

Outlining a sustainable future for the island of Samothraki, Greece, as a MAB Biosphere Reserve, and creating a regional showcase – Phase Two (“Samothraki Phase 2”)

**Final Report
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Introduction

The project “Outlining a sustainable future for the island of Samothraki (Greece) as a MAB reserve, and creating a regional showcase” commenced in August 2012 and continues from the achievements of three previous projects that were to establish the feasibility of a new Biosphere Reserve on the island of Samothraki, two realised by SEC, Vienna, and one in collaboration of SEC with UNESCO Venice (Fischer-Kowalski et al., 2011). The previous achievements included an extensive survey of visitors, their behaviour and preferences, the outline of economic models for tourism, a comprehensive consultation with stakeholders, several meetings during the summers of 2009-2012 and finally the preparation of the application to UNESCO for the new BR translated into Greek, signed by the Mayor and unanimously supported by the municipal council and submitted by the Greek National MAB committee in 2011. The proposal was generally very positively received by UNESCO, but the Advisory Committee recommended that the proposal be deferred due to a small list of additional points to be clarified and encouraged the authorities to resubmit the proposal in accordance with the Seville Strategy and the Statutory Framework of Biosphere Reserves.

The present project (phase 2) has become instrumental in assisting the Municipality of Samothraki in resubmitting the proposal to UNESCO, in particular supporting the creation of a BR management as well as developing some first projects towards sustainable development pathways. Thus, the present project plays an important role in an ongoing process that has been initiated by the Austrian MAB committee and was highly acknowledged, including the Sustainability Award 2010 it received by the Austrian Ministry of Science and Research. To this end, the current project appears necessary to achieve the main current goal, the advancement of a BR management plan, while paving the way for future science perspectives on the island.

The project had planned the following activities for the period August 2012 - November 2013, all of which has been achieved:

1. Development of a management plan and monitoring standards for the proposed biosphere reserve on the island of Samothraki with clear management goals, structure, roles and responsibilities in line with national and local legal frameworks and policies.
2. Elaboration of some modules / projects towards sustainable development for the proposed Samothraki BR, in particular relating to the economy (such as tourism, agriculture, fishing), energy self-reliance, waste management, and sustainable infrastructure, leading to first steps in implementation in collaboration with the local administration, NGOs, and civil society networks.
3. Development of a science perspective for setting up a long-term socio-ecological research station within the international LTSER network in collaboration with the archaeological division of Samothraki.

4. Contribution to the development and reinforcement of a regional network of MAB reserves in SEE and the Mediterranean, in terms of management guidelines (structural and procedural) and related monitoring tools for sustainable development along the lines of the Sevilla Strategy, the Madrid Action Plan, and the UNEP-MAP integrated coastal zone management protocol.

Moreover, additional tasks have been undertaken, to increase the visibility of the research and strengthen the participatory character of the process.

Tasks undertaken between August 2012 – November 2013

a) Field Research

i) MAB application resubmission

Based on our research, administrative efforts and networking work, an application has now been resubmitted to UNESCO for including Samothraki in the World Network of Biosphere Reserves, making the island the first “post-Sevilla” Biosphere Reserve in Greece. Before final recommendations from the part of the Secretariat (expected in January 2014), some additional amendments may be requested.

The support for this re-submission (a 200-page document) could not be covered by the financial means provided by ÖAW-MAB, nor will it be possible to cover eventual additional inquiries. Thus while the support from ÖAW-MAB was vital for the whole process, and without this support the Greek island community of Samothraki would never have found its way into candidature for UNESCO-MAB, the last full three months of work have not been covered. We would be extremely grateful if there were a way to cover our excess expenses.

ii) Student excursion October 2012

In October 2012 we organized a 1-week student course/excursion to the island of Samothraki. The objectives of the course were manifold: (a) expose students to sustainability and development challenges in a local setting seen from the perspective of social ecology, (b) reflect and engage in the design of a management plan to include first project ideas for the new biosphere reserve such as for sustainable tourism, land use, water, waste and energy systems, and (c) allow the experience of a transdisciplinary research process by learning to interact with stakeholders and conduct interviews in a culturally challenging environment.

Methodologically, during the excursion two main approaches were pursued:

- Focus Group Interviews with local stakeholders (such as fishermen, farmers, local professionals, elderly people in need of care, and tourism entrepreneurs) in order to explore their professional situation, their expectations for the future and the hopes and fears they might associate with a Biosphere Reserve, coded as “improving the quality of life on the island at lower environmental cost”. About 50 people participated in the focus groups, many articulated the need to become active themselves, and issued ideas what to do. This helped many more people to understand what a MAB-BR is about and see their own role in this, and provided excellent socio-economic orientation to the research team and the students.
- Distance Sampling methods in order to estimate livestock densities in different area types. This was performed in order to assess the pressing problem of erosion and biodiversity loss due to overgrazing.

A full paper for the “Working Paper Series” of the institute of Social Ecology has been produced providing a detailed description of the methods used, as well as first results and recommendations for future research on the island (see below section: publications)

As the students were so enthusiastic about this experience, we have successfully applied for an Erasmus Intensive Programme to organize another excursion to Samothraki in May 2014, in collaboration with the following universities: National University of Ireland, Galway, Lund University, University of the Aegean, Autonomous University of Barcelona.

iii) Field visit July 2013

Our three-week field stay at the island of Samothraki in the summer of 2013 has been in many ways instrumental for the smooth progress and success of the project. During our stay our team conducted additional interviews as part with the on-going Master’s and PhD theses, as well as were engaged in multiple networking activities (see below: organizational progress).

Moreover, from a very fruitful talk with Meriem Bouamrane, Programme Specialist, responsible for Euro-MAB in UNESCO (Paris), there sprang the idea of a visit of Johanna MacTaggart, Coordinator of the Biosphere Reserve Lake Vänern Archipelago & Mount Kinnekulle, Sweden, to Samothraki to gain her own impressions on the plausibility of a local MAB-BR there. Johanna MacTaggart visited the island in July 2013, and also participated in one of the above meetings. During the short term of her stay, she was shown some of the natural and cultural beauties of the site, and responded supportively to the idea of Samothraki’s application.

iv) EuroMAB 2013 and Training Course for Island and Coastal Area BR Managers

Two representatives from the local Samothraki team have participated in the recent Euro-MAB 2013, October 15-19, 2013, Brockville, Frontenac Arch Biosphere, Ontario, Canada, as well as the Training Course for Island and Coastal Area Biosphere Reserves Manager, from 21- 25 October 2013, Island of Jeju, Republic of Korea, organized by the Man and the Biosphere Programme and the Jeju Island Biosphere Reserve. These two occasions were a very important step for educating the local Samothraki team within the wider network and consolidating its knowledge base.

b) Organisational Progress

i) Establishment of a Scientific Advisory Board

In order to support the Science perspectives of the future Samothraki Biosphere Reserve, a “Scientific Advisory Board” (SAB) with renowned scientists coming from different disciplines has been established. The SAB will have an advisory function vis a vis the management of the BR, the Commune of Samothraki and the Greek National MAB Committee. As a body, it should be consulted at least annually with respect to the following tasks:

- The development of a science plan, both medium term strategically and for each year
- Job announcements for the management, in particular regarding criteria of qualification
- The development of a monitoring scheme, and the annual evaluation of progress
- It should be consulted ahead of the delivery of reports to UNESCO.

On their own initiative, members of the SAB will seek to raise funding for research on the island, help building networks of interested researchers, organize scientific excursions and workshops, and support MAB Samothraki in linking into existing networks of sustainable island initiatives and help with reviewing research proposals and publications.

See Annex 1: Scientific Advisory Board for BR Samothraki, members list

ii) Consultation regarding the BR management

During our stay on the island in October 2012 and July 2013 we also assumed further rounds of in-depth talks and negotiations on how to establish an appropriate management for the further process, based on a previous draft of preliminary statutes of an association (“Sustainable Samothraki”) to serve as a management body, in strong collaboration with the commune. Such discussions took place in two levels. First, with a number of people who have given long-term

support to this project, and second with a broader circle of stakeholders, during the focus group discussions held together with the students. The latter was a unique opportunity to be informed about and reflect on the obstacles and challenges to be overcome in order to come up with an operational management structure. Specific issues discussed included different visions for future tourism developments, in line with the BR concept, as well as different alternatives of financing the future BR management, via introducing a voluntary or compulsory contribution by visitors of the island. This discussion was based on the results of a willingness to pay survey performed the previous year.

In July 2013, efforts were concentrated on establishing a core group on the island that would take the agenda further, presumably in the form of an association, that in the future might enter contractual relations with the Commune, on the one hand, and eventually the National Ministry of Environment, on the other hand, to take care of the existing Natura 2000 areas and their protection, and at the same time developing a MAB-BR under the Unesco agenda. Two meetings were held, each with more than 20 people interested in taking an active part in the process. A number of locals declared their commitment to take responsibility for creating a civil partner institution that would take the agenda further. Among them are Mary Pitiakoudi, an intelligent energetic young woman experienced in communication, Giorgos Maskalidis, an experienced forester, Carlota Maranon, the Spanish wife of one of the major tourism entrepreneurs of the island; she holds a degree in Greek law, and Giorgos Kostakiotis, a PhD student in anthropology at the Univ. of Aegean and many years a social worker on the island. He had been the one to facilitate the focus groups in October. Finally, there is Jaqueline Kirby, who lives on the island for many years and teaches English. This appears to be a good team, professionally qualified and English speaking, commanding support from the commune and well-motivated. The formation of this group, and its willingness to enter a process of formalization, is an essential step forward in the overall process. While the case of Samothraki will be considered by UNESCO, the local group will proceed in the legal consolidation of an association that holds the potential to become a major partner in the process of founding a Biosphere Reserve.

Annex 2: Proposed management structure for Samothraki BR

iii) Meeting with Mayor

Moreover, we used the opportunity to arrange a meeting with the Mayor in order to inform him about the progress of research and the preparation of the proposal. Once more, the Mayor confirmed his full acknowledgement for our efforts and reaffirmed his personal, and the Council's, total understanding and support of a vision for a future of Samothraki as a Biosphere Reserve. He further committed to assist our work and provide any information as well as organizational and other support, in order to facilitate the process of resubmitting the proposal to UNESCO. Such a position by the Mayor was very positively endorsed by the research team

and reinforced mutually positive feelings in this transdisciplinary process.

iv) Other networking activities

Other networking activities have been directed at assembling a Regional Advisory Board for the future MAB-BR. President Ch. Topsidis of the Chamber of Commerce of Evros took the initiative to offer himself as a supporting member; N. Papanikolaou, the only major cheese and oil producer on the island, offered his support. It is an ongoing effort to recruit persons of public standing that would share the MAB-BR visions for advisory roles.

c) Publications and Research Perspectives

i) Publications

The following articles are in a final draft stage and under reviewing process:

- Marina Fischer-Kowalski, Irene Pallua, Laz Xenidis, Simron Singh (in preparation). Samothraki. Die Geschichte von einer griechischen Insel, die sich aufmachte, ein UNESCO-Biosphärenreservat zu werden. in Dressel, G., Heimerl, K., Berger, W. Winiwarter, V. (Hg.): "Inter- und transdisziplinär forschen. Praktiken und Methoden"., transcript - Verlag, Bielefeld
- Panos Petridis and Marina Fischer-Kowalski, 2013. *Analysing and promoting island sustainability: the case of Samothraki*. Planned to be published in 2014, in an edited volume of state of the art research conducted at the Vienna Institute of Social Ecology.

Based on the student excursion organized in October 2012, a full paper for the "Working Paper Series" of the institute of Social Ecology has been produced:

- Petridis P., R. Hickisch, M. Klimek, R. Fischer, N. Fuchs, G. Kostakiotis, M. Wendland, M. Zipperer and M. Fischer-Kowalski. 2013. *Exploring local opportunities and barriers for a sustainability transition on a Greek island*. Social Ecology Working Paper 142, Vienna, Austria. Available at: http://www.uniklu.ac.at/socec/downloads/WP142_WEB.pdf

See Annex 3: Draft version of the paper by Fischer-Kowalski et al.

See Annex 4: Final draft version of the paper by Petridis and Fischer-Kowalski

See Annex 5: Social Ecology Working Paper 142

ii) Presentations at international conferences

The following Poster has been presented at the 10th biennial conference of the European Society for Ecological Economics, ESEE 2013: Ecological Economics and Institutional Dynamics, 18-21 June 2013 in Lille (France), sparked a lot of interest and received many positive comments:

- Petridis, Panos, Marina Fischer-Kowalski, Lazaros Xenidis, Simron Jit Singh and Irene Pallua: “Outlining a sustainable future for the island of Samothraki (Greece) as a Biosphere Reserve”.

See Annex 6: Poster Petridis et al, presented in ESEE 2013

iii) Research perspectives

Two more people have joined our research team at the Institute of Social Ecology to study issues related to Samothraki, thus strengthening the research presence on the island and reinforcing the “research function” of the future BR, in accordance with UNESCO’s Seville Strategy for Biosphere Reserves and the Madrid Action Plan (2008-2013).

- Sheba Schilk commenced her PhD work entitled “Archäologische Rekonstruktion demographischer und ökologischer tipping-points auf der Insel Samothraki”.
- Nina Fuchs, currently enrolled at the Master course in Social and Human Ecology at the Institute of Social Ecology, will pursue her Master’s thesis on the following issue: “Das Spannungsverhältnis zwischen Effizienz und Diversität in der Landwirtschaft: Die Erosion von Diversität landwirtschaftlicher Produktionsweisen durch EU- Agrar-Subventionen”.

See Annex 7: Dissertation expose by Sheba Schilk