

FOCUS GROUPS – A Vision for Samothraki in 2030

FINAL REPORT

July 2014

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Executive Summary

The Samothraki 2014 project was intended to both facilitate data collection and offer research methods training for graduate students. The qualitative module entitled 'Focus groups and visioning' involved future-centred focus groups with people from Samothraki (Greece). Participants were asked to talk about their vision for the island in 2030 and to discuss steps to turn that vision into practice. The concluding part of the focus group involved a questions and answers session which provided opportunities for both participants and researchers to raise and answer specific questions.

Six focus groups were conducted between 3-7 May 2014, involving 37 local people from diverse economic sectors and social groups, including farming, fishing and bee keeping, tourism, public sector administration and civil society. A particular effort was made to involve adults from all age groups. All groups were organised, facilitated and translated by local people.¹

Across all groups participants raised a number of key issues that relate to 1) current challenges affecting the island, 2) hopes for the future of Samothraki in 2030 and 3) ideas how to achieve this desired future.

1) *Current Challenges*

Local concerns about the current state of the island revolved around economic, social and environmental issues. As regards economic issues, participants commented on the need for additional funding for public projects and business start-ups, a desire to extend the length of the

¹ Our special thanks go to Giorgos Kostakiotis, Carlota Marañón and Jacqueline Maskalidis-Kirby for their tireless efforts. The Cultural Centre in Chora offered a very suitable venue for the group discussions.

tourist season and employment opportunities for younger people so they could remain on/return to Samothraki. In addition, local people felt that currently available resources are not adequately used for the benefit of the island (e.g. thermal springs, goats). Social issues included a perceived lack of cooperation, gaps in law enforcement and policy implementation, the need to enhance the level of trust both within the Samothraki community and between local people, municipal authorities and State organisations and a desire to forge closer economic and social links between different groups (e.g. primary sector providing high-quality food products for tourism operators). Environmental issues included overgrazing caused by large numbers of goats and sheep, overfishing, inadequate water and waste management and deforestation to meet rising demands for firewood.

2) *The Future of Samothraki in 2030*

Many participants believed in a better, more sustainable future for Samothraki as long as people were prepared to take action now. Some emphasised the need to sustain current population levels and to entice young people to remain on/return to the island. A number of participants explicitly expressed their wish for 'soft', small-scale development that preserves the unique character of the island and that does not endanger its natural environment.

3) *Initiatives for Samothraki 2030*

The majority of participants expressed a desire to build a better Samothraki and they felt that this could be achieved through better cooperation, enhanced exchange of information on the island, improved transport links with mainland Greece and beyond. Concrete ideas included:

- **New economic activities** that protect and enhance the unique character and natural beauty of the island (e.g. agro- and eco-tourism, labelling of local food products and their sale through local restaurants and hotels, exporting Samothraki products to mainland Greece and other parts of Europe)
- **Sustainable management of natural resources** (e.g. reducing livestock numbers and enhancing quality of herds, growing animal fodder on the island, marine protected areas to aid recovery of fish stocks)
- Proposals for the setting up of **new cooperatives** in farming, fishing, tourism and services
- A greatly enhanced **online presence** for Samothraki and **improve communication** (e.g. high-quality websites advertising accommodation on the island, online sources of information by and for local people)
- **Improved infrastructure and services** both on the island and beyond (e.g. improved ferry links and maintenance of local roads, enhanced information services for tourists and local people, well signposted walking trails)
- **Steps towards a self-sufficient Samothraki** (e.g. greater use of renewable energy sources on the island such as thermal springs and hydropower, local food)
- **Education and skills training** for local people (e.g. training tourist guides, business and marketing skills for small businesses and cooperatives, advice on EU funding sources, good practice examples of sustainable community development from other European countries)
- **Innovative cultural and social activities** (e.g. social-environmental projects that maintain/increase biodiversity, enhance social interaction and provide novel cultural and recreational opportunities)

The Samothraki 2014 research team would like to thank all local people who were involved in the focus groups for their time and input. We welcome any comments or suggestions on this document.

Methodological approach

Focus groups can serve as a powerful tool for social-scientific and interdisciplinary sustainability research, by facilitating the recording and analysis of group-based discussions and decision-making. In addition, they can be used to initiate change processes within groups and communities, including decisions towards greater sustainability.

The growing popularity of focus groups in social research has also contributed to a greater awareness of both the benefits and drawbacks of this method. However, their potential for collecting information about group processes and deliberative decision-making is often not fully realised, with many focus-group-based studies adopting more standard approaches to content analysis that focus on individuals' contributions to the group discussion. In many ways, the potential of focus groups to elicit the social nature of human decision-making has not yet been fully exploited.

Focus groups can also offer a forum for participants to discuss their vision for the future as well as their proposals for achieving that future. The inclusion of a visioning element in focus group research can provide opportunities for participants to deliberate how they would like their place or community to develop. Future-centred focus group discussions such as the work presented in this report can open up opportunities for forward thinking and long-term planning that may or may not be the starting point for a transformation towards greater sustainability.

The methodological approach used in the Samothraki 2014 project

The Samothraki 2014 project was intended to both facilitate data collection and offer research methods training for graduate students. The qualitative module entitled 'Focus groups and visioning' adopted a semi-structured, future-centred approach to focus group research. Participants were asked to talk about their vision for the island in 2030 and to discuss steps to turn that vision into practice. The concluding part of the focus group involved a questions and answers session which provided opportunities for both participants and researchers to raise and answer specific questions.

This choice of methodology reflected prior discussions within the team of lead researcher for the Samothraki 2014 project. It was agreed that previous qualitative work on the island in 2012 by a research team from the Institute of Social Ecology Vienna, under the leadership of Prof. Marina Fischer-Kowalski (see also Petridis *et al.* 2013), had already yielded a large amount of detailed information regarding current challenges on the island. A logical next step was to tap into people's future visions, in particular with regard to efforts to reconcile future economic and social development with environmental conservation on the island.

It is important to note, however, that many participants did comment on current challenges before/while discussing the future of the island. In some cases, participants explicitly stated that plans for the future need to be based on lessons learnt from the past.

The composition of the research team changed on a daily basis, with the two lead researchers (environmental sociologist Dr Henrike Rau and anthropologist Prof Pernille Gooch) being accompanied each day by a different group of postgraduate students from various European universities specialising in social-scientific and interdisciplinary sustainability research. The diversity of research staff and students ensured a very high level of interdisciplinarity. One of the student groups chose the focus group module as their primary activity and thus played a key role in the preparation of the final report and group presentation.

Participant recruitment took place through local networks. Some of the participants had previously taken part in focus groups during research work carried out in 2012. **Six focus groups** were conducted between 3-7 May 2014, involving **37 local people** from diverse economic sectors and social groups, including farming, fishing and bee keeping, tourism, public sector administration and civil society. A particular effort was made to involve adults from all age groups. All groups were organised, facilitated and translated by local people.

The role of the **facilitators and translators** deserves particular attention, given that all focus groups were conducted in Greek and simultaneously translated into English and Spanish to facilitate the international research team. The translators summarised the key themes and paraphrased the discussion. In some cases, translators asked participants to repeat/specify particular points. In some groups participants had a good command of the English language and did not require translation of the questions and comments from the research team.

While recognising the cultural specificity of body language that may or may not be easily interpretable by outsiders, it was nevertheless possible to gain some insight in to the dynamics of different groups.

Depending on the composition and nature of the group, facilitators took on a more or less active role. In one case it was necessary for the facilitator to intervene in order to prevent a more heated discussion between two individuals.

Five out of the six focus groups took place in the newly refurbished Cultural Centre in Chora, the capital of Samothraki. The Centre is situated in close proximity to the Town Hall and fulfils a number of different functions, including a crèche/kindergarten, a meeting place for the community and a venue for cultural events, seminars and development meetings. The choice of location reflected the researchers' intention to meet local people in a familiar place that they are comfortable with and that is within easy reach for people from different parts of the island.

Seating in the venue was arranged to create an open and comfortable atmosphere that is conducive to sharing ideas. All focus group participants and the facilitator gathered around a large table in the centre of the room. To facilitate the translation process, the research team and the translator sat outside the main circle. This specific seating arrangement meant that participants did not feel 'under observation' and were perhaps more inclined to discuss issues. The meeting of the elders took place in the lobby of a local hotel. In this case both participants and researchers sat around a low table.

Data analysis took place in groups and focused on identifying key themes from the discussions. Many of the themes emerged across (almost) all groups (e.g. the desire for sustainable development that is in keeping with the character of the island, need for more cooperation, overgrazing issues) while some others were specific to individual focus groups (e.g. decline in fish stocks, some reflections in FG 5 on attitudes towards information sharing among islanders).

In order to extract these themes, members of the different research groups started to collate short reports more or less immediately after the focus group. These reports were based on detailed notes taken during the discussion, together with records of personal reflections and impressions. All focus groups were audio-recorded, to facilitate more detailed/secondary analyses in the future. However, a decision was made to draw on written notes only (rather than audio recordings) and to focus on researchers' first impressions. This was done to produce a report while still on the island that could be shared with the local people.

Focus group 1: Elderly people

Date and Time: 3rd of May, 2014, 10:30am until 12:30pm

Location: Niki Beach Hotel, Kamariotissa, Samothraki

Participants: Six (four male, two female):

Professional background: Teacher, Fishermen and President of the Fishermen Association, President of the local Mountaineering Association, owner of local vineyard and olive tree grove who also rents out rooms.

Background information and characterization of the group

All participants in this group appeared to be well educated and actively involved in the community. They also continued to be economically active to varying degrees, even though they were formally retired. Some group members had already participated in the 2012 focus group.

The atmosphere in this group was open and friendly and members seemed to know and respect each other. At the end of the discussion many participants expressed their appreciation for being invited and for someone from outside Greece taking an interest in their activities and the island. All focus group members participated actively in the discussion, although the length and detail of their input differed. Focus group participants appeared to be very knowledgeable and voiced their opinions on a range of issues. All of them appeared to be strongly attached to the island, even if they have lived elsewhere for some time.

Contents of the Discussion

General outlook on the future of Samothraki

The general outlook within the group regarding the future of Samothrace was quite pessimistic over all. People were concerned about population decline, with some talking about the threat of ending up with an 'empty island'. They are also worried about economic decline and the deterioration of the island's infrastructure. All participants offered explanation for their pessimistic outlook in the future. However they raised a number of options regarding how to address this threat. In addition they saw it as their responsibility to remain involved and for others to do the same.

Ecological degradation

All focus group participants expressed their concern about various form of ecological damage and degradation. Key topics included overgrazing, deforestation, loss of species diversity in the farming sector, disappearance of wild flowers and its impact on the bee population and a decline

in marine wildlife (turtles, fish stocks and seals). They also discussed potential causes and proposed positive changes, including life stock management.

Infrastructure

The topic of infrastructure emerged on many occasions throughout the discussion. Issues included marine transportation (e.g. harbour, marina, ferry links to mainland Greece) and current problems with transport infrastructure on the island (e.g. quality of roads). Waste management (e.g. installation of water tanks) and waste water treatment were also mentioned.

However, the group felt that current touristic infrastructure can cater for a significant number of people now and in the future.

Associations

All participants stressed the need for collective action, with associations acting as key tool for collective action across different areas (tourism, agriculture, fishing). Associations were also seen as a way to address structural deficits (e.g. lack of state support, willingness of politicians to support) All participants see a lack of law enforcement and policy implementation. At the same time, many of them raised the issue of a decline in associations, mainly due to negative experiences in the past (e.g. collapse of previous olive oil association). One explanation offered related to a lack of trust between different groups of the island. Another issue raised related to the involvement of young people, there is a lack of succession of leadership of the associations. One explanation offered related to a lack of trust between different groups of the island.

Education and Training

Education was seen as a major tool for sustainable human and natural resources. Professional training and up skilling were highlighted in areas such as tourism, farming, fishing, animal husbandry, training mountain guides. Some members of the group felt that education opportunities are concentrated on the main land, thereby discouraging young people to remain on the islands.

Economic situation

The economic situation is currently quite bad on the island. There is a perceived lack of economic opportunities. The participants of this group highlighted the limited opportunities for exporting local products, even if products are high-quality or organic. There was a general concern about the economy feasibility and long term sustainability of new business ventures (e.g. fishing tourism, organic wine). However participants seemed to be open for new ventures and had many ideas for innovation. For example, all of them see the potential for local fodder production for example. There were concerns about the island's dependence on imported animal feed supplies. Moreover, land distribution seems to be an obstacle to innovation and a reason for overgrazing.

Solutions

Many participants highlighted the need for improved information and communication. Training shepherds in proper animal husbandry was as a key solution to the problem of overgrazing. In addition, the need for more control, regulation and law enforcement was raised. This was especially raised in the area of resource management, for example in fisheries and livestock.

Another solution revolved the around improved networking and organisation. People have to see tangible benefits and opportunities in order to engage in change processes. Making the most out of available human and natural resources and existing infrastructure (rather than waiting/hoping for large-scale development) was seen as a key solution.

Summary and reflections

This group considered economic diversification as a core strategy to increase the island's resilience to economic shocks and social and ecological challenges. Collective action and networking were seen as crucial to creating a positive future for Samothraki. While participants shared a rather pessimistic outlook for 2030, they nevertheless offered a wide range of solutions. Awareness of the Man and Biosphere Reserve (MBR) initiative remains quite low both within the group and across the island, despite efforts to inform people. Participants offered to assist future efforts to develop the MBR in Samothraki and to also get involved in other initiatives to ensure the future sustainability of the island.

Focus group 2: Primary sector and business owners

Date and time: 3 May 2014 at 7.35 pm

Location: Cultural centre, Chora

Participants: This group consisted of 13 participants – 3 women and 10 men – who were active in the primary sector and/or as small business owners (farming, fishing, bee-keeping, food and wine production, employees at the local museum, head of the women's association)

Background and composition of the group

The atmosphere was lively and there was a lot of interaction between participants prior, during and after the FG discussion. Many participants appeared to know each other more or less well but did not seem to communicate on a regular basis. A number of participants were actively involved in associations (e.g. Women's Association, Beekeepers' Association, new olive oil press initiative).

Participants arrived at different times and not all members contributed to the discussion. It should be mentioned that the participants took turns when commenting on different subjects and questions, which made it relatively easy to follow the discussion in this large group. The discussion lasted for approximately 1.5 hours.

Content of the discussion

The initial part of the discussion focused on key barriers faced by the primary sector. This was followed by a discussion regarding potential solutions to aid economic development on the island.

General outlook on the future of Samothraki

The general outlook of this group was very positive and there was clear evidence of an entrepreneurial spirit among (some of) its members. Those who spoke frequently highlighted the unique environmental and cultural features of Samothraki (e.g. local products such as honey, cheese, olive oil) and some also expressed their very strong connections with the island.

While a number of participants expressed some concern about the future of the island economy, most participants had a very optimistic and positive outlook. When probed by the moderator,

some participants outlined their ideas for future development. Suggestions included reducing the number of livestock but adding value to products from the primary sector (e.g. meat, cheese, honey) through labelling and improved sales both in the island and beyond. Tourism was identified by different participants as a sector ripe for expansion. At the same time, some participants also stressed that they want 'soft' development that protects the unique character of the island and that 'does not turn it into another Mykonos'.

Infrastructure

Despite the overall positive outlook of the group, infrastructure deficits were seen as a significant obstacle to development. Participants from various backgrounds raised the issue of insufficient transport links, especially with regard to exporting products from the island. Some members also reported that their business was highly dependent on the mainland (e.g. Alexandroupoli) for supplies. For example, one male contributor who had been brewing beer for his own consumption for almost three decades wanted to set up a brewing business. However, he stated that he had planned to grow the ingredients for the beer on the island but that the malting process for barley could not be done in Samothraki at this point in time. The cost of new production facilities and the lack of grants were also raised as an obstacle to new businesses.

Ecological damage and degradation

Overgrazing was once again raised as a major issue that affects all parts of the island and that negatively impacts businesses such as honey production and the growing of herbaceous plants. That said, some members also stressed the need to maintain a free-roaming sheep and goat population because of its key role in Samothraki's economy and culture and its appeal to visitors to the island. Nevertheless, many participants felt that some form of regulation or change of management of livestock was needed. Furthermore, one participant also identified factors other than overgrazing by goats as causes for environmental problems such as deforestation (e.g. caterpillars, fungal infection). In addition, overfishing was discussed by two members in particular who got into a heated debate about its causes.

The need for cooperation

This group also highlighted the urgent need for greater cooperation and the development of associations, especially in the primary sector. The newly established association for the olive oil press was viewed in a very positive light, with some members emphasising their involvement in the project and their hope for the future of olive oil production on the island. It was stated that this project could serve as a best practice example for local agricultural production.

Economic development

Participants outlined many opportunities for expanding the primary sector and linking it to other sectors such as tourism. The new olive oil press project clearly acts as an important focus of activity for many of those present. Additionally, some participants talked about the importance of establishing additional innovative production facilities. Labelling Samothraki food products (e.g. goat meat, honey) was seen as an important strategy for adding value and increasing profits for small island businesses. The bureaucratic burden associated with food labelling was seen as major obstacle to achieving this goal. Additional markets outside the island were also identified (e.g. Athens, Turkey, Bulgaria and the US). For example, one bee-keeper stated that it is easier for him to export his honey to the U.S. than to the EU.

Summary and reflections

This group concentrated primarily on the potential for economic development in the primary sector and possible linkages to other areas. The main problems raised by this group revolved around barriers to establishing new businesses on the island, such as paper-work, lack of financial support, infrastructure and associations. Key solutions proposed by participants included establishing more cooperation amongst each other as well as better information and education. They stated that action is required as soon as possible if things in Samothraki should change for the better. They see themselves as primarily responsible for implementing change rather than relying on the state or the mainland.

The group seemed to be very positive and active in the discussion. Even though problems were raised they kept a very strong sense of entrepreneurial spirit and displayed creativity in finding solutions for future development.

Focus group 3 – Public service and administration

Date and time: 4 May 2014, 11 a.m.

Location: Cultural Centre, Chora, Samothraki

Participants: seven (five women, two men): four people working for the local administration, one member of the forestry department, one police woman, one ambulance driver

Background information and characterization of the group:

There was an open and friendly atmosphere in this group. Group members appeared to have ample experience participating in meetings and roundtable discussions. They felt comfortable in the focus group environment. Interestingly, many of the members in this group had one full-time job (rather than a multitude of different part-time occupations that characterised many of the other focus groups) and they clearly identified themselves with their professions.

The majority of the participants in this group appeared to be very educated. Some referred to their degrees/prior studies during the initial round of introductions. Contributions from this group covered a wide range of topics.

Contents of discussion:

General Outlook on the Future of the Island

Participants' outlook on the future was largely optimistic but they would also not discount potential negative outcomes concerning future developments on the island. However, it is important to note that the majority of participants favoured incremental changes rather than a radical transformation.

Ecological damage and degradation

Overgrazing was mentioned as the key issue that affects all parts of Samothraki, posing a particular threat to the forest cover of the island. This said, some members also recognised the

role of the free-roaming sheep and goat population for Samothraki's image as a tourism destination.

Leadership, innovation and education

Past attempts to build cooperatives among farmers and tourism operators produced mixed outcomes, with some succeeding and others failing.

The need to take concrete action and to learn from good practice examples was highlighted, especially in relation to farming. In addition, one participant mentioned the need for tradespeople to improve their skills.

One participant highlighted the need for more education and management skills among those who take up leadership and decision-making roles on the island. 'If people do not see progress they are less likely to act in the future.'

Governance

Unsurprisingly, this group appeared to be particularly aware of governance issues, including the reduction in the number of civil servants on the island. It was stressed that Samothraki cannot be treated in isolation from the rest of Greece and that the ways in which the country is governed impact directly on the island.

This group placed particular emphasis on law enforcement, including concerted action by the local administration (e.g. to prevent 'wild' camping by tourists). Barriers to law enforcement were highlighted on many occasions. For example, two participants discussed the fact that special protection zones to prevent overgrazing were created in 1958 but that these were never properly enforced. Here it was suggested to take decisive action to tackle overgrazing, including potential interventions by the local authorities.

The problem of geographical scale and its impact on local governance was mentioned by this group. Participants reflected on the island's dependence on EU and central government funding and decisions made by the Greek state, including legislation in relation to primary sector activities.

Like other groups, this group highlighted the current lack of cooperation on the island. However, their main focus was on institutional issues (e.g. relationship between local authorities and citizens). Participants also referred to a prevailing 'culture of dependency', which means that active citizenship tends to be the exception rather than the rule.

Information and communication

A general lack of communication was raised as another important issue. For example, one participant referred to the tourist information office in Kamariotissa harbour that is currently not used to its full potential. The need to improve the online presence of the island more generally, and tourism businesses in particular, was also emphasised.

Summary and reflections:

This group emphasised the need to enforce existing laws and regulation, to work within institutional and organisational frameworks and to change things incrementally. At the same

time, they also discussed the need for institutional reform, greater individual responsibility and the need for action (rather than more reports and verbal commitment only).

In addition, participants mentioned three cultural factors which they saw as important for the development of the island: 1) the dominant role of a small number of families which shaped the island economy in the past, 2) prevailing ideas regarding law enforcement and what counts as law breaking and deviant behaviour and 3) an unwillingness to enforce the laws because of a potential for conflict among islanders.

Focus group 4: NGO members and civil society

Date and time: 4 May 2014 at 2 pm

Location: Cultural Centre, Chora, Samothraki

Participants: 4 Participants (3 female, 1 male) from civil society and NGO sector.

Background information and characterization of the group

Participants in this group appeared to be very active and engaged members of the community. All four participants were very educated and had lived away from the island. Three members understood English and spoke (some) English. Various members were actively involved in cultural projects (e.g. cinema, choir/musical society). They also had concrete plans for future activities, including setting up a herb garden and developing a spelt grain growing programme.

Contents of discussion

General outlook

All members in this group appeared to have a rather positive view of the future. Their general outlook was optimistic and hopeful. They emphasised the need for greater cooperation but also recognised the necessity for action by individuals or small groups (rather than waiting for large-scale initiatives to happen). They placed considerable hope in incomers and young people being able to change the future of the island for the better. Moreover, the group emphasised that change does not always come easy but that persistence pays and that a brighter future can be reached.

Some participants viewed the current economic crisis as an opportunity for initiating positive change and enhancing people's engagement in economic, social and cultural initiatives. There was a strong emphasis on self-reliance. At the same time, participants expressed their hopes that the upcoming local elections might change the political landscape for the better, with many new and young candidates running.

Cooperation, communication and action

This group emphasised the need for enhanced cooperation and greatly improved communication between individuals and groups/associations. One participant stated that 'if I open something, a wave will start and people will come, not only for me but also for you.' They expressed the need for cultural projects that bring people together and highlighted recent projects (e.g. musical society, cinema club) that brought about positive change but that were also

negatively impacted by the recession, a drop in consumer spending and a lack of interest among islanders.

There was also a strong emphasis on turning innovative ideas into action (e.g. restoring old water mills for grinding grains, saving native seeds, setting up botanical herb garden). Lack of communication and high levels of distrust were seen as major obstacles. However, the group believe that positive change was already happening, with more open debates and exchange of ideas taking place. One such positive change was the new olive press cooperative, which, if successful, could set an example for starting similar cooperative projects in the future.

Links with the island and connections with the environment

This group showed a very strong awareness of existing environmental problems on the island (e.g. overgrazing, loss of biodiversity). At the same time, participants emphasised the need for people to (re-)connect with nature and to develop Samothraki sustainably and with respect for nature. For them, the main attraction of the island was its natural beauty and biological diversity (e.g. herbaceous plants, insects). They expressed a wish for small-scale sustainable development rather than 'big development'. Some participants emphasised the need to build up people's environmental consciousness and awareness of 'their roots in land and sea'.

Education

Education was seen as crucial for getting in new ideas. Some participants felt very strongly about the need to reform education. One participant stated that 'in order to survive on a small island in a sustainable way, we need to re-learn.' To them how people are educated directly influences their ability to connect with the environment they inhabit. Learning to grow food, how the human body works and how to relate to the natural environment was seen as 'real education'. Self-development (rather than economic opportunities) was a strong focal point for this group.

Given the high level of education that characterised this group, participants' proposals for sustainable development in Samothraki were well thought-out and emphasised a holistic approach.

Summary and reflections

This group showed a high level of environmental awareness and endorsed a more holistic approach to development. There was a very strong emphasis of self-reliance and self-development. At the same time, they also recognised the need for effective communication and cooperation. Overall, this group displayed an optimistic outlook, combined with a pronounced willingness to turn ideas into action.

Focus Group 5: Young local professionals

Date and Time: 5 May 2014 at 7pm

Location: Cultural Centre, Chora, Samothraki

Participants: Three participants (two women, one men). All three appeared to be very well educated.

Background information and characterization of the group:

All participants grew up on the island and returned after studies and academic careers on the mainland. All are actively involved in the community (e.g. a local radio station, secretary in public office, and teacher/local guide).

All participants exhibited a high level of engagement in the topics under discussion, a strong attachment to the future of the island and a strong wish for change. The discussion was lively and friendly and it brought out new topics that were not mentioned by earlier groups (e.g. the role of media and other aspects of information sharing).

Contents of discussion:

General outlook

Generally participants felt that the island has many advantages and offers great opportunities for future development. But, as one of them expressed it, 'the future depends on how we act today.' They saw the present situation as rather stagnant and expressed the need for new ideas and development impulses from outside for things to change. As all participants grew up on the island but left it for the mainland for a period before returning, they were able to look at the island's situation from both an insider's and an outsider's perspective. This was demonstrated for example through one respondent's comparison of the situation for young people on the island during their youth and the situation today (e.g. nowadays the youth would hang out in cafés instead of engaging in cultural events or sports as they did earlier). Due to the participants' lack of trust of politicians, the focus was on issues concerning cultural change rather than changes within political and legal structures.

According to the participants, the island presently lacks cultural leadership. They did, however, see themselves and other like-minded people as potential change agents that could lead 'counter-cultural' developments towards more communal modes of living and shared decision-making, in particular because of their broader outlook gained by living outside the island for some time.

Role of tourism in island's development and future

The participants saw tourism as the main driver of development on the island. They expressed concern that the tourist season on Samothraki is very short, arguing for an extended tourist season from May to September. Although being generally very positive about the role of tourism for the economy of the island and the welfare of its people, they did, however, express concern about the type of tourism. They expressed their strong wish to preserve the cultural and natural heritage of the island, stating that they do not want it to turn into a second Mykonos. Rather, for them the focus of tourism development should lie on specialised eco-tourism, employing local guides to guide people through the island, highlighting its cultural, spiritual and natural heritage.

Technology and media

While it was previously very difficult to export and sell goods from the island due to bureaucratic barriers and weak infrastructural connection to mainland and potential clients, this has become less of a problem due to the availability of information and communication technology (ICT). As regards online access, they stressed that presently it is mainly used for social networking (e.g.

facebook), but for the future they saw new ICT-based possibilities for economic activities through marketing local products online. According to members of the group, improved online access could also be used to create a good life for people on the island through teleworking. They also considered the possibilities of new technology for enhancing information flows and for providing transparency, both seen as necessary aspects for a more participatory future on the Island (e.g. political decision making). One participant did, however, express concerns that IT also separates people physically and socially from each other.

Generally, the lack of local media on Samothraki was seen as a significant problem. Until now there is no newspaper or other information exchange via media, apart from one radio station, Radio Samothraki.

Culture and lifestyles

The discussion also focused strongly on cultural development, concentrating largely on issues concerning cultural changes rather than a transformation of political and legal structures. This can be attributed to an overall lack of trust in politics among the group members. Instead, they largely endorsed a more humanist ideal whereby educational and cultural changes serve to promote improved organisation and reasonable resource use. Participants expressed their concern about cultural activities such as the theatre group, the library or the music society experiencing a significant decline/being discontinued due to recession.

According to the members of this focus group, there has been a significant cultural shift towards greater individualism, with people focusing more on their own interests and personal gain rather than the benefits for the whole community. The focus group members were astonished to hear that a person from another focus group who was originally not from the island publically announced his ideas of brewing beer. Participants felt that people in Samothraki usually keep their ideas to themselves, for fear of others using them. They felt that this observable level of distrust within the community is further strengthened by forms of anonymous communication and economical market activities. One member described the process of transformation as follows: 'Everything starts with a great vision until someone comes and judges it and people then lose confidence.' This appears to point towards low levels of mutual support among community members. A way of mitigating this lack of trust proposed by the focus group members is the establishment of cooperatives and other forms of the 'sharing economy.' Collaborative and co-creational activities should be strengthened and more free spaces and places should be made available for this type of work, thereby transforming the prevalent ideal of competition into a new form of cooperation on the Island.

Education

Against this background, it is little surprising that participants' hope for a better future was directed towards new forms of education. Participants felt that the island would also benefit from teachers with new ideas and a different outlook who are brought in from elsewhere. They also saw themselves as 'bridging agents' between the island and outside knowledge and cultural ideals that are urgently needed to transform the island. The group members were quite pessimistic about the possibility of a significant transformation based solely on cultural and economic capital already available within the Island. Some expressed a rather critical view of mainstream education, stating that it lacks ambition to "make people better people" who treat

themselves, others in the community and the environment with respect. For them, Samothraki's future depends on decisions taken today in relation to education, tourism and preservation of environment. The creation of places to learn more about the community, free spaces, or an experimental platform to learn and share ideas was endorsed by participants as an important development strategy. Education for farmers was mentioned, too. Agronomic and botanic expertise or other forms of agricultural education are currently lacking. Similarly, environmental literacy is diminishing on the island.

Role of institution and politics

The organizational structures on the island were described by one participant as lacking in capacity to solve local problems. Land ownership issues were mentioned as a source of conflict, especially on the north of the island. Responsibility for addressing land ownership issues, including disputes, will once again be transferred to the municipality by the end of the year, thereby ending practices of self-regulation by private owners/interests. This is likely to lead to changes in the distribution of (common) land. A lack of health services and other facilities (i.e. gyms) was also mentioned as a problem on the island which should be improved (e.g. no medical specialists on the island)

Economic Activity

In general, participants expressed their preference for local economic activity, as opposed to foreign investment. They highlighted the potential for exploiting resources on the island that is not yet fully realised. The role of the local council regarding public procurement, funding and public works was explicitly mentioned. On the other hand, participants were sceptical with regard to investments by the council. Moreover, resources that are needed on the island are still largely imported from mainland Greece and beyond. Renewable energy was highlighted as a potential source of income on the island, with opportunities emerging to make the island more self-sufficient, or to even turn it into a net exporter of energy. However, one participant expressed concern about the possible defacement of the island's unique landscape due to wind park developments.

Participants highlighted current problems with economic stagnation on the island. A manifestation of this is the lack of construction of new buildings and facilities. Lack of usage of existing resources was repeatedly highlighted; however, the threat of inappropriate use and possible destruction was also raised (e.g. people picking herbaceous plants in ways that destroy existing plant stocks).

Summary and Reflections:

Regarding the future of the island, participants in this group were generally quite positive and optimistic. They stressed the many advantages of the island, especially its natural beauty and rich cultural heritage. They mentioned their strong emotional connection with the island as a main reason for them to return after studying/working on the mainland. The island is seen as a source of tranquillity and recovery for city dwellers who want to live in peace and harmony with nature.

Overall, group members expressed a strong desire for cultural and educational development. On the other hand, there was less emphasis on environmental problems and changes, compared to

other focus groups. The issue of overgrazing was not explicitly mentioned until one of the researcher asked for it during the Q and A session towards the end of the discussion.

Group 6

Focus Group 6: Tourism professionals

Date and Time: 7 May 2014, 7.30 pm -10pm

Location: Cultural Center in Chora

Participants: 4 adults (2 female, 2 male); one hotel owner, one café and sweet shop owner/professional photographer, one photographer/social cooperative member, president of hotelier association.

Background information and group description:

Although this group was expected to be one of the largest focus groups, relatively few participants turned up on the day. Three interviewees arrived at the arranged time, with one other person arriving much later. Responses tended to be quite short and the facilitator had to regularly probe and prompt to get more detailed answers. Conversation between group members was less lively compared to other focus groups, with some disagreements and tensions being discernible at times.

Contents of discussion:

General outlook:

Once again, participants in this group felt that the island has many advantages and offers great opportunities for future development, especially around tourism. On the other hand, they expressed concern about the lack of cooperation on the island, in particular with regard to economic development. The potential danger of overdevelopment was also mentioned. That said, participants felt that Samothraki has largely managed to retain its unique character so far.

Economic development and tourism

All participants agreed that in the future the island should develop in a way that preserves the unique natural environment, attracting alternative tourists rather than the mass market. They envisioned a society with increased social cooperation, more effective authorities, a controlled but bolstered tourism sector, and higher levels of awareness and knowledge on the part of both the local population and visitors. In this future vision, Samothraki would not resemble other Greek islands that suffer from tourism-related overdevelopment, but remain truly unique, with an emphasis on local food and nature. Local people would be able to engage in a variety of jobs and increase their income through better marketing and access to information. Participants mentioned several key problems that hinder the implementation of this vision, along with possible solutions.

The main problems participants addressed included uncontrolled tourism (free camping/nudism), poor waste management, environmental degradation, a distinct lack of general knowledge and information, resistance to cooperation, and ineffective local authorities. Despite unilaterally acknowledging the existence of these issues, participants often differed in their opinions regarding the scale and relevance of these problems. For example, one participant felt strongly that public nudity was disrespectful, for example, while another suggested that this type of practice would be acceptable in certain areas. Free camping, which participants noted

contributed to environmental degradation, was also debated: one participant proposed that the municipality should enforce laws and fines for unauthorized camping. Another participant countered that free camping has occurred on the island since the 1960s and that it should be effectively controlled and restricted to certain areas rather than being stopped altogether.

Waste management

With regards to waste, interviewees problematized the lack of recycling on the island and explained that locals might lack a general consciousness and motivation to recycle. They agreed that those who lived away from the island for a time may have gained a better awareness of waste management from foreign host cultures. Many tourists, they argued, did not properly manage waste or recycle while visiting the island even though they were likely to do so at home. Poor waste management was attributed in part to infrequent rubbish collection carried out by local authorities.

Governance, cooperation and (lack of) trust in local authorities

In general, participants seemed to see local authorities as rather unengaged and limited in their effectiveness, and described a general sense of distrust in 'the system' as a whole. Thus, cooperation between authorities and citizens was reported as being low. Even between citizens, cooperation rarely flourishes. One participant stated that a culture of cooperation is very difficult to promote. Other participants expressed frustration at the way in which distrust and resistance to change hinder efforts to cooperate. Perhaps the largest problem discussed centered on a perceived lack of general knowledge and awareness of lifestyle alternatives and social/environmental issues.

Solutions

Several creative solutions to the aforementioned problems were also discussed. The key solution proposed was to address the general lack of knowledge and awareness through development of local institutions and associations that could provide heightened access to information. One suggestion was to establish an office to inform local people about EU funding available for primary sector development. Tourists could also be better educated, perhaps through pamphlets delivered upon arrival, of the issues surrounding free camping and waste management. In general, local incomes could increase via a lengthened tourist season. Participants discussed promoting agro-tourism and food tourism, to complement more mainstream exploitation of the island's natural attractions (while, at the same time, avoiding any environmental harm). One participant discussed in great detail a proposal to develop a certification system for local and/or organic Samothraki food. Another participant countered that this might not work due to the increased costs of the goods. However, the first participant then argued that production costs could also be lowered through use of local alternative energy and animal feed. In general, participants focused on increasing local production and decreasing dependence on the mainland as a tool for sustainable development.

Summary and Reflections:

Overall, participants in Group 6 agreed that the unique and special character of Samothraki needs to be better communicated to both locals and visitors. There was a strong belief in this group that environmental protection and development can go hand in hand through promotion of alternative tourism, enhanced cooperation, and heightened education and awareness. Participants considered cooperation to be very important for progress but also very difficult to

achieve. However, it should be noted that this focus group (as well as others) may suffer from a self-selection bias in that those who are especially enthusiastic about cooperation might also be more inclined to come together to discuss these issues with researchers.

As a whole, this focus group revolved around an exchange of information rather than an action-focused debate, as participants lacked overall consensus on ways forward. Nonetheless, all participants, despite their expressed frustration and some occasional spells of cynicism, seemed to be either already actively engaged in a range of projects or had many ideas that they thought would help achieve their vision.

Due to scheduling issues, this focus group facilitated an unusually large number of student observers, which may have affected the comfort of the participants and direction of the discussion. That said, participants repeatedly engaged with the research team, asking for students' and researchers' opinions and thoughts throughout the entire interview.

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