for a sustainable local economy in the Parco Agricolo Sud Milano and Giovanna Quattrone (CNR Calabria), who illustrated the numerous techniques of environmental conflict management, especially in protected areas.

More than 100 participants were involved in the Open Space Technology (OST) Method, which produced an instant book containing the working instruments used by the focus groups.

The goal of the conference was to understand how the various participatory approaches, applied in accordance with the complexity, actually lead to a single perspective: the environmental governance for conservation, with a positive coexistence between humans and conservation, towards a new and advantageous balance.

2.4 The assessment (during the whole project)

A post-hoc assessment aimed at assessing the effectiveness of the implemented method through the analysis of the results, by taking into account the degree of stakeholders' participation and the respect of formalized agreements.

There were positive or very positive results, measured as:

- satisfaction index within their own experience
- public confidence improvement
- request to go on with the process
- effectiveness of the project

3. Further developments of the participatory process within the experience of the EU funded LIFE PRATERIE project (LIFE11/NAT/IT/234) "Urgent Actions For The Conservation Of Grasslands And Pastures In The Territories Of Gran Sasso and Monti Della Laga"

The "LIFE Praterie" Project aims at the long-term conservation of the high nature value grasslands and pastures in the Gran Sasso and Monti della Laga National Park. The Park Authority is the only beneficiary of this project, and all the Park services are involved.

The premise of the project is that the conservation of the different types of grassland habitats cannot exclude a sustainable management of the human activities connected with them, such as extensive farming and tourism.

Therefore, according to strategies and actions that have been widely shared with the interested parties in the territory, the project aims at intervening on different levels to solve or reduce the existing conservation problems through different actions:

- the harmonization of the grazing system;
- more careful ways to manage the impact of tourism;
- the spread of good conservation practices and of a new culture of sustainable land use.

The LIFE Praterie project is currently involving many stakeholder categories in order to commonly develop community regulations for pasture management, as a tool of long-term conservation of grasslands.

The expected result of these efforts is to achieve a long-term conservation of the high nature value of the high mountain grasslands through a less impacting land use.

3.1 Identification of the actors and implementation of a concentric circle map

This inclusive process began with the construction of the “Map of Actors”. We recall this tool that identifies three typologies of persons and bodies that are at various levels affected (positively or negatively) by the addressed issue. Each of the involved stakeholders or institutional entities is characterized by their territory of origin, different profiles, issues and strategies.

First circle

- INSTITUTIONAL ENTITIES: Ente Parco, Municipal Administration, Park Association of local management Civic Uses, Region
- ECONOMIC ACTORS: farmers and local manufacturers, lawyers

Second circle

- SOCIAL ENTITIES (Livestock raising associations, other local associations)
- INSTITUTIONAL ENTITIES: State Veterinary Services, Italian State Forest Administration

Third circle

residents, journalists, environmental associations, universities, facilitators.

3.2 The participatory process

We are carrying out a long series of local meetings in which we use different participatory techniques that help to build a dialogue between parties (Fig.3) These meetings shall also guarantee the prosecution of the durable participatory process in order to improve confidence, communication levels, conflict management and accountability of the involved stakeholders. This process has developed a discussion channel regarding values and weak points of grassland management, types and intensity of existing conflicts, and shared solutions to mitigate tensions and conflicts levels.



PHASE 1

• 30.11.2013 1st WORKSHOP

• 14-15-16-17 January 2014

1st SET OF TERRITORIAL MEETINGS

• 13-14-27-28 March 2014

2nd SET OF TERRITORIAL MEETINGS

24.6.2014 2nd WORKSHOP

3rd SET OF TERRITORIAL MEETINGS

September 2014

Fig.3 Process mapping

3.3 Start point: the addressed issues

Main critical factors

- Several legal frameworks managing forest/farm producers and civic uses had to be coordinated (at a national, regional, municipal, and protected area level)
- Rights of private land use regarding the broadest pasture lands in the Park had to be coordinated with the coordination needs within the completely protected areas (A zone)
- The management of some pastures had been outsourced to external beneficiary but they were not grazed.
- The management of the pastures was leased to local residents
- Transhumance had to be adjusted according to the specific situations
- Grazing pressure
- Need to meet the health regulations in order to graze animals.

Strong points

- Many regulations enforced in these areas contain provisions aimed at protecting environment pursued by the Park:
- Highest grazing pressure acceptable for the pastures.
- Lowest differences for the periods of transhumance.
- Obligation to maintain and improve the pastures.

The project entails some mitigation strategies, also through micro-interventions aimed at developing natural conservation (fencing mountain ponds, restoration of the water points, trails etc...). The interventions to be implemented were decided in agreement with the stakeholders on the basis of farmers' effective needs and on the basis of the habitat sensitivity: this standard was defined depending on the interesting species which lived in the area.

The project also includes actions aimed at improving the infrastructures of pasture management (enclosures, guard dogs, sheepfolds).

3.4 Results of participation

The participation of involved stakeholders is summarized in the next graphics, divided for typology (Fig. 4) and for territorial origin (fig. 5)

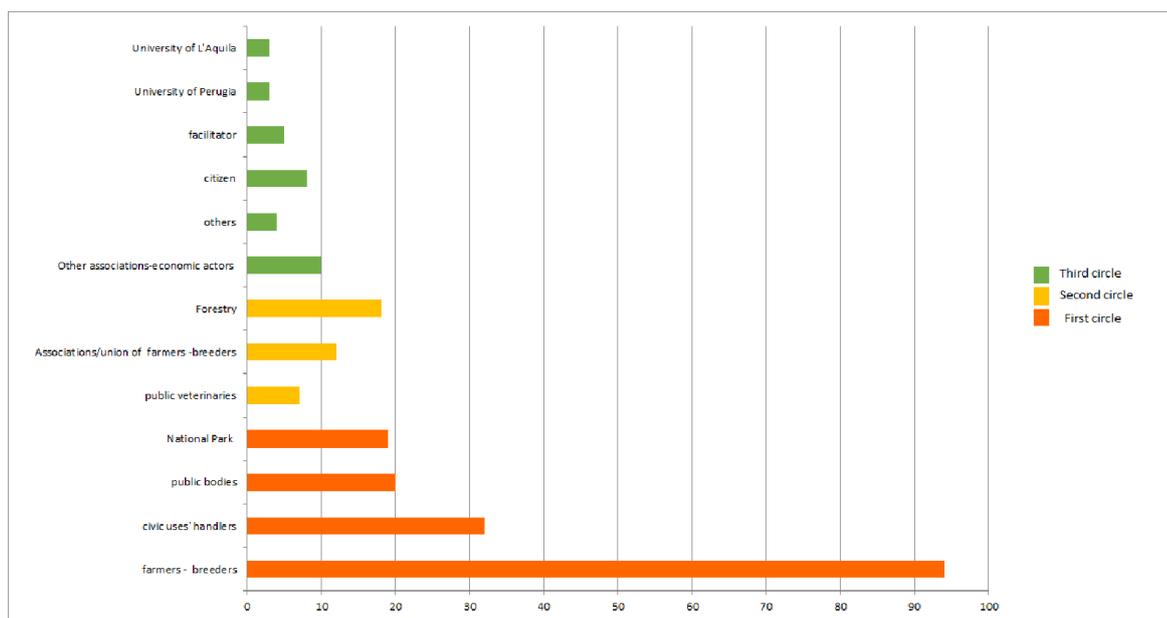


Fig.4 Typology of involved actors

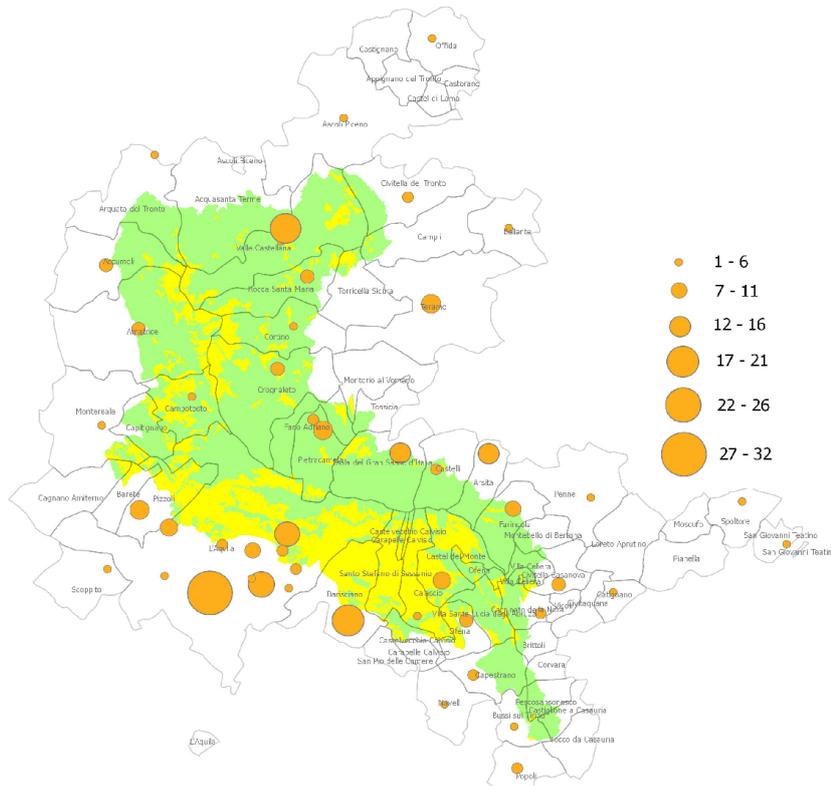


Fig. 5 Territorial distribution of the actors

Short analysis, participation and strategies applied for each kind of actor

First circle

- 1) The main beneficiaries of the participatory process were the farmers. Their massive participation confirmed the that the chosen approach was correct. Farmers actively took part in the process without delegating their own position. They shared the same goal: improving working conditions on the pastures and developing their business. The self-regulation was also an important issue: farmers who already managed their business in a correct and biological way mistrusted farmers who left their herd at the pasture without an appropriate custody. In fact, this attitude entails health damage, predation by predators as well as a considerable decrease of the market value of the animals.
- 2) Participation of Park technicians. The main goal was to implement the legislation related to nature conservation and the development of the territory, but through this new methodology, new communication channels were opened; it also raised general awareness about the usefulness of the participatory method, which allows to obtain shared and long-term results.
- 3) On official occasions, we registered a poor participation of the institutional bodies, but we proceeded with the conventional communication channels such as *ad hoc* meetings, specific meetings etc. We also registered a general mistrust towards a method that tries to involve all the stakeholders at the same time, by keeping specific procedures as regards the technical and political debate with the institutional Entity representatives. The institutions that took part in the project agreed on the effectiveness of the used methods and confirmed their willingness to formalize it.

Other circles

- 4) Trade associations took part in the project with a limited number of representatives but in a constant way: they were interested in keeping their representative role; they were often represented by their associate members.

- 5) The veterinaries working for the ASL (local health service) and the officers of the Italian State Forestry Administration have got specific interests: they aim at developing as effectively as possible their institutional functions, which are mainly of a technical nature and based on the control of their territory.
- 6) The University of L'Aquila and the University of Perugia were interested in the scientific research and they could provide the process with the right skills for its legal and scientific validation

The participatory process is also based specific skills and expertise :

- LEGAL VALIDATION through the University of Perugia (Prof. A. Valastro and STAFF Members):
 - assessment of the legal quality and of public policies paying special attention to the participatory instruments regarding ex ante verifications (feasibility) and ex post verifications (impact) carried on the efficiency of policies and regulations as instructed by OECD and EU;
 - enforcement of prescriptive drafting, paying special attention to the regulations regarding the efficient drafting of legal acts.
- SCIENTIFIC VALIDATION through the University of L'Aquila (Prof. Lina Calandra and STAFF Members):
 - social and territorial analysis as well as social and economic analysis, also developed through participatory methods and practices, aiming at establishing the general framework in order to set up and manage the participatory process; they are consistent with the geographic and environmental framework of the project.
 - Analysis of the stakeholders who were involved in the project in order to underline the tensions and the possible conflicts as well as the strong points and the meeting points between the strategies and the practices implemented following the above described project.
 - The communication activity, which will be especially set up on visual and geographic communication models (GIS, cartography, exhibitions posters, multimedia presentations),
- SPECIALIZED STAFF MEMBERS FOR THE MANAGEMENT OF THE CO-DELIBERATIVE PROCESS (1 senior facilitator and 4 junior facilitators) coordinating the public negotiations.

3.5 Agreement reached

The encouraging result of this process is that newly identified conservation measures are more effective thanks to the management of the existing conflicts and the improved dialogue between parties.

We drafted the first guidelines regarding the standards that the competent administrations engaged themselves to meet for their respective pasture regulations.

We succeeded in reaching an agreement on:

- health regulations
- pasture rental to non resident farmers is discouraged
- the lease to resident farmers was favoured; regulations and obligations were standardized
- guidelines for management and protection of livestock, driving the flock and the herds, as well as increasing the number of controls.
- Co-responsibility and cooperation among the different institutions for major maintenance and improvement of the pasture infrastructures (water points, shelters, trails, access roads to the pastures)
- Responsibility of livestock raisers for minor maintenance works on the assigned pastures.

- The periods of transhumance were defined on the basis of the shares and of the specific periods, with the possibility of amendments on the basis of climate conditions and different places.
- Development of local products and of a sustainable tourism supply chain.

Some administrations officially engaged themselves (through a Memorandum of understanding) to follow the steps described in the project both as regards the development of legal texts concerning the pasture regulation and the experimentation/ assessment step, which will be carried on throughout the whole year.

4. CONCLUSION

The Life EXTRA Project opened a very efficient channel communication channel that is carried on in the frame of the LIFE PRATERIE project. It is important to strengthen this approach as well as the confidence level between the actors operating on the territory and the Park technicians. Finally, technical knowledge and local communities' knowledge are starting to meet.

So the Park decides to perceive itself as one of the parties of the participatory action, a stakeholder like the others. In that capacity, it represents its interests without imposing them - maybe by legislative provision, but through dialogue, discussion, negotiation, always ready to hear stakeholders' requests. This effort leads to the resulting action, which is negotiated with other stakeholders.

We have to try hard, in order to establish the participatory process as a method of management for the Park; in fact, this strategy is able to take charge of the problems, the conflicts and the contradictions, bearing in mind that these issues cannot be solved without the interventions of the parties involved.

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