

Feasibility study for creating a new MAB-park on the island of Samothraki, Greece

FINAL REPORT
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Introduction

The project “*Feasibility study for creating a new MAB-park on the island of Samothraki, Greece*” commenced in March 2008. The key goal of the project is to look into the feasibility of the creation of a new MAB reserve on the Greek Island of Samothraki. The project aimed to clarify whether the creation of a MAB reserve on Samothraki would provide an added value in guiding socioeconomic development perspectives in a coherent and systemic way in the direction of sustainability. At the same time, the project aimed at the development of tools for an early stakeholder involvement thus demonstrating a model of good practice for the ownership of the BR vision. The following broad goals were outlined in the proposal:

1. To establish a first (and somewhat superficial) assessment of the natural endowment of Samothraki and record the challenges to its maintenance.
2. To deliver a preliminary description of the social sphere, name the important stakeholders and their positions with respect to the pressures on the environment and the benefits from ecosystem services attained.
3. To conduct expert interviews with stakeholders and attempt a first assessment of their preferences and their resources to support or oppose such a policy process.
4. To evaluate the descriptions attained in the above steps in terms of policy needs and policy potential with a strategic reference to becoming a MAB biosphere reserve.
5. Finally, it should deliver the findings to the Mayor and discuss with him what he can and will do in moving forward (or not moving forward) the MAB park. The results of the entire process including the outcomes of the discussion with the Mayor should be communicated to the Greek MAB committee, the Austrian MAB committee, the EuroMAB and the UNESCO-MAB Paris.

All of the goals have been met, and some extra activities were also undertaken to ensure continuity of the process within the second project “Samothraki 2”, in collaboration with UNESCO-MAB. The activities undertaken during the entire project period are listed below.

a) Collection of secondary socio-economic and environmental data

Significant amount of socio-economic data was collected for Samothraki pertaining to the socio-economic and environmental aspects. The first data provider that was contacted was the National Statistical Agency of Greece (<http://www.statistics.gr/>). These lists included tables of births and deaths on Samothraki Island for the years 1999 – 2006, the national population census data for the years 1971, 1981, 1991, 2001 which included sex ratios and numbers, education level, professions and state of employment, a detailed list of the primary sector goods produced in Samothraki for the years 1993 – 2005, including statistics on the machinery used in the agricultural and fisheries sector, and finally a dataset including the tourist activity on the island for the years 1984 – 2006 (number of tourists, what kind of accommodation the used). Furthermore, the National Statistics agency provided climatic data for Samothraki in

printed format derived from the meteorological station of Alexandroupoli. After receiving the dataset further work was done on them in order to be transformed into a usable format which included a transfer to Excel files and a translation from Greek into English.

The second data provider was the municipality of Samothraki that also indicates their willingness to collaborate in the project. They provided the project with various regional statistics they had generated themselves including demographics for the different villages, reports on the economics of the municipality (incomes and expenditures) for the years 2005 – 2006 and documentation on decisions, proposals and ideas that they have for the development of the island. All information was translated from Greek to English.

The third data provider was the Greek Biotope and Wetland center (www.ekby.gr) which provided a GIS file with the habitat types that are included within the NATURA 2000 area that is established on Samothraki along with a detailed description of each habitat. The fourth data provider was a member of the Greek Ornithological Society, Maria Panagiotopoulou, who had participated in a project on Samothraki Island in which the current status of biodiversity on the island was assessed. The data contained lists of plants, trees, reptiles and amphibians, mammals and birds along with sufficient literature. Finally, the National Greek Fisheries Research Institute (<http://www.fishri.gr/>) provided two studies that had been conducted in the coastal/marine environment of Samothraki.

Full documents on this have already been submitted with the interim report

b) In-depth interviews with 24 stakeholders

In the last six months, twenty-four interviews were conducted with relevant stakeholders of the island using a semi structured interview methodology. These interview partners were selected from a variety of sectors (government, business, NGO, agriculture, church) with relevant representatives and by their importance weighed in the context of biosphere reserve. A meeting with each stakeholder was prearranged and most of them lasted between 30 – 60minutes. The questions were prepared beforehand but the interview was more like an open discussion. The main aim was to extract the opinion of each stakeholder towards a possible MAB reserve, his/her views on what a suitable future of the island might be. All these interviews have been documented and transcribed.

See Annex 1: Stakeholder Interviews

c) Visitor Survey

Between July and September 2008, the project undertook a survey of the visitors to the island and generated valuable data on the various island dynamics such as population flows, activities, economic behavior, future preferences on the islands, etc. In all, 1,511 questionnaires were distributed and collected following a pre-defined sampling method. The sampling procedure was designed according to available data on tourism of previous years and on the 2008 boat

schedule. By sampling July, August and September the tourist peak was recorded. Certain dates and boats were decided for sampling. The questionnaire was also handed in to anybody who was traveling out of Samothraki by boat since it is the only mean of transport out of the island. All data was fed into the SPSS program and analyzed for the publication. With this we were able to build economic models with respect to various scenarios of development and changes in visitor flows.

d) Consultation with the public, tourists, NGOs

i) Presentation EcoCamp Samothraki

During 12 – 21 of July 2009 an EcoCamp took place at the big camping facility of Samothraki. The event was organized by the youth of the Green party of Greece, Iliosporoi. The project team was invited by the organizers to make the opening session on the 12th of July. The invitation was accepted and the outcomes of the project along with an introduction to the island were presented to the participants. In the meeting the mayor of the island Mr. Giannis Petroudas was present with his family.



ii) Open Public Meeting and presentation in the municipal Cultural Center of Chora

An open public meeting and presentation was organised in the Municipal cultural center of Chora on the 19 of July 2009. The place was reserved beforehand and posters were printed to advertise the event. Around forty people came most of them locals and among them were many members of the municipal council. As agreed the mayor opened the meeting, welcomed the research group and gave the floor to Project Leader Uni. Prof. Dr. Marina Fischer-Kowalski who made an introduction of the project in English. Then Lazaros Xenidis continued with the presentation of the results. Afterwards a discussion with audience continued and questions were answered. The climate was very positive towards the realization of the MAB Samothraki.

iii) Presentation to the Greek branch of Naturfreunde

A group of members of the Greek Network of Nature Friends (Elliniko Diktio Naturfreunde) along with their president Mr. Makis Stavrou visited Samothraki in July 2009. The purpose of their visit was to get to know the island and to film a video for the competition Landscape of the Year. The island of Samothraki will participate in the competition. For the visit of Nature Friends Greece in Samothraki all the local organizations and associations coordinated and collaborated in order to provide to the visitors a full Samothraki experience including all the natural beauties but also the traditions and local practices like the production of sweets. Lazaros Xenidis met Nature Friends Greece and made a presentation of the results of MAB Samothraki. The group members were satisfied and surprised that Austrian organizations like the Austrian Academy of Sciences, the Institute of Social Ecology, Vienna and Naturfreunde express their interest to this unique island.

iv) Presentation to local “elite”

Eustratia Stefanou - Colin, a Greek woman who works in the French ministry of Culture and has origin from Samothraki contacted Lazaros Xenidis and asked for a meeting in her house. Many others were present in the meeting including the head of Samothraki Mountaineer club, some local women and a couple from Thessaloniki. The couple from Thessaloniki was Theodoros Theodorou who works in the Greek embassy of Syria and his wife Fenia who is a famous Greek writer. Mrs Efstratia Stefanou who lives in Paris and has a house in Samothraki has connections in French government and UNESCO Headquarters France and she has been having the idea to include Samothraki in UNESCO. During the meeting Lazaros Xenidis presented the results of the project to all the people present and answered their questions. According to Mrs. Stefanou UNESCO France is waiting for Samothrakis application for long time and for sure it is going to be accepted as she says. She is a very enthusiastic woman in her mid 40s that i believe that she means what she is doing. She also wants to organise a mission from Samothraki to visit Paris and meet French officials like the French minister of Culture, the ambassador of Vatican in France, the Greek ambassador, the director of Louvre Museum, the French UNESCO ambassador and others with the scope of reconnecting Samothraki with France and promoting the Biosphere idea. She has made a list of participants which include as far as i remember the Mayor, the head of Greek Church, the head of Evros prefecture

Zabounidis and the research group. She is willing to organize a 3-5 day meeting in Paris between 7-16 of December 2009. Lazaros Xenidis told her that it would better to have finalized the application before such a meeting however she says that this is not essential. Either the meeting is a prologue to the application or if we are fast the application can be brought along with this mission. All this process if feasible will help us to achieve our goal.

e) Meeting with Mayor, and endorsement of the MAB proposal

On the 14th of July 2009 a meeting was arranged with the Mayor of the municipality of Samothraki. The aims of the meeting were to present to the mayor the results of the project, to re-establish the contact with the municipality and to ask the mayor to open the public meeting. Furthermore during the meeting, the research group members declared that the process towards the realization of MAB – Samothraki is in a mature stage and asked the mayor to express his willingness to follow the MAB development path along with the acceptance of the financial obligation it contains. The mayor welcomed the research group, listened carefully to the presentation and was surprised by the details of the results obtained. He expressed his willingness to follow the MAB development path and he accepted to open the public meeting.

f) Collaboration with UNESCO Venice to operationalise the MAB reserve

In March 2009, collaboration on the Samothraki process was finalised with UNESCO Venice, through its Director, Prof. Engelbert Ruoss. The main goal of “Samothraki 2” is to support the commune of Samothraki to prepare an application to UNESCO-MAB for nominating Samothraki as a biosphere reserve, and to design first projects for the new biosphere reserve to address some of the main sustainability problems such as wastes, water, and soil erosion by over-grazing. UNESCO Venice also plays an important function to revitalise the Greek national MAB Committee. Some of the accompanying activities within this framework have been initiated as follows:

i) Comment on the official spatial Plan of Samothraki

On the 7th of August 2009 the municipal council of Samothraki had to decide and comment upon the spatial plan of the municipality of Samothraki. This plan would determine how the future land use in Samothraki Island would be. The study has been implemented by Mrs. Myrto Koroni and her office and it is divided in three phases. Briefly, in the first phase a description of the current situation is provided, while in the second phase future regulations and changes developments are being proposed. Many departments and state offices have to comment on the second phase among them the municipal council of Samothraki. In the third and final stage all the comments are included and the spatial plan becomes a law.

The project group understanding the importance of the process sent a letter to the municipal council, stretching the importance of the spatial plan and how it can be connected with MAB Samothraki. The council took into account our recommendations and take a progressive step forward towards the realization of MAB Samothraki by introducing strict regulations on new

building construction but also by announcing more land as of archaeological interest. The final stage of Samothraki Spatial plan can be used as a basis for the zonation of the future MAB Samothraki. Further work in this direction is being taken up within “Samothraki 2”.

See annex 2: Letter to the Mayor, 6th August 2009

ii) First talks in establishing a long-term socioecological research station on Samothraki

In July, a meeting was held with the Director of the local archaeological museum (Mr. Dimitrios Matsas) to discuss the possible collaboration on setting up a long-term socioecological station on Samothraki. The idea was welcome and next steps in this direction are to be taken this summer. Austria has an interesting connection with archaeological studies in Samothraki owing to one of the early publications on this subject by Austrian archaeologists Conze A., A. Hauser, and G. Niemann under the name “Archaeologische Untersuchungen auf Samothrake” in 1875.

Visibility of the process

The project has also made efforts to gain visibility locally as well as internationally, and to share the research outcomes, and the process to a wider audience. Those prominent are mentioned below:

i) Interviews to two national Greek Radio Stations

On 20 July, 2009, two Greek National Radio stations (ERA Evros and Status Radio Alexandroupoli) called Lazaros Xenidis to interview him and ask more information about the realization of MAB Samothraki project. Both the interviews were broadcasted live to be heard on the local and national scale.

ii) Sustainability award

The Institute of Social Ecology has applied for the recent ‘Sustainability Award’ for the Samothraki project. This award is initiated by the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research. The participation to the contest is at least means to make the project more visible within Austrian science, notwithstanding the outcome.

See Annex 3: Application for the award

iii) Presentations in international conferences

Two presentations of this project and its outcomes were made at reputed international conferences. The first was presented at the *International Conference on Human Ecology*, Manchester, UK, June 29th to July 3rd 2009, at a special session on “How Do Biosphere Reserves Deal with the Challenges of an Urbanised World?” The same was presented at the *15th International Symposium on Society and Resource Management* hosted by The University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences (BOKU) from July 5 – 8, 2009 in Vienna, Austria, in the session “Eco-Tourism: Social, Ecological and Economical Impacts.”

See Annex 4: PowerPoint presentation

Publications,

Two publications have been initiated within the scope of this project, consistent with the goals of this project, and will be submitted to the journal of *Society and Natural Resources*, titled: *Transforming the Greek Island of Samothraki into a Man and Biosphere reserve: A feasibility study* (Marina Fischer-Kowalski, Lazaros Xenidis, Simron Jit Singh). In addition, a study on the energy analysis of Samothraki island was also produced as a working paper that will be used for a fuller analysis of the island’s material and energy metabolism for a subsequent paper.

*See Annex 5: First draft of the paper with summary in excel sheet prints,
See Annex 6: Energy analysis*