

The sicilian system of Protected Areas Integrated planning and management policies for protected areas

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Abstract

Currently the Sicilian system of protected areas appears to be extremely advanced with its 12% of territory protected by regional regulations versus the nationwide average of 11%, but it is also the most contradictory one. Even today a large number of protected areas- also small ones - are subject to strong anthropogenic pressure, which favor fragmentation. In this paper we will analyze what kinds of anthropogenic pressure exist in Sicily and what could be a new perspective for protected areas

Keywords

protected areas, planning, metropolitan cities

Introduction

The last fifty years have seen scientific research in the field of city planning underline the importance of protected areas for the overall protection of the territory. More in detail, the importance of such environmental protection model has been confirmed within the planning process carried out at different territorial levels by governmental and non-governmental institutions and their national and international operational instruments. Sicily is particularly suitable for becoming a reflection field where the new perspectives on protected areas could be put into practice.

Discussion

Currently the Sicilian system of protected areas is made up of 1 recent national park (Pantelleria Island), 5 regional parks (*Etna, Madonie, Nebrodi, Fluviale dell'Alcantara* and *Monti Sicani*), 75 regional natural reserves, 6 protected marine areas and 2 other protected regional natural areas. An overall area of 310 hectares, more than 12% of the regional territory, making up a significant system in terms of number and size of protected areas with high environmental, social and economic value.

Moreover, in fulfilment of requirements of Birds Directive 79/409/EEC and Habitats Directive 92/43/EEC, there are 233 Sites of Community Importance and Special Areas of Conservation (15 SPAs, 14 SCIs/SPAs, and 204 SCIs). These areas make up 50% of parks and reserves and cover 12% of the regional territory thus making up about 24% of the territory of the whole Sicilian region. If considered from a nationwide point of view, the Sicilian system of protected areas appears to be extremely advanced with its 12% of territory protected by regional regulations versus the nationwide average of 11%, but it is also the most contradictory one (SCHILLECI 2008). It is a fact that even today a large number of protected areas are subject to strong anthropogenic pressure, which favor fragmentation.

If we consider the metropolitan city of *Palermo*, one of the areas most interested by fragmentation in past decades is the North-West area, between *Palermo* and *Cinisi* (GUECI & SCHILLECI 2006). By driving down the A29 highway from *Palermo* to the airport of *Punta Raisi*, one can realize how in this fragmented coast segment the fragmentation both in hilly and plain areas, generates an incessant loss of the last segments still preserving their natural features. The typical landscape of this Sicilian coastal area on the Thyrrenian Sea is characterized by outcrops of carbonate rocks surrounded by marine terraces eroding on the sea and by narrow coasts, often with irremediably degraded dune systems.

The process of fragmentation of the territory, and the changes in the landscape connected, starts with the building of major infrastructures with regional interest in the '60s, such as the *Palermo-Mazara del Vallo* highway, the SS113 and the railway, the airport of *Punta Raisi* and the selection of a large area destined to industrial agglomerations, which was then turned into shopping centers (GIAMPINO et al. 2015) that radically modified the relationship between sea and mountains of the territory. These transformations have generated increasingly rarefied forms which determine levels of complex fragmentation in comparison with both foothill agricultural surroundings and the natural system in which falls *Isola delle Femmine* natural reserves with the related protected marine areas of *Isola delle Femmine* and *Capo Gallo*; the SCIs *Raffo Rosso*, *Monte Cuccio e Vallone Sagana*, and the SPAs, partly coinciding with *Monte Pecoraro e Pizzo Cirina* SCIs *Monte Cane*, *Pizzo Selva a Mare*, *Monte Trigna*.

Today, 50% of the territory is covered in building, with a strong anthropogenic pressure on the same coast were the dune systems of *Isola delle Femmine* are threatened, and on special protection areas in the inland area. While many Italian regions are undergoing significant and interesting integration between environmental issues and territorial policies, Sicily is still lagging behind from both a cultural and regulatory point of view. Sicilian regional administrative authorities are still dealing with the theme of environmental planning within the framework of territorial interventions, and of the difficulty of the integration of environmental issues into ordinary territory planning instruments, especially as regards habitats and species protection.

Throughout the years, the need of an intermediate level to plan and manage the protected areas, derived from diffused reflections on the three different levels: regional, provincial and municipal level was recognized. If the existing regional level has a more general vision and should have coordination and orientation functions, as provided by law, the local level is limited to territories divided in administrative entities, but lacks a comprehensive vision of the territory, which is pivotal for an organized ecological approach (GUECI & TODARO 2008).

This need was met by the enactment of RL 9/1986 that created an intermediate level of planning. This law created the so called regional provinces as intermediate level of territory planning. The rule envisaged that provinces had the obligation to develop a multi-annual *Piano di sviluppo economico sociale* aimed at planning, divided in plans and sector projects, and to expect a PTCP for the localization of works and infrastructures of extra-municipal interest, and the network of the main roads and railways. Once passed, this Plan should be managed and controlled by the provincial authorities and should be binding over the whole provincial territory

In this way, the province officially became the center for receiving different requests from the territory, not only being a link between regional and municipal planning, but also territorial and sector planning (SCHILLECI 2012). The RL 9/1986, in conjunction with the creation of regional provinces, defined criteria to identify and define the agglomerations of several urban centers, defined as Metropolitan areas. The regulation then recognized three metropolitan areas as further intermediate level areas and defined their functions and objectives (art. 21). Actually the superposition of territorial authorities was solved with the perfect match of metropolitan cities to provinces. 15 years after the definition of the first Italian metropolitan areas, characterized by a significant number of provisions (MARTINOTTI 1998; SCHILLECI 2008; Mariano 2011; DE LUCA & MOCCIA 2015), new debates have spread about a possible reorganization of policies and integrated territorial planning, attempting to test agreements in territorial governance in a changing territory. The possibility to identify a new level of territorial management, indeed, could have obtained to the limits of provincial planning and claimed a central role in recognizing the new limits of environmental and ecological criteria, which are often strongly limited by administrative constraints

Conclusion

In Sicily, an autonomous region with a special statute, the discussion on different and multidisciplinary planning, that could develop better answers to environmental and urban problems, is confronted with the immediate political need to define administrative borders (LOTTA 2012). Instead of systemic interpretation of ecological and environmental elements aimed at recognizing the new post-urban models (MAGNAGHI 2010) and planning and manage it, it was preferred leaving the situation unchanged. Without debating on the missed occasion of identifying the territory according to heterogeneous and interscalar criteria, where morphological and typical features of environmental and residential systems cross (LOTTA et al. 2017) one should define the relevant contact points between territorial and environmental planning in the new administrative structure of the island, divided into three metropolitan cities and six Liberi Consorzi di Comuni.

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