

The role of women in the conservation and development of the Dadia Forest Reserve

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1999

Keywords: protected areas, forest, conservation, development, natural resource management, women, policies, community based approach, Dadia, Greece.

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A) Recommendations for Policy Makers

i) Local/National

- When protected areas are established, national & local governments must simultaneously initiate conservation measures which can provide an alternative income for local people, such as ecotourism programmes.
- National & local policy makers should ensure that national legislation does not impose measures in ways that are perceived as illegitimate by local people, for example by leaving local people out of major land-use decisions.
- National & Local governments should provide funds to support sustainable development & ecotourism in protected areas.

ii) International

- International policy makers should ensure that international treaties do not impose measures in ways that are perceived as illegitimate by local people (see above).
- International bodies such as the EU should provide funds to support sustainable development and ecotourism in protected areas.

B) Recommendations for Stakeholders

- **Managers of ecotourism programmes** should gain the support of local people through involving local communities in the management of protected areas and related activities. Women's influence in shaping attitudes should be harnessed.
- **Partnerships** should be established between private and public sectors, to create a multi-stakeholder group to manage reserves and ecotourism.
- **International NGOs and corporate sponsors** should provide funds to support sustainable development and ecotourism in protected areas.
- **Local community** (especially husbands) should support women's participation in cooperatives and ecotourism, including their participation in public decision making.

Stakeholders coming from outside of the local community should not impose external value systems in ways that may be insensitive and inappropriate to local culture. Long and consistent involvement with local communities should be maintained.

C) Recommendations for women's cooperatives involved with ecotourism aiming to replicate the success of this model

- Women's traditional roles and skills in rural societies should be built upon to ensure their participation in conservation and ecotourism in a socially acceptable way.
- Cooperative members should participate in skills-training seminars to increase their business skills and professional experience.
- The social organisation of a women's cooperative should lead to skills being acquired which will widen women's social role, and their ability to influence the affairs of their community.
- Cooperative members should establish links with other women's cooperatives to exchange experience and information.

Abstract

The role of women in the conservation and management of protected areas in the Mediterranean region is illustrated in this case study. Protected areas are usually found in rural environments, where women have traditional roles as parents, housewives, and helpers in farming or animal husbandry. Women have less access to education and hold secondary roles with respect to the decision-making and management of communal life. Time constraints and traditional values prevent full-time employment and limit mobility with respect to employment opportunities. Thus women seek additional income on a part-time basis, using skills they have already developed as homemakers in their community.

In some protected areas, one goal is to attract visitors for ecotourism: the involvement of women deals with management of accommodations, preparation of food, and provision of traditional products such as handicrafts or preserves. In areas such as Dadia, the conservation infrastructure put in place involved women as tour guides, environmental educators, or volunteer coordinators. A women's cooperative provided a basic social organization, where skills were acquired and opportunities for funding were established. The collection and equitable distribution of funds fulfilled one of the main incentives for women's participation: to supplement their family income. The cooperatives also provided an avenue for access to a wider social role, and the associated benefits in terms of exchange of ideas, further learning, and the ability to influence the affairs of the community.

Part 1. Introduction

The Dadia forest reserve is one of the most important habitats in Europe for the variety and density of birds of prey and herpetofauna. The forest covers the southeastern foothills of the Rhodope mountain range, at the northeastern border of Greece with Bulgaria and Turkey. Located in the prefecture of Evros in Thrace, the border of Greece with Turkey is demarcated by the Evros River, whose nearby delta has been designated a Ramsar wetland. The forest is composed of a mixture of pine and oak and is characterized by a mosaic of ecosystems including open areas, streams, creeks, densely forested patches and rocky outcrops. Due to its geographical position at the juncture of the European and Asian continents, it is one of the major flyways of migratory birds. The diversity of species is one of the rarest in Europe: of the 38 raptor species known to occur in Europe, 21 nests in the area and another 10 species regularly visit for the winter (Poirazides, 1995). It is especially known for endangered species such as the Black vulture, the Griffon vulture, the Egyptian vulture, the White-tailed eagle and the Imperial eagle. The birds of prey feed on the rich variety of amphibians and reptiles. At least 40 species have been identified, including salamander, lizards, and thirteen species of snakes, frogs and toads, including many endangered species. Both common and rare

mammals in the area include brown bears, wolves, wild boars, otters, foxes badgers, wildcats and susliks (Petrou, 1994).

This rich ecosystem was partially destroyed through inappropriate development schemes, funded by the World Bank and the Greek government. These were directed towards the intensification of forest production, the clearing of deciduous oak forests and reforestation with fast-growing pines. The funds were also used to open forest roads for intensive exploitation. Fortunately the importance of the area as a habitat for raptors was documented by European ornithologists and biologists in the 1970s. A study funded by the IUCN and WWF was completed in 1979 by the Dutch ornithologist Ben Hallman. This provided the basis for a joint ministerial decision to declare Dadia a protected area. A later study on the herpetofauna by Helmer and Scholte (1985) found that the area supported the highest density of reptiles and amphibians in all of Europe (Petrou, 1994). Two core areas of 7,250 ha were designated as strictly protected areas, forbidding hunting and wood extraction. A buffer zone of 28,000 ha was also designated for limited land uses. The communities of Dadia and Lefkimi share joint jurisdiction of the reserve, together numbering about 1,250 inhabitants.

Initially the local communities were opposed to these restrictions, since they expected to lose significant income by abstaining from wood harvesting. A lag time of almost a decade occurred before conservation management actions were initiated which could provide a basis for generating alternative income for the local people. It is a credit to these people that the land-use restrictions were honored for the most part throughout this period, when both the state and conservation organizations delayed in implementing active conservation measures to maintain and enhance the values of this important habitat.

In 1987, using European Economic Community funds, the ACE (Action Communautaire pour l'Environnement) programme created the initial infrastructure for the protected area. A small observatory was constructed around 500 meters from a feeding place for the raptors. The decline in their populations was related to the decline of traditional livestock herding, and the provision of food on a regular basis was to allow the raptor populations to recover. In addition, funding was provided for the blocking of certain forest roads, the purchase of a 4WD vehicle and the building of a guest center and restaurant at the edge of the reserve to accommodate visitors. Most importantly, two wardens from the area were hired and trained to manage the feeding site and monitor the bird populations. These persons played a key role in the evolution of the area, since they were able to generate support from the local community and at the same time, became the main contacts for outsiders who wished to invest in the conservation of the area.

At the conclusion of the European Union programme, the visitor's center was almost fully constructed and wardening and feeding of the raptors was in

place. WWF International through its representation in Greece covered a gap in the establishment of further EU funding. Soon afterwards, in 1992, a three-year project was approved through the EU LIFE programme for management, monitoring and ecotourism activities. A corporate sponsor, Allianz, the largest German insurance company, whose support continues to this day, also provided funding. Through this project, a specific environmental study was completed which specified management measures to be implemented within the two core areas of the reserve (Adamakopoulos, 1994). Support for interpretation and ecotourism was provided by completing the furnishing and equipment of the visitors' center, and setting up an information room with slide shows, displays and printed material for visiting tourists and schoolchildren. Monitoring of raptor populations continued, and hiking trails were created.

In 1994, the Dadia community established an independent community enterprise to manage the visitors and related ecotourist activities. Several local people were trained to become ecoguides, and activities were developed such as guided tours, volunteer projects, sales of printed material and local products, slide shows, meetings and accommodations for scientists, research students, Greek and foreign visitors. A local women's cooperative with at least 36 active participants was established in 1994 in order to prepare meals and traditional products which could be sold through the visitor's center. Today over 50 local people work in activities associated with ecotourism, which represents nearly one in six adults, including nine women trained as ecotourist guides. The staff of the visitor's center is made up mainly of young people between the ages of 20 and 35. Eventually, the additional incomes of the residents served to change the attitudes towards the reserve and to raise awareness and local pride for the ecological values of the area. The social life of the area has changed, and young people remained in the village to settle. This is a unique reversal of the trend in most rural areas of Greece, whose young population emigrates in large numbers to cities and larger towns.

Beyond Dadia, increasing interest was generated through presentations at national and international meetings, and through promotional material distributed at fairs on the prefecture level and at annual agriculture or tourism fairs held in Thessalonike. Visitors increased from 10,000 in 1995 to over 30,000 in 1998 (See Table 1). As the Dadia forest reserve became publicized, more state and prefecture funding was attracted to the area, with investments in infrastructure and supplementary occupations, including ecotourism.

Part 2. Key Objectives of the Project

The project initially had three major objectives: the monitoring and scientific research of the forest ecosystem and the rich biodiversity it supports, particularly of the raptors and herpetofauna; the design and implementation of a management plan for the reserve which would maintain and enhance biodiversity; and the establishment of ecotourism as an economic activity

which would replace incomes lost by the restrictions of land use in the two core areas, such as wood gathering and hunting. The last objective was the one which provided some measure of equity between men and women of the community: the ability to generate funds by providing employment related to ecotourism gave local women the opportunity to share in the benefits of the reserve. The major support to visitors in terms of preparation and cleaning of rooms, the preparation and serving of meals, and supplementary products prepared for sale such as traditional pasta or preserves, were necessarily the job of women. In addition, the conservation infrastructure put in place over the years encouraged the involvement of women in guiding tours, environmental education, volunteer activities, as well as administration and merchandising. Women took an active role in designing, planning and executing activities related to the increasing flow of visitors, and organized themselves independently to further their skills and find support for more activities.

Part 3. Experiences with a gender responsive process in planning and implementation of the project

The Dadia forest reserve in northeastern Greece is an example of a protected area whose management and sustainable development is now successfully organized ecotourism. It serves as a model for integrated rural development in the Mediterranean where human habitation has coexisted with natural landscapes for thousands of years. The local people acquired additional income by providing food, accommodation, and interpretation services, and government and international agencies provided additional funds. Initially many local people openly sabotaged protected area measures, which were designed to restrict traditional human activities such as cultivation, wood gathering, hunting or animal husbandry. The local people felt that the sudden imposition of restrictive measures is in a way 'illegal' or at least illegitimate, even if imposed by national legislation or international treaties. Since the measures were considered illegitimate, they felt no compulsion or obligation to obey them. These attitudes reflect a feeling of being left out of major land-use decisions which affect their immediate environment, and an imposition from the outside of measures whose outcomes were perceived as detrimental to their income and way of life.

The first step in the development of the ecotourist programme in Dadia was to gain the support of local people by providing information and increasing awareness of the need for protection and the value of the 'investment' that was being made in the area. This was not an easy task, and became successful only when one or two local persons who had influence in the community understood and communicated the need for conservation to relatives and friends. Acceptance of conservation activities was a slow and difficult process: it required that attention be paid to involve local communities in the design and management of the protected area/or species, and to legitimately acquire a 'stake' in its preservation.

The importance of women in shaping the attitudes of the local community in Dadia cannot be underestimated. Typically a traditional society, the women of Dadia did not participate at the planning meetings of project proposals, project development or project management. However, the women had a strong influence on whatever happened in the community. The women's influence was manifested chiefly through their family: husbands, children and relatives. Women pass on cultural values to each new generation, by teaching the use of local products for cooking or healing, by training children in the preparation of handicrafts, and by shaping the knowledge and attitudes of children to their surrounding environment. In the case of Dadia, they were informed of each stage of the development of the project through their husbands and relatives, and made plans to be incorporated in the activities supporting ecotourism.

Women's traditional roles were especially conducive to participating and supporting the ecotourist activities: cleaning of rooms, cooking food, child rearing, room preparation etc. were all associated with their role as caretakers. It was relatively easy to transfer these skills towards the reception of visitors, and such transfer was more socially acceptable than other occupations for women. Another advantage was that women were permanent inhabitants of the area, so that any training or enhancement of skills paid off in the long term: the skills could continue to be used locally and were passed on to other local women.

Finally, women had flexible hours, compared to most men working in regular occupations, which confined them to a rigid daily schedule. This was an advantage for part-time work, or for peak activities which could be organized around normal family life. In most traditional societies, flexibility with child-care is available because of extended families and neighbors. Thus women were able to work on weekends or evenings to prepare food or to receive visitors.

At the same time, women of Dadia faced many impediments to their participation in conservation and ecotourist activities: one example is the lack of language skills (especially English) which excluded them from formally interacting with conservation organizations or foreign scientists who visited the area. The lack of interaction necessarily meant that they had little chance to directly express their needs or to become properly informed about the importance of the site and the means that were being designed to protect the area.

As is typical of women in traditional societies such as Dadia, most had a lower level of education in general, since it is the males in the family who are sent to schools or to higher training. Less education meant fewer skills such as accounting or marketing, which are needed for locally based ecotourist activities. Another commonly found impediment to women's participation in ecotourism was lower mobility it was rare for women to own their own means

of transport and because they are usually the primary caretakers, they were dependent on husbands or other men in the community for transport to and from their homes when preparing meals for large groups or holiday visitors.

Finally, the multiple responsibilities of women may include vegetable gardening, food preparation, cooking and cleaning at home, raising children, caring for old and sick relatives, and assisting their husbands with farming, animal husbandry or others. This limits the amount of time they could spend on ecotourism, or require substituting for some of these tasks, which are considered part of their primary role, with other means.

Women still have a secondary status in most traditional rural societies, and the main obstacle to their participation in ecotourism was the attitudes of their husbands and others in their immediate surroundings. As the community was not used to visitors, it was initially opposed to having women work outside the home or to seek additional income (paid wages). It was not considered proper for women to participate in public decision making -- a sphere reserved for men. A women's traditional work, such as homemaking, child-rearing, caretaking, and assisting in agricultural work is usually not linked to monetary gains, and therefore is undervalued compared to wages received by men. This was associated with lower self-confidence amongst women and hesitance in initiating entrepreneurial ventures when lacking the support or acceptance of the community.

In Greece, women's cooperatives developed in the post war period, during the decade of the 1950s as a means to supplement rural income. However it was a long time before women were able to take advantage of this new means of organization. In 1981, although 30% of working women were in agriculture, only 10% participated in cooperatives. The reasons given by the Ministry of Agriculture and by men interviewed in agricultural cooperatives reflected the prejudices which have always kept women out of commercial activities in traditional societies: first of all, since women were usually not the head of families they were not legally able to participate until appropriate laws were passed; secondly, they were considered of "lower intellectual capacity and lacking a cooperative consciousness," thus they "cannot participate actively in the service of a cooperative," and third, "a women's place is in the home." (Mediterranean Women's Studies Institute, 1986 & 1994).

In 1985, the first law was passed allowing equal access to men and women to form cooperatives. Through this initiative five cooperatives were established in remote rural areas in Greece, in an effort to supplement women's income and to shift occupations from the waning agricultural sector to alternatives such as ecotourism. Today there are seventeen formally registered cooperatives, including that of the Dadia forest reserve, although more than forty are known to operate throughout the country.

The Dadia cooperative was founded in 1994 entirely by the personal initiative of 32 women, reaching more than forty women in 1998. Initially each woman contributed funds with a small monetary contribution and the cooperative purchased goods on credit from local shops and vendors. The majority of the food preparation was made at home with home utensils and ingredients until enough money was available. Support from the community was negligible. Even a meeting room was hard to establish, as both the town hall and public school were made unavailable. Meetings were held outdoors at the steps of the church until the women found a more permanent space.

The women of Dadia realized that they lacked business skills or professional experience needed to run the cooperative. They applied to participate in a variety of skills-training seminars to improve their performance and broaden their range of services. Gradually the husbands of women in the cooperative began to change their attitudes and support their wives in this endeavor, thus also influencing the support from the rest of the community. A picnic and recreation area about nine kilometers from Dadia was offered by the local forestry service to the cooperative to prepare meals and traditional products such as noodles and *trachana*, a rice-like paste made with sour dough. Women participated in the community ecotourism enterprise by providing meals including traditional pies and soups cooked on wood stoves for conferences and meetings, and for other visitors staying at the guesthouse adjacent to the reserve. Nine young women in Dadia have been trained as eco-guides and have developed environmental education programmes for schools in the area. Although not necessarily members of the cooperative, these young women have found jobs and have become trained in skills that would have been unavailable to them without the infrastructure established to host ecotourists. Today financial support comes from a variety of sources, including public funds in the form of:

- Education and training seminars
- Access to European Union and state funding
- Support in kind such as land, use of facilities, local shops as outlets for their products from the prefecture, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Forestry service, or the municipality of Dadia-Soufli

Future plans include the establishment of a cooking and restaurant facility near the guesthouse with European Union LEADER funds, which will be owned and operated by the women's cooperative. The guesthouse and visitor's center is being expanded by ten additional rooms and a separate exhibition center from state funds. In addition, eight guest apartments have been built near the picnic and recreational area owned by the local forestry service, and managed by the community enterprise.

The women of Dadia opened a dialogue with other women and women's cooperatives in Greece.

An exchange visit with the community of Prespa in northwestern Greece took place in 1995, which brought the women in contact with two other cooperatives working in association with a protected area also organized around ecotourism. In March of 1997, the Dadia cooperative made a presentation to women in northern Greece to a village, which also wanted to establish a cooperative. In 1998, a meeting in Athens of 17 women's cooperatives from all over Greece gave further opportunities for exchange of experience and information, particularly regarding access to funding for training and education. Later in the same year, in another meeting held in the regional town of Komotini, the example of Dadia was presented to women in the area as a means to contribute to a wider social role in their communities, to enlarge their horizons and to supplement their family incomes.

The women in the cooperative instituted a board of directors, electoral procedures and financial management, thus gaining self-confidence and prestige. The cooperative allowed them to have a greater voice in the decision making of community affairs, more access to power and eventually to be represented in local municipal councils (, as has been the case in a neighboring village). The election of the new community president in Dadia was largely determined by the support of the women's cooperative. Women found that despite the initial mistrust of the local community, they were capable and successful in doing something alone (that is, without men).

In fact, a fundamental change in the behavior and attitude of the women occurred. Many older women who had never left the village came into contact for the first time with scientists, businessmen, politicians and other 'worldly' people who expanded their awareness and exposed them to wider interests. Many of these visitors came to give advice or to seek cooperation and promotion of the women's work through advertising and merchandising of their products. Greek journalists meeting in Dadia from all over the world took an interest in the cooperative and conducted interviews, which were aired or published in foreign countries.

After Dadia's cooperative was formed, the idea spread throughout the region. Three additional cooperatives were established in villages in the area. Ranging from cooking to preparation of handicrafts and preserves, the women in these other areas have developed a means to organize themselves and supplement their incomes in a manner that has now become socially acceptable in rural Greece.

Part 4. Assessing experiences and lessons for tale future

Notwithstanding the benefits of involving women in conservation projects, persons working in this field encounter a number of obstacles in dealing with local women. As conservationists coming from a different environment, with value systems which differ dramatically from those found in traditional rural areas, those involved in conservation ran the risk of imposing value systems in ways that may be insensitive and inappropriate to local culture. One's behavior, mode of dressing, or access to authorities may bring dismay and disapproval to the women in local communities, shutting down lines of communication and slowing the progress of conservation management.

One also finds that 'outside' intervention in the form of conservation project may face long established male hierarchies, which cannot be changed. It is important to recognize this resistance early on and to work through the accepted social hierarchies. It may happen that introducing a local team to work on a conservation project creates new seeds of conflict in local societies: this occurs if it is perceived that power or authority is being lost or shifted from local people to Siting newcomers, who are considered to have little connection to the local society and seem to have access to funds and means which are not understood or accessible to local people. Another problem one faces is when women working in conservation projects negotiated or made decisions solely with the input of local men. This caused resentment on the part of local women, who were necessarily left out of planning discussions and could only express their views at a later time through their husbands.

Finally, those working in conservation usually are educated in the pure sciences or political science. Most are not historians, sociologists or anthropologists, and therefore have few skills or training to approach and understand the needs of local societies. More importantly, the understanding of the life and values of rural communities has been lost for most of those working in conservation because they were raised and educated in urban environments. These gaps in social skills have led to misunderstanding and paranoia in the minds of local people, setting up obstacles to protected area management which in many cases have yet to be removed.

To deal with these difficulties, it is important to maintain a long and consistent involvement with the community. This allows the evolution of trust between local people and those who can be viewed ultimately as facilitators in promoting the interests of the community. Extending family ties by serving as godmother or godfather to local children has also helped to build such longer-term relationships.

Despite its unique characteristics, this case study can serve as a model for other important natural areas in the Balkans and the Eastern Mediterranean. The evolution of the local community enterprise in the management of

ecotourism, and the involvement of women in the form of a women's cooperative demonstrate a number of principles which could be transferable:

- The successful combination of tourism and conservation the level of tourist services evolved gradually and is in the hands of the local people. They have developed at an appropriate scale and do not infringe on the ecological integrity of the areas.
- The attraction of visitors outside the area has provided additional income which otherwise would not be generated. This is particularly relevant to the supplementary income of women in the cooperatives, most of who have families and therefore would not have the opportunity to seek regular employment.
- The basic infrastructure, which is in place, gave incentives to private entrepreneurs to provide food, accommodation, and other services. This in turn, has had a multiplier effect by attracting public investments which are now oriented towards ecotourism. Government and EU funding provide a basis to continue appropriate development in the future, thus strengthening the local economy and enhancing present activities.
- Successful partnerships evolved between private and public sectors: the multiple groups now have a say in the overall management of the reserve and of the ecotourist activities. One of these groups is the formally instituted women's cooperative; others include the local community enterprise, conservation NGOs, Greek and foreign scientists, the local forestry service, the municipality, the prefecture, and the Greek Ministry of Environment.

Perhaps the most important aspect that is relevant to other valuable habitats in the region is that ecotourism has provided the means to effectively conserve these sites. Neither international treaties nor protected area legislation had been implemented during the two decades or more since sites were first identified as important for biodiversity. Local people could not understand nor support the land-use restrictions and limitations on activities, which were seen as fundamental to their livelihoods. Ecotourism introduced alternative income and created new jobs centered on the protection and promotion of the natural values of these habitats, thus creating a new awareness and interest in their conservation. The active participation of women was crucial: the increase in social activities associated with ecotourism kept young people in the area and reversed the trend towards emigrating to larger cities. It is well-demonstrated facts that unless means are found to actively involves the local people and render them beneficiaries of conservation activities, then parks and protected areas have little chance of being protected in the long run.

Annex

Table 1. Visitors to the Information Centre of Dadia

	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
January		90	338	823	1326
February		144	594	737	754
March		413	776	2350	2179
April		1549	1883	2821	3398
May		1428	3575	5721	6792
June		870	1628	2843	3586
July		1033	1231	2819	3467
August	343	1987	2945	5433	6608
September	439	400	1576	1980	2910
October	447	1466	1868	2331	2649
November	311	382	1173	1428	(*)
December	265	491	551	1400	(*)
TOTALS	1805	10523	18088	30686	33669

(*) 1998 figures to be completed