

Parks and MaBs A preliminary inquiry on Sardinia*

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This paper describes the Tepilora Park in Sardinia to discuss a first ethnographic approach to this Park's management.

In recent decades, the field of conservation anthropology has grown considerably, showing how nature conservation is both a political project and a social process of our time (Kiiik 2018). According to Martínez et al. (2022), Protected Areas (PAs) are "spaces crossed by cultural, environmental, economic and political factors [in which] a multitude of social actors participate, relating at different levels and based on often conflicting interests" (Martínez et al. 2022: 29).

Perhaps this is why most review articles on conservation anthropology devote considerable space to conflict dimensions. Kiiik (2018), referring to the literature produced on native communities and conservation projects from outside contexts, identifies three macro-categories: a) green-grabbing, b) governmentality, and c) culture clash. For this author, the excessive emphasis on these aspects has contributed to marginalising other research topics, particularly on expert figures (see Boyer 2008) such as conservationists. Kiiik's study fits in with the current interest in the ethnography of conservation management, demonstrated, for example, by the recent proposal of Martínez et al. (2022). However, unlike Kiiik, these authors believe it is insufficient to reverse the gaze from local populations to conservation experts. Instead, it is necessary to consider the latter within the relationships inherent to

* Prepared for the session by Jose A. Cortes-Vázquez and Beatriz Santamarina, Transformations in the Anthropology of Conservation, 17th Biennial Conference of the European Association of Social Anthropologists. EASA2022: Transformation, Hope and the Commons. Belfast, School of History, Anthropology, Philosophy and Politics, Queen's University, Northern Ireland, 26/07/2022 to 29/07/2022. The municipalities selected for this research were identified based on criteria aligned with the goals of the "InnTerr: Innovation, Inclusion & Interdisciplinary Studies for Territorial Development" project (InnTerr: Innovazione, Inclusione & studi interdisciplinari per lo sviluppo del Territorio), funded through a collaboration between the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences of the University of Sassari and the Consortium for the Promotion of University Studies in Central Sardinia, based in Nuoro, under the auspices of the Regional Competence Center R.E.S.T.A.R.T. (Center for Research, Sustainable Economy, Tourism, Environment, and Territorial Revival). The project aims to promote sustainable territorial development in the Nuoro area by enhancing local heritage and adopting digital technologies to coordinate socio economic growth initiatives, targeting a system that includes all communities and local stakeholders in an inclusive development process. The selected municipalities are those traversed by the *Itinerarium Antonini*, an ancient route that spanned the entire island—a central element in the project, as it represents a point of historical and cultural connection across various territories. The revitalization of this route, along with the study of associated traditional trail networks, forms the strategic focus of the research. This initiative seeks to create a network connecting elements of Nuoro's territorial capital, promoting the area as a cultural resource and a tourist attraction

the daily management system. After a detailed review of the literature, Martínez et al. point out the absence of works explicitly dedicated to the ethnography of management. Their contribution aims to provide a methodological guide for future research in this direction. It should be made clear that this proposal, in fact, a guide, is open, dynamic, and sensitive to the ethnographic context. The authors identify four areas: 1) conservation actions; 2) heritage uses; 3) relations with the population; 4) inter- and intra-institutional organisation.

Therefore, firstly I briefly reconstruct the history and geography of the Park. Secondly, I discuss some aspects of my ethnography's initial phase on the Tepilora Park's governance in northeast Sardinia. Specifically, I take up the model of Martínez et al. (2022), attempting to systematise some aspects of park management that are emerging at this research stage. I draw on data generated since January 2022 through various ethnographic techniques: interviews with experts, participant observation, analysis of websites, cartographic material, and grey literature.

Historical-geographical context

Located in the province of Nuoro, with 7877.81 hectares, the Tepilora Park is a heterogeneous territory in the regions of Barbagia di Bitti and Baronia. It includes the municipalities of Bitti, Lodè, Posada, and Torpè. Different ecological niches characterise the Park: the mountainous area in the west; the coastal area in the east; and the wetland of the Posada river, the connecting axis of this socio-ecological system that, together with the Tepilora mountain (528 m above sea level), represents one of the symbols of the Park. From a geomorphological point of view, it consists of intrusive granite rocks with the presence of the characteristic *serras* and torrential streams, as well as important rivers such as the Rio Posada and the Rio Santa Caterina. According to the Park's website, there are "deciduous woods (33%), coniferous (14%), Mediterranean scrub (17%), and garrigue (12%), while artificially recolonised areas occupy 16% of the territory" (PNRT n.d.). The fauna is typically the Mediterranean, and the presence of birds, specific in mountain areas (in particular the golden eagle, *Aquila chrysaetos*) and wetlands, are important.

Since the 1950s, Sardinia has experienced significant migration from inland agro-pastoral regions to coastal areas. The mountainous area has suffered most from the migration process. In Bitti, for example, the population decreased from 6,000 inhabitants in 1951 to 2,600 (ISTAT 2022). On the coast, on the other hand, summer tourism - although much less strong than in other parts of the island - has been an engine of the local economy with the urban growth of second homes and villages. Posada, in this sense, doubled its number of inhabitants from 1,200 in 1951 to 3,000 in 2021 (ISTAT 2021). Especially in recent decades, these processes have led to uneven territorial development in the two macro-areas of the Park.

Due to its socio-environmental characteristics, the 1990s saw a planning project to create a fluvial

park for the Rio Posada and a park for the mountain area. However, due to the overlapping of territorial jurisdictions between the regional and national governments, the project was abandoned, only to be resumed in 2005 when a bill (Disegno di Legge) was presented, approved by the Council (Giunta Regionale), but never turned into law.

Finally, the Regional Council with Regional Law No. 21/2014 approved the establishment of the Tepilora Park 'after a Programme Agreement between the Region, the Municipalities and Forestas of 2011, aimed at preparatory actions for the establishment of the Park' (Mossa, personal communication, July 2022). In 2017, UNESCO declared the Biosphere Reserve, which, in addition to including the Park, involves thirteen other municipalities, totalling 160,000 hectares and over 50,000 inhabitants.

Overall, one can assume that establishing this protected area is part of the regional and national policies aimed at the socio-economic revitalisation of the so-called 'inland areas.' These are regions far from the production centres and affected, to varying degrees, by demographic and economic stagnation. To achieve this goal, institutions develop several strategies, among which heritage - cultural and environmental - is significant. Thus, one can see environmental heritage protection, conservation, and enhancement as an economic development strategy in spatial planning.

Results

Based on this framework, I will now attempt to systematise some of the management actions of the Park. As mentioned, since the research is at a very early stage, I will limit myself to identifying the areas and some of the actions that are carried out by the management, based on the proposal of Martínez et al. (2022).

Conservation actions

Concerning conservation actions, at Tepilora, a reintroduction project of the Bonelli's Eagle (*Abilastru, Hieraaetus fasciatus*) has been carried out (SardegnaForeste s.a.). Park's aims include: "protecting, recovering and enhancing the landscape, natural, archaeological and historical-architectural heritage and defending local typicality, traditions and culture, promoting actions to raise the awareness of local communities and operators towards the conservation and management of the natural and cultural heritage' (PNRT n.d.). Heritage uses, therefore, represent a relevant dimension.

Heritage uses

In this sense, establishing a protected area is already a form of herigitisation involving several actors. It implies the negotiation of different cultural and ontological visions, economic dimensions,

enhancement, and public use: from promotional materials to visitor infrastructures, signposting and the protection of ethnological heritage. These are activities and products that, in addition to the managers and staff of the protected area, also involve guides, educators, information providers, hikers, schoolchildren, scientists, the local population, and, in fact, the environment itself as an actor.

In Tepilora, this is still a work in progress, with several issues the management is trying to resolve. After a structuring phase, the Park has received funding for the restoration of buildings to be used as visitor centres and information points. However, the infrastructural work is not yet finished. Likewise, services such as guides for excursions in the area are still being organised. For some years now, the Park has agreed with the Environmental Education Centres (CEAS) of the municipalities involved, and work is in progress in this direction.

Perhaps one of the most evident frictions concerns footpaths. In the organisation chart, the Park Authority has pre-eminence. However, another actor, Forestas, has the task of creating and maintaining the paths, which have not yet been completed and which, with the addition of signposting, will allow people to explore the entire Park, either individually or accompanied by guides. Due to the delays in constructing the pathways entrusted to Forestas, tourist use of the Park is still not organised, which leads to problems in terms of tourist use and the consequent impact on economic activities in the area.

The Park's and Mab's CEAS represent a dynamic force for the management of Tepilora because of their articulation with the area's schools. The latter is a paramount interlocutor that successfully involves the younger generations, while, according to the park director, the real problem is capturing the adults. This issue is closely linked to relations with the population.

Relations with the population

Indeed, one of the main problems is the identification of the population with the Park and the MaB. However, some actions are in this direction, as in Budoni, which has provided economic operators with the MaB logo. The park management is also carrying out a census 'of all the economic operators who wish to deal [...] with the provision of tourist services for the park' to create a network of ad hoc links on the website. Also significant are local associations, such as cyclings, mainly active on the slow tourism front. Park branding, recently analysed by Ruiz and Santamarina (2022) comparing three Spanish cases, is an issue that deserves further investigation, given its socio-economic implications, particularly for ecotourism and the territory.

Inter- and intra-institutional organisation

The presence of various actors makes up a complex, in some cases conflicting, but generally dynamic and positive management landscape. In addition to the CEAS and local associations, the Unions of

Municipalities (especially Montalbo, which includes almost the entire territory of the MaB) represent a valid interlocutor for the economic development of the Park and MaB territory, thanks to territorial marketing programmes financed by the European Union through the region.

Conclusions

In this paper, I have sought to identify the areas and some of the main actions of Park management, starting with the proposal of Martínez et al. (2022). I have argued that the establishment of the Park is part of a (national and regional) development policy for inland areas, in which environmental and cultural heritage can be read as a local response to a series of contemporary global dynamics. Based on the current research, it is possible to identify some preliminary conclusions:

1. The Park management faces several infrastructural problems, including the paths, which are essential for the economic-tourist development of the Park;
2. Another limitation concerns the identification of the population with the Park. However, various institutional actors and local associations, together with the Park Authority, are paving the way for the protected area's development, using the UNESCO brand of the MaB as an element of recognition.

There will be many issues to explore in the future: a) the role of the Park's geography and cultural elements in the development of ecotourism; b) the role of experts and guides in management; c) the function of the Park's brand and the MaB; d); issues such as the role of the regional press in disseminating the Park's image.

The current phase is one of consolidation for the Park, which, despite various problems, is becoming a crucial social actor in the development of its territory.

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