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Stakeholder Management and the Imbalance of Power: A Central Mediterranean Perspective on Tourism in Marine Protected Areas

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Abstract Islands in the Mediterranean region are important tourist destinations, but overtourism has led to extensive challenges for island communities, not least due to its negative impact on fragile environments. As a result, attention is shifting towards alternative forms of tourism, such as ecotourism, which embrace sustainability principles. This involves the repositioning of protected areas in terrestrial and marine environments as not solely conservation instruments, but also as venues for ecotourism. Despite their small populations, stakeholder involvement in the management of these sites can be a challenging process which is fraught with conflict. Qualitative interviews with stakeholders were conducted in six islands in the central Mediterranean Region: The Aegadian Archipelago, the Pelagian Islands, and the Island of Pantelleria. Different levels of protection exist with the most peripheral islands allocated the highest level of protection and the most restrictions on tourism activity. Stakeholders fear that this will negatively impact their traditions and their livelihoods, and this has led to strong resistance against MPAs. Recommendations are made as to how genuine stakeholder involvement, better management and a rebalancing of power can lead to more competitive ecotourism destinations and improved well-being of local communities in an era of overtourism.

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**Introduction: Ecotourism and Marine Protected Areas (MPAs)
in Islands**

Islands are synonymous with tourism and are among the most visited tourist destinations in the world (Fotiou, Buhalis & Vereczi, 2002). The Mediterranean region, which is by far the world's most visited tourist destination, boasts hundreds of islands which tourists visit in their droves (Andolina, Signa, Tomasello, Mazzola & Vizzini, 2020). Most tourism in Mediterranean islands is for sun, sea and sand (3S) holidays which take place in the peak summer months thus leading to seasonality (Cannas & Giudici, 2015; Tovar-Sánchez, Sánchez-Quiles & Rodríguez-Romero, 2019; Alipour, Olya, Maleki & Dalir, 2020). Mass tourism has brought about a number of benefits to local communities, including employment (Bramwell, 2004). However, for some island destinations, the number of tourists received far exceeds that of the local population at least throughout part of the year. Commonly known as 'overtourism', carrying capacity limits are breached, and this leads to various negative environmental, economic and socio-cultural consequences (Baldacchino, 2008; 2015; Vogiatzakis, Mannion & Pungetti, 2008; Said, 2017; Briguglio & Avellino, 2019). Facing significant pressures on their resources, attempts have been made to diversify the tourism product and to promote alternative, more sustainable forms of tourism which are smaller in scale, which draw on the distinctive features of the destination (Bramwell, 2004), and can take place throughout the entire year. In this regard, ecotourism has been lauded as an alternative tourism product to mass tourism on islands (Weaver, 1993) including those in the Mediterranean (Cidalia Tojeiro, 2011, Said, 2017; Agius, Theuma, Deidun & Camilleri, 2019).

It has been argued that if managed appropriately and sustainably, ecotourism can not only overcome seasonality by extending the tourist season (Garrod & Wilson, 2004) but can also reduce pressure on the destination during peak times (Buckley, 2009). Some islands have already rebranded themselves from 3S destinations to 'nature islands' (Weaver, 2017). Ecotourism is a form of tourism which takes place in natural settings, is educational and interpretative in disposition, and embraces sustainability (Weaver & Lawton, 2007). Ecotourism mostly takes places in

peripheral and insular places. Indeed, such areas boast a great richness of species, including charismatic megafauna, and an abundance of ecotourism venues which include MPAs (Hoyt, 2005).

Various benefits have been associated with MPAs associated with ecotourism. MPAs have the potential to raise the environmental and socioeconomic profile of a coastal or insular region, to promote sustainable tourism (López Ornat, 2006; Dalias, Lenfant, Licari & Bardelletti, 2007) and to offer opportunities to local fishermen to supplement their income (Pham, 2020). On the other hand, MPA regulations can lead to negative impacts on locals' everyday lives, cause inequalities between communities, and create conflicts (Neva, 2020). Achieving a balance between the protection of habitats and allowing for the development of marine ecotourism opportunities is challenging (Hoyt, 2005). One approach has been to delineate zones where tourism can be encouraged whilst actively trying to minimise conflicts with other uses (Salm, Clark & Siirila, 2000). In the case of island MPAs, zoning can maximise protection while minimising restrictions against anthropogenic use such as small-scale commercial fishing and ecotourism activities such as wildlife-watching (Schofield et al., 2013).

For MPA management and zoning to be a success, the involvement of stakeholders in decision-making processes and good governance is key (Bustamante et al., 2017). Early consultation with all stakeholders is considered crucial to reducing conflicts in an MPA in the long term (Francour et al., 2001). While stakeholder involvement in MPAs has received much attention in the academic literature, for central Mediterranean islands, this best practice approach has not been without its challenges. For islands, the small size and limited economic opportunities can result in extensive pressure on coastal and marine areas and conflicts between the various users. Stakeholders include artisanal and recreational fishermen, conventional and ecotourism operators, environmental non-governmental organisations (NGOs), tourists that visit islands for a variety of reasons (e.g. free-diving, boat trips, diving, swimming, wildlife watching etc.), as well as the residents. Since the presence of MPAs can have a particularly notable impact on the fishing industry, the success of an MPA will often be hugely dependent on the industry's attitude towards it (Pita, Pierce, Theodossiou & Macpherson, 2011).

In the case of archipelagos, the different cultural and community interests on each island makes stakeholder involvement an even more complicated and difficult process (Sheehan & Ritchie, 2005). The smaller, more peripheral islands of an archipelago are usually dependent on the larger neighbouring islands which function as economic and political centres (Cross & Nutley, 1999; Karampela,

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Kizos & Papatheodorou, 2015). In tourism terms, this means decisions about the nature of the industry's development are often taken by leaders at the centre, with varying levels of stakeholder involvement from the periphery (Chaperon & Bramwell, 2013). A characteristic of tourism governance in archipelagos is dominance and subordination (Baldacchino, 2015) whereby the power dynamics between the islands are unequal, with the core having more power than the islands at the periphery. The core is often accused of controlling and exploiting the periphery, and this leads to 'core-periphery conflict' (Keller, 1987; Jordan, 2004; Chaperon & Bramwell, 2013).

Ecotourism and MPAs: The Central Mediterranean Context

The economies of islands in the Mediterranean are increasingly dependent on the tourism sector (Mazzola, Pizzuto & Ruggieri, 2019). This has led to an increase in the urban footprint at the expense of the natural environment to the extent that landscapes have at times been considered to be more cultural than natural (Cassar, Conrad and Schembri, 2008). For islands where the natural terrain and coastline have been heavily impacted by tourism development, but where there are still rich marine environments, it is feasible to develop marine ecotourism products.

In the case of archipelagos, the peripheral islands have greater potential in this respect. These islands may be more difficult to reach for international visitors due to their remoteness, may not have been marketed as strongly as the core islands, and so have not experienced the same levels of tourism development as 'core' islands. Thanks to this, they have more pristine environments and extensive terrestrial and marine protected areas (Agius et al., 2019). Therefore, while these islands often face many challenges with their economic development because of their geographical peripherality (and often political too), these features also offer opportunities in tourism terms (Garrod & Wilson, 2004; Chaperon & Theuma, 2015; Weaver, 2017).

The Mediterranean region has huge marine ecotourism potential due to its rich marine ecosystems (Fotiou et al., 2002; Agius, Theuma & Deidun, 2018; Andolina et al., 2020). Although the Mediterranean Sea only represents 0.82% of the World's ocean area and 0.3% of its volume, the richness of its species corresponds to 4–18% of all marine species, depending on the phylum taken into consideration (Lejeusne, Chevaldonné, Pergent-Martini, Boudouresque & Pérez, 2010). A total of 12,000 marine species have been recorded (Gržetić, Lukovic & Božić, 2013). Marine

ecotourism – a category of ecotourism which is practised in marine and coastal settings (Cater, 2003) – is one of the fastest-growing segments (Sakellariadou, 2014) and is supported by the blue growth strategy (Neva, 2020). Islands have been widely regarded as ideal venues for marine ecotourism (Cater & Cater, 2007; Fotiou et al., 2002; Halpenny, 2001; Sakellariadou, 2014), and this is often due to the presence of MPAs which act as a conservation tools for marine biodiversity (Pham, 2020) and ideal sites for marine ecotourism (Agardy, 1993; Gervassileiou, Koutsoubas, Sini & Paikou, 2009; Petrić & Mandić, 2014; Agius et al., 2019). In the case of the Mediterranean, these are mostly located around or adjacent to islands (Francour, Harmelin, Pollard & Sartoretto, 2001) increasing such potential. With the increasing awareness and demand for sustainable tourism (UNWTO, 2019), these islands have the opportunity to develop, or further develop ecotourism products.

While various studies have been conducted on MPAs in the central Mediterranean in the field of natural sciences, there is limited literature in terms of island studies, ecotourism and its role in addressing overtourism in this region. Furthermore, studies of the socioeconomic impacts of MPAs are scarce, and research into the involvement of stakeholders in the design, implementation and management of MPAs is limited to a small number of geographic areas (Pascual et al., 2016). This chapter will discuss the importance of stakeholder involvement in the process of creating and managing a protected area as well as some of the challenges in doing this. In archipelagos, the challenges are enhanced due to the core-periphery relations that are present and the power imbalances between islands. Thus recommendations are made as to how this can be addressed. If well managed, MPAs can serve as an opportunity to attract tourists seeking nature-based experiences away from crowds and can offer islands and archipelagos that are suffering overtourism the chance to re-dress the balance.

Areas of Study: Aegadian Islands, Pelagian Islands, and Pantelleria

The area of study consists of six Italian islands, all located in the central Mediterranean (see Figure 1). This includes the Pelagian archipelago, which comprises of Lampedusa and Linosa; the Aegadian archipelago which comprises of Favignana, Levanzo and Marettimo, and the island of Pantelleria (See Table 1).

Established in 1991, the MPA in the Aegadian islands is the largest MPA in Italy and encompasses the entire archipelago (Mannino, Paraspuro, Crocetta & Balistreri, 2016). It was considered to have been ineffectively managed by the Italian Coast Guard between 1991 and 2000, and its management was transferred to the

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Municipality of Favignana. The MPA is managed by a director, appointed by the mayor of the municipality, and an advisory board. The MPA stretches westward off the coast of Trapani and covers approximately 540 km², including 22 km of protected coastline. It is divided into four zones (Zones A, B, C and D) each with varying levels of protection and restrictions (Himes, 2007a). The MPA includes the largest and best-preserved meadow of *Posidonia oceanica* in the Mediterranean Sea, serving as a vital nursery for hundreds of species. The institutional mission of the MPA includes the protection and enhancement of the marine environment, environmental education and the promotion of sustainable development, with particular reference to the eco-compatibility of tourism (Donati, 2015).

The MPA in the Pelagian Islands was instituted in 2002 by the Italian Ministry for the Environment (La Manna, Manghi & Sara, 2014). In 2003, its management was assigned to the Municipality of Lampedusa and Linosa with the aim to protect the marine vegetation and fauna, biological resources and geomorphology of the area (Cooperativa Sesto Continente, 2012). The entire area includes 41.36 km² and 46.28 km of coastline (Giardina, 2012). As with all MPAs in Italy, the MPA is managed through a system of zones. Three key areas have been designated as Zone A (the highest level of protection), with one being close to Linosa and two close to Lampedusa which includes the sea area adjacent to the Spiaggia dei Conigli (Rabbit beach) which serves as a regular nesting site for the loggerhead sea turtle (Prazzi, Nicolini, Piovano & Giacomina, 2013).

The MPA scenario in Pantelleria is quite different. Debates about introducing an MPA in the island have been ongoing since 1991 when a legislative framework on protected areas identified a site for a marine park or reserve (Gazzetta Ufficiale, 1991). A Committee which expressly supported the MPA - the Comitato Pro Parco Marino di Pantelleria - was formed in 1999 and in 2001 a request was made by the Municipality to the Ministry for the Environment to implement it. Scientific studies were commissioned to investigate the biodiversity of marine life in the area (Bianchi & Acri, 2003; Bianchi, Acri, Aubry & Camatti, 2004) and zoning solutions were proposed (Picchetti, Caravello, Ghelia & Di Martino, 2010), but the MPA remained an issue of contention. In 2009 the proposal reached the Senate, but in 2010, just before the local elections, the Municipality asked for the process to be suspended as locals had petitioned against it (Caldo, 2019). The implementation of the MPA had become a political issue with elections being won and lost on the basis of its support.

Despite the lengthy process and the controversy surrounding the proposal of an MPA, a working group was set up by a civil society movement made up of locals and NGOs to continue working on its design and development. A participatory

approach was taken, which involved identifying key stakeholder groups and nominating a representative from each to contribute to discussions. This allowed a bottom-up approach which took into consideration views from local community members and prioritised what was important to them, such as the protection of their local traditions (Rampini, 2016). To date, the MPA has still not been implemented and has been described as a valid initiative approved through laws but hindered by politics and bureaucracy (Picchetti, 2015).

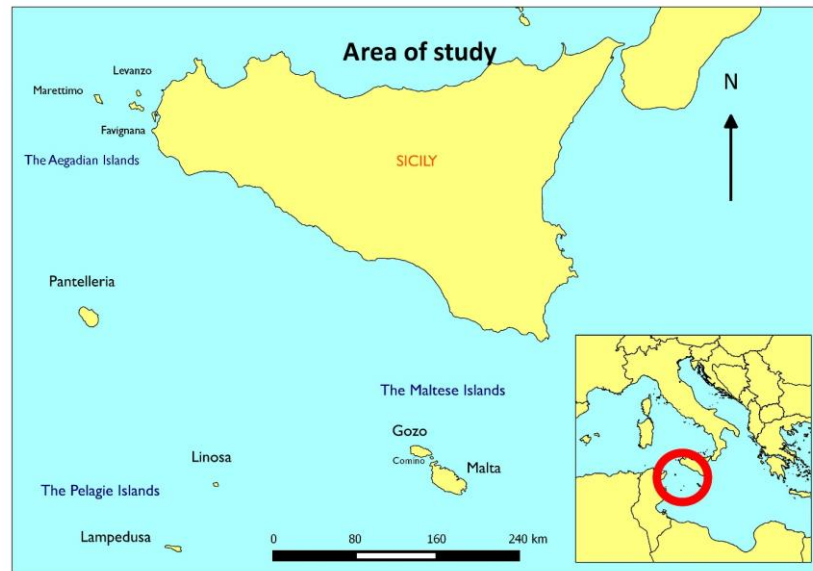
Table 1. Characteristics of the islands under study

Islands	Aegadian Islands			Pelagian Islands		Pantelleria
Factor	Favignana	Levanzo	Marettimo	Lampedusa	Linosa	
Density habitants/km ²	157	39	48	261	81	93
Permanent population	4500	220	820	5703	438	7736
Area (km ²)	19.8	5.8	12.4	20.2	5.4	84
Coastline (km)	33	15	18	33.3	11	51.5
Annual tourist arrivals	207,843			253,710		151,917
Size of MPA km ²	540			41.36		/

Sources: Himes, 2007a; ISTAT, 2011 as cited by Gallia, 2012; Giardina, 2012; ISTAT, 2017; ENAC, 2018; Libero Consorzio Comunale di Trapani, 2019.

Fig. 1. Map showing islands under study

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Research Approach

A phase of multi-sited ethnography was carried out which involved 'sojourning' in the islands under study (Falzon, 2009). Three study visits were made to each island between 2013 and 2016 and phases of observation were carried out to examine the issues related to the management of the MPA and to gain insights into the various perspectives on them. Between 2015 and 2020, semi-structured interviews were held with various stakeholders to explore these issues further. Two sub-types of strategic informant sampling technique were used to recruit interviewees. The first is expert sampling which involves the selection of 'typical' and 'representative' individuals. The second technique used, also known as snowball sampling, involves asking an initial set of informants to propose other potential sample members (Finn, Elliott-White & Walton, 2000). The stakeholder interviewees included representatives from the local tourism industry, conventional and ecotourism operators, fishermen (both artisanal and recreational), NGOs, academics (in the field of natural science), policymakers, MPA management bodies, and also tourists. Interviews were held face to face in person and online, and also by phone. The combination of face to face and online interviews has frequently been used in tourism research (Power, Di Domenico & Miller, 2017) with both

methods permitting valid and high-quality interviews (Suryani, 2013). The interviews were not recorded so as not to deter participants from active participation (Parker-Jenkins, 2018). Instead, comprehensive field notes were taken during and immediately after the interviews (e.g. Decrop, 1999). The field notes were coded and sustained through content analysis of existing legal framework related to management of MPAs in the area of study using the method adopted by Stoffelen (2019). The following sections will present some of the key findings from this research, exploring some of the reasons for supporting and opposing the implementation of an MPA, and the various challenges facing MPA management.

Case Study: Pantelleria

The implementation of an MPA around the island of Pantelleria has been debated for several years. A terrestrial National Park is already in place, but the same protection for the waters that surround the island have raised many concerns, and it is yet to come to fruition. The Municipality and the Ministry for the Environment have recently expressed their commitment to reactivating the process (Caldo, 2019), but according to policy makers interviewed this has already sparked opposition. Pantelleria has a limited tourism season, mainly in the summer months where seaside tourism is the major activity; Pantelleria does not have sandy beaches and so does not precisely offer the 3S product. However, the rich natural environment, including volcanic landscapes and impressive seascapes, offer opportunities for other types of tourism. There is agreement among policymakers, and other stakeholders including locals and tourism operators interviewed that Pantelleria should not become a mass tourism destination. Due to recent travel bans associated with COVID-19, Pantelleria has experienced a surge in young domestic tourists with little interest in natural and cultural attractions, and this has raised concerns amongst local residents and local ecotourism operators interviewed. The implementation of an MPA is again being proposed as a way of controlling tourism activity and attracting more nature-based tourists. This has the potential to build on the promotional efforts which have already been made to attract tourists to the terrestrial National Park. There have been suggestions made by NGOs and policy makers to follow the Cinque Terre model (mainland Italy) where the National Park includes both the terrestrial and marine protected areas. The Cinque Terre management body has recently become involved in the Pantelleria case to try to create awareness and generate support for the implementation of a similar model (Ente Parco Nazionale Isola di Pantelleria, 2020).

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Support for MPA Implementation

In support of the implementation of an MPA for Pantelleria are the small number of artisanal fishermen who see this as an opportunity to obtain exclusive fishing rights for locals and to deter outsiders; this is mainly aimed at fishermen from Sicily that fish in what the locals consider to be their waters. Another perceived benefit is that an increase in controls would prevent the illegal activity of recreational fishermen and offer new income opportunities through a permitted and appropriately managed tourism offer. A fisherman commented positively that the organisation of tours on fishing boats has already offered them a supplementary income. An NGO representative agreed that the positive perception of the MPA among professional fishermen is thanks to work undertaken by a civil society movement composed of locals and NGOs supporting the implementation of the MPA. Marine ecotourism operators and diving centres see the implementation of an MPA as a great opportunity to attract more tourists. For example, managers of diving centres based on Pantelleria commented that the underwater archaeological sites and the subsequent protection of the marine resources have already attracted more tourists to the area that have an interest in the natural environment. As a result, their businesses have benefited, they appreciate the importance of protecting such sites, and this has created a greater awareness to others working in the tourism industry of the positive impacts that greater protection and management can bring. This reflects Russ and Alcala's (1999) assertion that only when stakeholders fully understand the needs and benefits of an MPA will the support increase. Environmental NGOs have also supported the implementation of the MPA due to concerns related to the issuing of permits for oil exploration close to Pantelleria, fearing oil slicks and other hazards for the island.

Opposition to MPA implementation

The main area of concern regarding the implementation of the MPA seems to be around zoning and the sense of disquietude about the restrictions that would be in place. Recreational fishermen have been particularly vocal against the implementation of the MPA. Their argument is that while there is no MPA on the island of Pantelleria, there are five sites along the coast (Cala Gadir, Cala Tramontana, Punta Li Marsi, Punta Tracino and Punta Tre Pietre) that are designated as protected areas due to the presence of underwater archaeological

artefacts. These areas already face restrictions that are equivalent to the most heavily protected MPA 'A' zones, and they are not willing to face further restrictions. Other recreational users, such as free-divers, are opposed to the MPA because this would prohibit their activities. Companies that operate excursions to the island are also opposed to the proposed MPA as they are convinced it would impact their visits and limit their activities.

According to NGO representatives, initial attempts to set up an MPA around the island were made by using a top-down approach, without any genuine involvement of the local community. More recent attempts to actively involve community stakeholders in the planning process have also been problematic. The process has been criticised for involving too many 'external' stakeholders. This includes non-native residents, several of which have only lived in the islands for a few years, and also environmental NGOs which have no direct link to the island. Some local community and tourism stakeholder respondents felt like they had no ownership over the proposal. If the MPA were to be implemented, there are also opposing views on who would be responsible for its management. This question has been turned into a political issue, with supporters of one party arguing that it should be managed in the same way as the National Park, and supporters of another party arguing that it must be managed by a separate body.

The case of Pantelleria shows how lack of stakeholder management in the initial phase, as well as lack of political commitment, derailed the setting up of an MPA. The absence of a bottom-up approach and foreign elements created doubt leading to failure to gain public support. Strong lobby groups such as recreational fishermen and conventional tourism operators have put pressure on successive administrations and influenced their political agenda to counteract the establishment of an MPA which they believe will have an impact on their traditions. Furthermore, there is fear for their livelihood as they believe that their tourism activity will be further controlled and limited. Protection has been associated with restrictions rather than with conservation, the well-being of local communities and added value to the competitiveness of the tourism product. There is a clear power imbalance between on one side recreational fishermen, tourism operators and other resource users such as free-divers and on the other hand the few remaining professional fishermen, ecotourism operators including diving centres and NGOs. Stakeholders in favour represent a small minority, and thus politicians have considered the political repercussions. While Pantelleria has a terrestrial national park, the absence of an MPA implies that Pantelleria has missed out on the opportunity to strengthen the image of the island as an ecotourism destination remaining off the radar, for tourists seeking destinations away from the crowds in summer or seeking an ecotourism experience off season. This has contributed to the existing problem of seasonality which leads to a peak of tourism in the summer months and extensive economic losses beyond these months. In the long term, this might affect the tourism sector

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of the island as more tourists seek new destinations where they can immerse themselves in nature.

Case Study: Pelagian Islands

Unlike the MPA in the Aegadian Islands (established in 1991), much less academic research has been carried out on the implementation and subsequent management of the MPA in the Pelagian Islands (established in 2002). The MPA in the Pelagian Islands faced much less opposition, and this was agreed and explained by a variety of different stakeholder interviewees.

Artisanal and professional fishermen from the Pelagian Islands commented positively about the implementation of the MPA, albeit from two different perspectives. The majority of respondents viewed the MPA as having no direct impact on them or on their livelihoods, while a smaller group believed that the presence of the MPA was actually beneficial for them. The MPA in the Pelagian Islands does not extend very far beyond the shore (it covers an area of 41.36 km² compared to the 540km² of the MPA in the Aegadian Islands), meaning that trawling – the main fishing activity in the archipelago (Celona and Coparetto, 2009) – is conducted beyond the designated MPA zones, and did not impact the professional fishermen at all. Fishing was also an activity and industry in decline as more people were choosing to work in the tourism sector. These factors meant that there was little opposition to the MPA from the local community. A small number of respondents complained that environmental protection was being prioritised over the needs of the fishing industry with fishing not permitted in zone A, but in fact, this only covers a very small area of the MPA, and fishing is still permitted in the larger zones B and C.

Several respondents including academics and NGOs attributed a lack of opposition to the MPA as being due to the weak level of its enforcement. According to regulations, certain limitations must be in place in the MPA. These limitations include the number of anchorage permissions, the number of boats permitted for rental, the number of operators organising boat tours, and also the number of diving centres (Ministero dell'ambiente e della tutela del territorio e del mare, 2008) but these regulations have been rarely enforced. According to Orsini (2015), the local communities have gradually abandoned traditional industries, such as fishing, and have moved towards working in the tourism sector which today serves as a major economic activity for the local community. As a result, local authorities have shied away from high levels of enforcement as it causes conflict with the resource users.

Instead, in collaboration with environmental NGOs, they are prioritising the need to raise awareness of the importance of the MPA to the local community. They are also working with universities who are carrying out academic research on the MPA. Studies conducted on the impact of vessel traffic in the MPAs and the effects on the bottlenose dolphin has also concluded that better enforcement is needed (Papale, Azzolin & Giacoma, 2012). Furthermore, it has been noted that the intense boat traffic during the summer period (especially between May and October) leads to several collisions with turtles (Prazzi, Nicolini, Piovano & Giacoma, 2010). This also causes disturbance to the bottlenose dolphin (*Tursiops truncatus*), which in return causes their displacement from coastal areas (La Manna, Manghi, Pavan, Lo Mascolo & Sarà, 2013; La Manna et al., 2014). Unlicensed and uncontrolled anchoring has also been reported as having a damaging impact on the seabed. According to Guidetti et al. (2008), MPAs in Italy are usually underfunded and understaffed, and this further affects their ability to successfully manage an MPA. The Coast Guard's mission includes surveillance in the MPA to identify any illegal activity, but tourism operators explained that the Coast Guard's main activities recently have focused on search and rescue in response to the ongoing migration crisis faced by Lampedusa. The lack of enforcement of MPA regulations has meant the area is not sufficiently protected, it has led to a reduction in the potential for wildlife sightings, and is detrimental to the success of ecotourism in the archipelagos.

In the case of the Pelagian islands, the limited size of the MPA and lack of enforcement have camouflaged challenges faced in other MPAs but this does not mean that stakeholder involvement and management of the MPA is taking place effectively. Similarly to Pantelleria, its management is influenced by local authorities who are aware of the importance of tourism activity for the livelihood of local communities and have thus shied away from full enforcement. This is coupled with the continuing immigration crisis which means resources for enforcement are stretched. Meanwhile, due to a lack of understanding of its potential, most operators still work in nautical and 3S tourism with limited involvement in ecotourism. The islands are branded by operators as the 'Caribbean of the Mediterranean', leading to peak season overcrowding on the beaches and deserted spaces for the rest of the year.

Case Study: Aegadian Islands

The importance of meaningful stakeholder involvement in successfully achieving an MPA has been widely discussed (Himes, 2003; 2007b), but this was

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found to be lacking in the initial stages of MPA implementation in the Aegadian Islands. This is not surprising as a lack of stakeholder involvement is common in Italian MPAs, where only a few have been able to effectively manage natural resources through the collaboration of managers and interested stakeholders (Guidetti & Claudet, 2010).

The implementation of the MPA in the Aegadian Islands did not receive much support initially as stakeholders were unclear about the potential impacts. In particular, this led to antagonism between the fishermen and the MPA management team (Badalamenti et al., 2000). Furthermore, initial management of the MPA was based on a very top-down approach, failing to encourage stakeholder participation in the management process, hindering support for it (D'Anna, Pipitone, Fernández, Garofalo & Badalamenti, 2015) and consequently bringing about a general lack of public trust in its governance (Guidetti et al., 2008). The MPA continued to face opposition to the way it was managed. Fishermen argued that they wanted to be more involved in the management of the MPA as they believed decisions were mainly influenced by academic research on environmental issues in the MPA and did not sufficiently take into consideration the needs of the local economy.

A new management body in 2010 addressed the issue 'head on' and stakeholders acknowledged that the situation did improve with their increased involvement (D'Anna D'Anna et al., 2015). Representatives of local authorities claimed that the presence of the MPA led to various socioeconomic benefits for the fishing industry due to an increase in tourism. Fish stocks, including threatened species, have increased. Destructive fishing techniques, such as spear-fishing, have been prohibited while local fishermen have been given exclusivity to fish in the area. Diving centres and operators organising boat tours to observe wildlife remarked that MPAs are essential for their activity as adequate protection and management meant that visitors could observe more marine life. They claimed that marine protection boosted their activity, and thus, they had a personal interest in complying and supporting such initiatives. Operators and tourists attributed the abundant marine life and the extremely high visibility in the sea to the presence of MPAs making the islands ideal for diving, snorkelling and wildlife watching.

Unsurprisingly, the conflict between local authorities, conservationists, fishermen, tourism operators, and the local community still exist (D'Anna, Fernández, Pipitone, Garofalo & Badalamenti, 2016). Whereas protected areas should be seen as beneficial for local economies and communities, in several cases, this is not understood or viewed as such by local communities (McNeely, 1994). In fact, representatives from the fishing and tourism industries interviewed claimed not to have experienced any of the promised benefits, such as new job opportunities

related to tourism or higher fish stocks. On the contrary, they believe that fishing was a dying trade and that the presence of MPAs led to stricter controls which impacted their livelihood. Operators renting boats to conventional tourists also remarked that due to the MPA there were too many restrictions in place, particularly in relation to the reduced number of permitted anchoring sites, imposed to avoid damage to *Posidonia* meadows. There were also limitations on the use of motorised boats, arguing that this impacted tourism activity and that more flexibility was required. These stakeholders argued for the scaling down of zone A protection.

In the Aegadian Islands, most MPA conflicts are found on the main island of Favignana. This island, the largest in the archipelago, has remained geared up for more conventional mass tourism and is very seasonal in nature. Despite policies to promote alternative tourism (e.g. Guerra, 2015) and the promised allure of the MPA to tourists in off-peak months, this has failed to materialise. Favignana has a heavily developed internal terrain and coastline which historically was due to industrial rock (tuff) extraction, and more recently the tourism sector (Groppi, Garcia, Basso, Cumo & De Santoli, 2018). The sea remains the only real alternative for nature tourism on the island, especially for 'hard ecotourists'. The use of charismatic species such as the Mediterranean monk seal (*Monachus monachus*) that has been sighted close to the island can serve to promote activity that supports both conservation and tourism, and successful management of the MPA is extremely important in this respect.

The main, recurring conflict between stakeholder groups centres around the balance between the fishing industry and conservation. Different stakeholder groups award different weighting to biological, economic and socio-cultural performance indicators when assessing MPA performance (Himes, 2007b). Studies on MPA zoning in southern Europe have called for increased dialogue between stakeholders such as scientists, MPA managers and fishermen so that the benefits of, and problems with, MPAs can be better understood (Mangi & Austen, 2008). It is important to take into consideration both economic and cultural factors in all decisions regarding MPAs, and this should be done from the initial planning phase through to its daily management (Himes, 2003). As this case suggests, failure to do so will result in low levels of support for the MPA and dissatisfaction in the local community (Badalamenti et al., 2000).

In the case of archipelagos, stakeholder management may further highlight imbalances in power and cause rivalry not only within an island but between islands, reflecting conflictual core-periphery relations (Jordan, 2004; Chaperon & Bramwell, 2013) and characterised by domination and subordination (Baldacchino, 2015). At the crux of the problem is the lack of genuine stakeholder involvement, which has been discussed previously, but in this case, there is the argument that stakeholder interests from the larger, 'core' island are given priority. According to fishermen in Marettimo, the most remote and peripheral island of the Aegadian

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archipelago, attempts to encourage their participation in the MPA management process were 'fake' and although they were asked for their views, it was only the interests of the local authorities on the main island (Favignana) that were acted upon. Core-periphery relations are also exhibited in relation to the MPA zoning. Locals and tour operators from Marettimo remarked that their island suffers from disproportionately high levels of protection. Zone A, which represents the highest level of protection and where least activity is permitted, is situated very close to Marettimo's shoreline, limiting what tourism and fishing activities can take place, and negatively impacting the local economy. Locals argued that in reality, the entire archipelago merits the same level of protection, and it was unfair to attribute the MPA to the whole archipelago when the highest grade of protection was enforced solely around one island. Locals believe that such decisions were taken by authorities based on the core island to prioritise tourism activity on the larger island. Thus, the smaller island was placed at a disadvantage by shifting the 'burden of protection'. Meanwhile, academics, representatives of the management body of the MPA, politicians and NGOs argued that a higher level of protection could serve as an advantage for the islands as they have the potential to attract more marine ecotourism. This could, in fact, help to address the inequality that exists in terms of tourism between the core and the periphery. Therefore, through the use of the MPA and its higher level of protection, Marettimo can attract the marine ecotourists seeking to avoid the crowds on Favignana or the day-trippers on Linosa.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In each case study presented here, the stakeholder involvement in the implementation and management of MPAs has been characterised by imbalances in power between stakeholder groups, both within and (in the case of archipelagos) across islands. Decision-making related to the MPAs tends to be taken by bodies appointed by local authorities, themselves elected by the local community, but seemingly without sufficient consultation with the local community, and this has led to widespread dissatisfaction. The implementation of an MPA on Pantelleria is still being debated, mainly due to the vociferous recreational fishermen, free-divers and tourism industry stakeholders who are vociferously opposed to it, fearing the impact it would have on their traditions and livelihoods, and who seem to have the power in this respect. For the Pelagian case, the power again of the tourism industry stakeholders, in particular, and the stretched resources of the coast guard due to the immigration crisis seems to prevent the local authorities from adequately managing

the MPA and operating full enforcement. In the Aegean Islands, core-periphery relations are more prominent, and the perceived power imbalance between the larger, 'core' island and the smaller, more peripheral islands is strongly felt by the communities based on the latter.

This study has contributed to the limited knowledge on the involvement of stakeholders in the design, implementation and management of MPAs in small islands in the central Mediterranean, in particular in the case of the Pelagian Islands and Pantelleria where research on the matter has been neglected. It has also shown how characteristics of archipelagos, with core-periphery relations in particular, have an impact on the implementation and management of MPAs and how this can be mitigated through genuine involvement of stakeholders. Acknowledging the inequalities between the islands, it has also been argued that marine ecotourism could take full advantage of the higher levels of protection at the more peripheral islands, creating appropriate settings for ecotourism products which could draw tourists away from the overcrowded coastal areas, contribute to the local economy and redress the balance. In general, islands in the central Mediterranean region have failed to take advantage of the opportunities presented by protected areas to shift from mass tourism on crowded beaches/coasts to more sustainable tourism within the MPAs. This has been due to lack of enforcement, the dominant role of 3S and nautical tourism operators, and lack of incentive given for change. This needs to be addressed through genuine stakeholder involvement; endorsement of the MPAs and a better understanding of their potential is key. By doing so, MPAs can not only reduce tourism pressures on main islands of archipelagos but also reduce inequalities faced by peripheral islands. MPAs can offer the opportunity to attract ecotourists and to tackle seasonality since several activities extend beyond the 3S tourism season.

For all cases, clear recommendations can be made. It is imperative that all MPA implementation and management processes need to include equitable and meaningful participation of all stakeholder groups. Without this, there may be widespread dissatisfaction with the zoning decisions, and (as for Pantelleria) it may never exist. Resistance to MPA proposals can be addressed through effective participatory processes, coupled with consistent engagement of stakeholders over time, and transparency of the decision making process. Genuine participation entails empowerment for engagement and this calls for education and capacity building of local communities to get involved in the process of planning, implementing, and managing MPAs (Gaymer et al., 2014). This is key to shift from a top-down (government-led) to a bottom-up (community and user-led) approach.

In order to ensure benefit sharing, mechanisms must be introduced by management bodies to assess the economic and sociocultural impacts and benefits

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arising from the establishment of MPAs and strive to share these equally, in particular between main and peripheral islands. In the case of archipelagos, policy benefits must compensate for costs incurred by peripheral islands due to higher levels of protection. Wider awareness is needed of the benefits of MPAs, and this can be achieved by using success stories from locals, and recruiting local stakeholders as 'MPA ambassadors'.

Regulations associated with MPAs need to be better enforced through further investment to ensure regular patrols and controls. Training must be provided to all resource users operating within MPAs to encourage compliance. In order to reduce the influence of powerful stakeholders and local politicians in decision-making about the management of the MPA, collaboration with local NGOs and research institutes is encouraged. The MPA alone is not enough to encourage the development of marine ecotourism; promotional efforts are also needed to attract these tourists, with the aim of eventually reducing the reliance on conventional 3S tourism to support the economy, and a more sustainable tourist destination which meets all stakeholders needs.

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