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## Governance of Sustainable Tourism in a Vast Area Surrounding a National Park

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### Abstract

Policies for governance have become a key question within the sustainability paradigm. Researchers can play an important role in supporting the action of policymakers and responsible agencies involved in managing the sustainability of fragile venues, such as protected areas when pressed for tourism purposes. The Asinara National Park shows the peculiarity to be located in a small and non-inhabited island, close to the big Italian Island of Sardinia. The specific site is a very interesting case study for rethinking the importance of the so called collaborative governance, in comparison to the traditional top-down policy usually adopted in protected areas. The case study well illustrates opportunities and difficulties that the managing agency has to face and, in the same time, cannot avoid, if it will successfully run a governance of sustainability which can be eventually also the motor of the economy of the surrounding neighborhoods. The authors present a possible future local stakeholder partnerships based on structured governance. The findings are in line with the literature debate on how the local governance can be used to support sustainable tourism.

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### 1. Introduction: Aims, Focus and Research Questions

Protected areas have initially established around the relatively simple concept of large wild areas 'set aside' for protection and enjoyment and then complemented by an increasing emphasis on cultural values. After the 1960s, a

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broader understanding of the need for a systematic approach to resource planning and management arose within the scientific and managing community. The initially need of biodiversity conservation was progressively accompanied by other protected area objectives such as recreation and tourism, for the flourishing tendency for people to want to experience protected environments. Tourism grew in many parks and became a major element in the culture of society, so that tourism and recreation are current management categories in protected area [1]. Even when established by the State and public bodies, being managed by government employees, protected areas are increasingly bringing other stakeholders into the processes of decision-making [2], originating the necessity of paying attention to effectively reach planned goals.

Our paper has origins from a field experience in the Italian National Park of Asinara, located in the northern part of the Italian island of Sardinia. This area, as many other environmentally attractive but fragile destinations, needs a robust sustainable tourism planning in a framework of public/private often diverging goals. The still ongoing research put already in evidence problems and practical difficulties that public managing agencies actually face when designing sustainable tourism policies which want to involve the socio-economic community surrounding the protected area. In the present work, our focus is on the actual possibility to give effectiveness to sustainability policies by promoting collaborative governance among actors located about a protected areas. Thus, the focus of the paper is specified in the following research questions:

(i) Which are the relations between the main stakeholders of the Asinara National Park and those acting in the neighboring areas?

(ii) Are these relations oriented to attain a sustainable tourism?

For the above mentioned purposes, the rest of the text is organized as follows. The second paragraph discusses the distance between rhetoric declarations on sustainability and actual practices and the subsequent necessity for cooperation and governance. The third paragraph describes the methodology; the fourth one describes the area study, namely the Asinara National Park in Sardinia (Italy), and its features. The fifth and sixth paragraphs expose results and discussion respectively. The seventh paragraph reports our concluding considerations and proposals for future research and political decision among alternative possible scenarios.

## **2. Distance Between Rhetoric of Sustainability and Practices Claims for Governance**

The increasing importance of the Travel and Tourism industry has determined many socioeconomic changes in the more developed countries and has become an attractive and an apparently unavoidable option for the economic growth of less developed countries. As tourism continued to increase, however, it became evident that a range of negative impacts was arising both at the national and international level. Many international organizations have produced proposals aiming at designing models of sustainable management and guidelines. A robust literature review on the topic, including protected area case studies, has been made by Cocossis in 2001 [3]. With specific regard to governance, since 1998 the IUCN-International Union for Conservation of Nature has published a set of studies entitled 'Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series' within which the 2014 no 20 issue is properly entitled 'Governance of Protected Areas: From understanding to action' [2]. The title itself underlines the dramatic distance between the willing to understand and the actual capability of effective action, as clearly stated in the concluding remark at the end of the book: 'We should now know what we have to do to conserve life on earth and protect our own future as a species. Yet, too often we fail to act, partly because our governance systems are not yet effective when faced with these global challenges. Could progress in governance at the level of protected area systems and sites perhaps inspire our leaders to step up to the task at the global level?' [2]. The challenge may even be more dramatic when policymakers aim at fostering tourism as the most proper tool for development even in protected areas, enforcing the perception of a clear distance between the rhetoric of ethical declarations of policymakers or common discourse and the operational level of running businesses and governing tourism.

The definition of sustainable development (and tourism) which 'meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs' [4] is fascinating but still intrinsically lacking in meaningful content, because it casts very complicated questions such as 'what is a need?', 'who are

needing people?', 'how far in time are the future generations?', 'which is the scale of involved region?', hardly challenging for many disciplines and inducing further complications not so easy to be treated [5]. Thus, sustainability and sustainable tourism risk to be beautiful and empty concepts, and nevertheless remaining as intriguing and fundamental research topics and sound political tasks. The inherent challenges pertain to the intrinsic nature of the industry, the fragmented way in which public and private decisions about tourism are made, and the often conflicting interests held by a large range of stakeholders and rightholders committed to tourism [5]. For all this, we accept the idea that sustainability needs governance to have a practical significance [5].

In a very simple definition, governance is the process, institutions and ways by which the function of governing is implemented [6]. Its features are transparency, efficacy, legality, lack of corruption, respect of rights and participation. In a more general sense, public participation is a fundamental component of democratic governance [6, 7, 8], but as shown in international cases [9, 10], and even in a smaller scale research of an Italian experience [11], methods of public participation in government decision-making of Natural Areas does not work as desired.

In many cases, soliciting the democratic participation in decision making, e.g calling together people in forums or focus groups, risks to induce an aggressive and confrontational atmosphere that overwhelms many of the reasons for which participation is sought [7]. As a matter of fact, a major problem of policy decision-making is the lack of opportunities for citizens to participate and then learn from one another in a public conference or forum. This can have also the consequence of inducing managers and policymakers to make decisions in a selfish way, presuming to have the right to impose the best solution [6, 7,8].

Attributes of governance are characters deeply immersed in the history, traditions and politics of a society. Economics is able to provide theoretical analysis, and sometimes prescriptions, extremely useful when you want to deal with specific issues, but in the construction of governance, the economist without the politician does not have all the necessary tools. Governance has an instrumental value time as it provides to actors the maximum clarity on the rules of the game. So, at the local level, the appreciation of the way in which networks of governance works is crucial to design management structures and practices of tourism oriented toward sustainability.

In the management of a destination, an effective local governance strengthens local participation and the sense of participation in political action, and provides a singular 'place' some tool for sharing information, discussion, negotiation and learning. From here to the point of being able to say that an effective local governance is the central element of a serious approach to sustainable tourism is a short step [12]. Thus, if participation is a crucial element, the term governance needs to be qualified as collaborative governance meaning a participative approach and the active public involvement of diverse actors. An effective planning system has to be able to support people in building up a relational, tackling complex issues and implement the proposed policy, namely the sustainability of tourism, because its governance features encourage various stakeholders to participate in open debates through dialogue and interaction [13, 14]. While a traditional planning system usually focuses on scientific rationalism in the culturally homogeneous community with a public interest, on the contrary Healey [14] suggested that a complex society requires a new paradigm based on active collaboration among diverse actors. In this framework, the meaning of collaboration is related to the idea of involving people or groups working together to produce something and then governance assumes the sense of being the process of governing a collective decision-making 'one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented and deliberative and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets'[13: 544]. Collaborative governance can give effectiveness to the planning activity because it involves all distinct stakeholders in a working relationship with each other through regular dialogue and interaction in pursuit of a common goal. All stakeholders, while are involved in the process, are empowered to achieve shared goals by mixing different resources and creating innovative thinking through negotiation and cooperation [15, 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21].

Only during a still fatiguing process of collaboration, distinct stakeholders can understand their differences, clear up different goals and enucleate shared ones so to provide adequate solutions to complex issues such as the definition of sustainable tourist presences in a singular place. Collaboration can drive individuals to change their ways of thinking when interacting with other stakeholders who have different goals and cultures, and influence how

problems are identified and solved. Obviously, collaboration is not always a spontaneous and self-empowering process [19, 22].

The political process leading to the tourism planning (in terms of governance and collaborative governance) is influenced by a number of interest groups (stakeholders) who have power and authority over policy. These influences affect every step of the process, from the identification of things to do and alternatives, from weighing the feasible options to choose the most favorable ones, from the implementation phase to the control.

In a general sense, and also in the specific case study application, the stakeholder analysis [1, 2, 23, 24, 25], can be suitable for governing relations among different agents in a protected area. The stakeholder analysis is a process of systematic collection and analysis of qualitative information needed to determine what interests should be taken into account when policymakers propose a new policy, or a change in one already in place. Stakeholders are individuals or organizations bearers of legitimate interests with respect to the policy to be implemented, can have different institutional forms and can be classified in different ways. The tool helps to individuate the characteristics of the stakeholders who are most interested, the actual interest involved, the position of opponent or proponent, the potential alliances that each one is able to establish and ability to influence the political process, in terms of power and / or leadership.

Policymakers and managers of the proposed policy can use this analysis to identify who are the most influential actors (key-actors) and then choose to interact more and more effectively with key-stakeholders, to seek to have more support for their proposals. The analysis can be made in advance or consumptive, but also during the course of the political process, especially in view of the pursuit of success of the policy, just in terms of practicing effective governance. In this sense, the advantages seem obvious, in front of disadvantages not indifferent. The stakeholder analysis is costly in terms of working groups to be involved and work, for the investigation, for the analysis of the interviews and the transfer of results in the strategy of governance. The list of stakeholders can be very large and the analysis of the individual positions must be accurate, also to assess whether the responses of individuals are conditioned to their possible inclusion in organizations more or less large and powerful, easily, do express positions dictated by selfish behavior and strategic positions. The constant repetition of the analysis relieves errors but increases costs [23, 24]. Without re-testing and without the continuous involvement of stakeholders, the effectiveness of the policy is challenged, reduced or canceled and the governance weakened [1, 2].

### 3. Methodology

Our research investigates the Asinara National Park in Sardinia, Italy as a case study. The case study method allows researchers to examine in-depth a particular 'case' within its 'real-life' context [26, 27, 28]. For the purpose to deal with the research focus and answer the questions posed in the introduction, during the period 2013-14, our field group has collected information and data, according to the so called grounded theory [29, 30], in order to delineate an analytical framework from different sources such as personal observation of evidence, preceding projects, news from media, and direct interviews. Within the framework of cultural geography approach, following Anderson *et al.* we can also consider 'the case study not as a local application of an abstract model, or a 'micro' statement of a 'macro' series of events. Rather, case studies are passionate evocations of the world and an engagement in it' [31: 9]. In doing interviews to stakeholders and rightholders, we followed the method of Steiner Kvale who considers the interview as an everyday friendly conversation yet having a structure and a goal strictly controlled by the interviewing researcher [32]. In identifying stakeholders and selecting the main ones we started from preceding researches [33] and the Asinara National Park program [34], snowballing a chain of main key-actors [35].

### 4. Area Study: the Asinara National Park in Sardinia (Italy)

Asinara is a small island located in the north of Sardinia in Italy (figures 1 and 2). It is the second Sardinian island after Sant'Antioco (in the south of the island), and located in the north-west, between the Sardinian and the

Corse Seas, being far 20 marine miles from Porto Torres, which is the Municipality. The area is 51,230 km<sup>2</sup> and the north-south length is 18 km, while it is broad from a maximum of 7 km to a minimum of 290 m. The coast length is near 110 km being very fragmented. In the whole protected area there are no permanent residents, also because the island was a former high security State prison. It has been opened for tourist use in 1999.

The Asinara National Park was officially founded by the Italian Law n. 344 in 1997. The Park includes all of the surface above water, the small islands within 1 km of the coastline, except for Isola Piana. The Decree of Republic President of 3rd October, 2002 and Ministry Decree of 13th August, 2002 established the Protected Marine Area of Asinara which has an area of 10,732 hectares and a coastline length of 79,64 km [33].

The Asinara National Park in Sardinia is a particular case study because it is actually not inhabited by permanent residents but faces a strong and increasing pressure coming from tourism. In past decades, the venue has become an important tourism destination being a well conserved environment, with exclusive assets such as landscape, rare geological sites, botanical and animal species, in particular protected marine turtles and local white donkey. The distinct quality of the environment produces a specific and exclusive atmosphere which a tourist can breathe, encountering free and friendly animals and having the opportunity to improve knowledge about unique botanical and geological resources [33].



Fig. 1. Geographical position of Asinara Island in Italy. Source: processing of the authors from Google Maps, 2015.

## 5. Results

In the introduction we designed the two following research questions: (i) which are the relations between the main stakeholders of the Asinara National Park and those acting in the neighboring areas?; (ii) are these relations oriented to attain a sustainable tourism?

First of all, we must underline the total absence of residents in the island and the existence of a plan established by the Park Authority in 2008 which openly claims for a greater involvement of stakeholders located in the 'vast area' surrounding the Asinara island, including the Municipalities of Porto Torres, Stintino, Alghero and even the geographical area named Nurra in the North-Western Sardinia [34]. The current state of our field research allows us to list the main stakeholders' relations in terms of type of actor, institution, objectives, public/private nature and his/her power, accordingly to the methodology exposed in previous paragraphs.

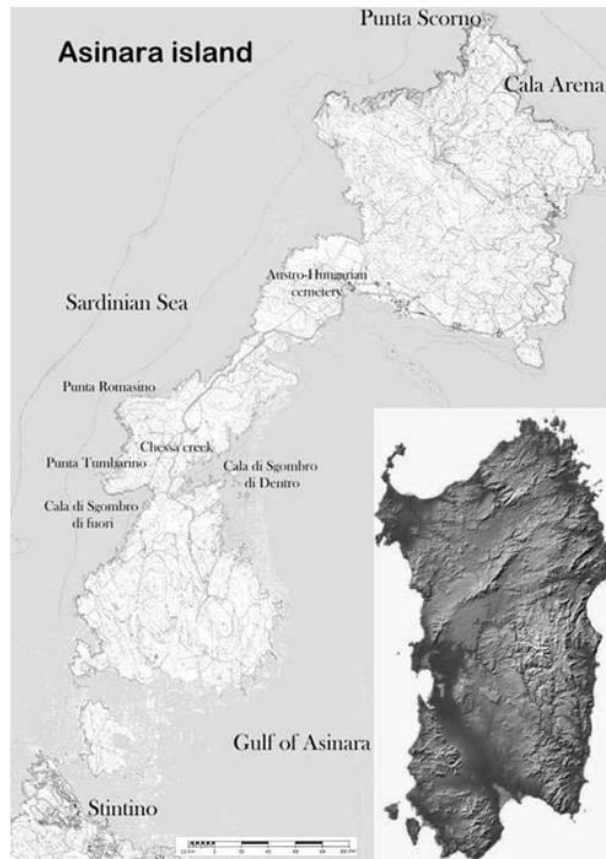


Fig. 2. Geographical position of Asinara Island in Sardinia (IT). Source: processing of the authors from Ginesu et al. [34]

Data showed in table 1 are sufficiently feasible to exhaust the first question. We can say that public bodies, including the Universities, privilege goals of sustainability, with a strong attention to the conservation of the natural resources, limiting the free access and fostering guided and controlled tours. The private companies pursue their economic profits and exercise lobbying power. Anyway, one point should be stressed, that is the strong power held by the Park Authority, descending from the Italian National Law on protected area [34] and giving sense to a top-down direction in policy making.

Regarding the second question, a general orientation toward a sustainable use of local natural resources has been detected from any categories of stakeholders, and can be described in its fundamental features as follows. The Park Authority identifies the Park Plan and the Province Territorial-Urban Plan (PTUP) as the cognitive reference for the institutional coordination between the park and other territorial agencies located in the above mentioned 'vast area' (Province and Municipalities). In particular, the park plan defines the area borders, which include both complex ecological features and legal issues [34]. These last ones are made up of two kinds of tools: 'fields of issues' and 'methods', which should identify the arguments and regulate the way of being cooperative among all the committed



actors and players. In view of mutual commitments with the agreed rules, the parties will implement feasible tools and rules within their planning territorial area and socio-economic environment [34].

Among the key-stakeholders, there is a diffused awareness about the necessity to choose conservation and environmental maintenance and improvement as a development model based on the collective design of sustainable management to be implemented both for the present park area and the rest of the vast area. In this line, discipline of conservation and management established by the park rules will be gradually extended to positively susceptible environmental areas, in view of building a larger network of ecological sites. Production facilities with high environmental impact, polluting and risk activities have to be taken into account for possible interference with the park.

All the actors envisaged even the advantages of promoting a sustainable tourism in an attractive and unique destination. In fact, the tourist presences increased from 65,000 in 2011 to 80,000 in 2013, and key-stakeholders considered as a problem not yet the total number of arrivals but the excessive concentration of them in the peak season, namely summer, and in very few hotspots. Thus, the opportunity of implementing sustainable tourism can solve the problem of seasonality and crowding of the few areas, and contemporarily being a motor of the economy of the surrounding vast area. Only cooperation among stakeholders can solve both the problems of sustainability in the Park and the fading features of the industrial economy of the neighborhoods.

Regarding the managing of tourist arrivals, there is a shared clear opinion about the importance of building a feasible infrastructure network in line with the Asinara Park Plan, in order to make the flow of tourists compatible with the high vulnerability and exclusivity of the natural resources. Even the organization of tourism, recreational, educational and cultural activities have to be referred to a cooperative model among all the actors.

Table 1. Asinara National Park. Key-Stakeholders and their features

Key-SH	Institution	Objectives	Nature	Power
<b>Park Authority</b>	National Park	Conservation Financing Making Relations Sustaining Community	Public	By Law
<b>Public Administrators</b>	Public Bodies (Province, Municipalities)	Conservation Sustaining Community	Public	By Law
<b>Businesses</b>	Companies	Profit	Private	Lobby/Vote
<b>Researchers</b>	Universities	Research Knowledge	Public	Reputation

## 6. Discussion

Our research on the case study Asinara National Park is still ongoing, so that the exposed results in this paper are to be considered actually very interesting but still partial and to be integrated by further future research activities.

Nevertheless, we can underline an already relevant result regarding the unambiguous necessity of a more shared awareness about the adoption on the one hand of a collaborative governance among public authorities and between all the public authorities and the private entrepreneurs on the other. This is in line with preceding field experiences such as those reported by IUCN [1, 2], Barker and Stockdale [17], Stojanovich and Barker [18], Davies and White [19]. From cooperation will descend a shared strategic planning which can manage both conservation and the tourist use of natural resources. So the accessibility for tourists, and even businesses and researchers is to be considered a real priority, as well as decision about designing a model of sustainable use capable of integrating tourism with the

long term conservation of natural resources. Definitely the main decision that the community has to assume regards the participation in a stable forum, gathering public bodies and private businesses, for the definition of standard qualitative indicators and desirable targets in terms of acceptable min/max number of visitors. This forum can positively resolve most part of the disparities and conflict of interest that we observed during the emerged the field survey.

The present top-down policy adopted by the Park Authority may face opposition from other public bodies and private entrepreneurs. A mediation of management actions with all the stakeholders, if carried out under conditions of lack of information on the exclusive ecological values of the natural area, will result as inadequate (even definitively dangerous) and can undermine the governance that the authorities responsible for long-term decisions will adopt. The discourse on the integral planning of the park is largely accepted and a possible methodology will be the final establishment of a permanent forum which can provide the effective procedures capable of ensuring:

- to set desired goals, associated indicators and quantitative standards;
- to prepare a stable system of monitoring the indicators;
- to apply management practices so that the standards are respected.

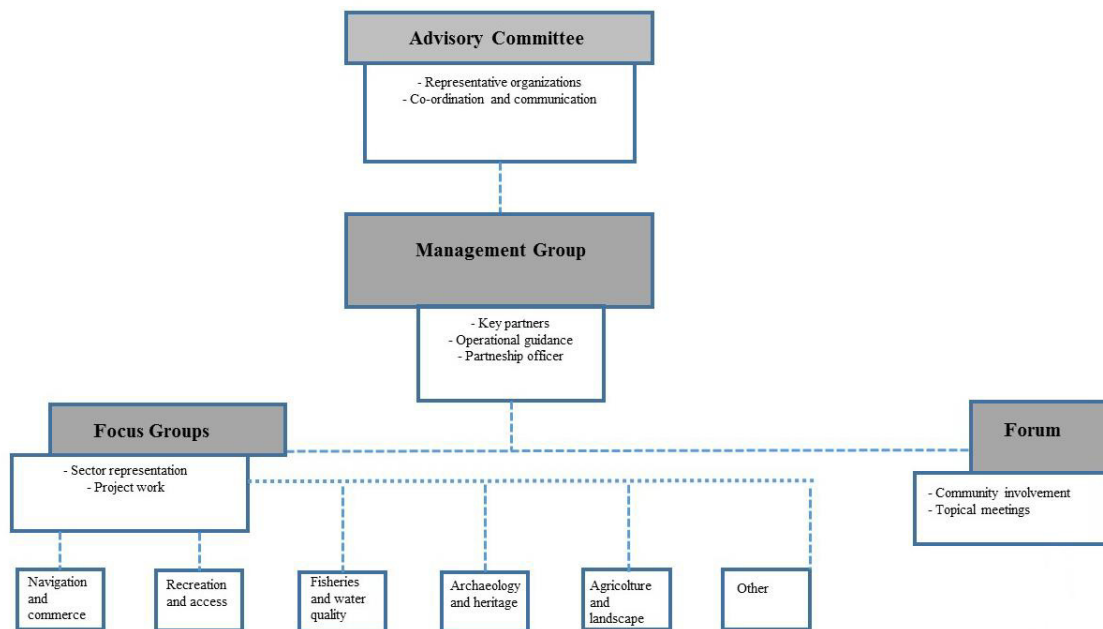


Fig. 3. Example structure of a Partnership for collaborative governance. Source: Based on Stojanovic and Barker [18: 347].

As already recognized by IUCN [1, 2], Barker and Stockdale [17], Stojanovich and Barker [18], Davies and White [19], Zhou *et al.* [21], also in our field research we found that the approach to determine the desired level of objectives of sustainable management (even the determination of minimum standards) must face the continuing confrontation between the public managing agencies and local business and other stakeholders within a structured partnership for collaborative governance (figure 3). The targets set by the governance can connect with those of other public stakeholders, tourist companies and representatives of guilds, to get feasible guidelines for sustainable use of the park resources and extend both environmental and economic benefits to the surrounding areas. Close cooperation geared towards sustainability is the basis for establishing close and effective relations between the park and all public agencies and businesses adjacent to the protected area for the construction of a network of virtuous



relationships. Any barriers of lack of information must be broken even for a stronger identification between tourism and quality management of the whole park.

The goal of establishing accepted and shared goals and their implementation is actually not easy, because the sensitivity of ecosystems and tourists/businesses needs are often very mixed. However, fostering cooperation between tourism businesses and the park depends on many facts, including:

- proximity to the protected area, which is an economic opportunity;
- cooperation which is beneficial for all involved parties;
- future better representation of the sustainability of the park which can improve the image of individual business;
- sustainable use of natural resources which can target efficiently the type of guest preferable and consequently develop the tourism product.

Even the management of visits to main and fragile hotspots in the park can be better managed in a shared vision which can ensure:

- to preserve as much as possible the local ecosystem;
- to preserve the cultural landscape;
- to preserve the geological structure;
- to allow the tourist uses with minimal infrastructure construction.

Because the sustainable use of hotspots is the origin of main managing problems and conflicts with conservation objectives, it is crucial to implement a monitoring system about the conservation status of environmental components (geological, botanical, animals) in relation to the behavior of visitors.

## 7. Concluding Consideration and Future Tasks for Possible Scenarios

The Asinara National Park in Sardinia is a particular case study because it is actually not inhabited by permanent residents and faces the necessity of a larger involvement of people living in adjacent areas. The use of natural resource is regulated under the Italian National Law on protected areas, which gives the public managing agency both the task and power to manage the conservation of natural resources yet adopting the vision of a controlled and increasing opening to tourism as an economic activity given under permission to private companies. From this comes the necessity to individuate a feasible model of sustainable use of the park. Our main finding after the field research, which lasted two years, is the necessity to transform the policy of governing natural resources in a local capability of *governancing* relations among actors who target different goals, including the necessity to have the collaboration of a larger base of committed agents.

The establishment of a stable forum, where conflicting interests will find an effective composition, is as important as seemingly fatiguing, due even to the particular figure of the local community, stressing the importance of the largest participation of social agents resident in the close or more distant areas to the island of Asinara. A top-down policy seems to be unavoidable in order to control environmental sustainability but it has to face the opportunity not to impose decisions but produce a collaborative governance of sustainable use of natural resources together with the local community.

Some guidelines for the agency, and thus the stable stakeholder forum, are as follows. The governance collaboration will produce:

- skilled communicators, who play an important role in establishing, facilitating and coordinating collaboration;
- strong links among stakeholders which are based on individual capacity and organizational capacity for collaboration, in which stakeholders need to learn from collaborative experiences and principled conducts.

The governance collaboration will avoid:

- to adopt different formal rules, dividing stakeholders;
- to bear informal norms, allowing informal leadership;

- to recognize diverse resources of various stakeholders, which may cause imbalances of power and conflicts.

In sum, the governance system will be capable to choose between alternative scenarios such as:

- the island will be populated by humans and economic activities, including productive farming, animal breeding, populating the small village of Cala d'Oliva with residents and new tourist businesses;
- the island will be an environmental laboratory which has the sole aim at monitoring the natural evolution of nature, privileging only scientific researches;
- imagine, designing and implementing a new form of hospitality which can be spread in a larger area close to the Asinara National Park, outside the borders of the island.

Our next step in making our field research will focus on the analysis of the ways by which the public agency has to plan and manage the flow of tourists to the island in reality. We already envisage that a challenging issue will be the factual possibility to export the same model of governance in other national parks or protected areas, as localism appears to be the very topic of governance.

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