

Chapter 16

The Importance of Protected Areas for Socioeconomic Sustainability

Marios Alkiviadis Asteriou

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

Grigoris Zarotiadis

Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Greece

ABSTRACT

The unprecedented macroeconomic challenges emerging from the coronavirus pandemic has searing impact on the global economy altering the existing status quo. The unusual situation created by COVID-19 has clearly undermined the general approach toward sustainability. The impacts of COVID-19 questioned the progress on SDGs, threatening decades of development gains and further delaying the urgent transition to a greener world. The origins of emerging diseases correlate with environmental –land use change, human population density, and wildlife diversity. To prevent future pandemics and promote sustainable development, it is necessary to further embed ecosystem services into socioeconomic development. To this direction, it is evident that protected areas could play a crucial role, as their aim is to maintain the benefits provided by natural ecosystems. As the pandemic has devastating effects on fragile economies, further research implications emerge for the implementation of green development paths that favor conservation and sustainable development.

INTRODUCTION

The macroeconomic challenges emerged since the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic have searing impacts on global economy, deteriorating developmental prospects for most countries. Economic transactions and trade were damaged by considerable shrinkages in production and consumption, and it will take years to recover. Moreover, socioeconomic effects emerged due to the health crisis exacerbating inequalities, especially for the most vulnerable segments of societies. The negative impacts on the livelihoods of com-

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munities and families, demand a reconsideration of the current *modus vivendi* in order to move forward to more sustainable solutions in daily life altering countries' strategic planning and developmental paths.

All these adverse consequences emerged while governments were pursuing a more sustainable world through the implementation of the seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015 – as declared in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Agenda provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity that forms the cornerstone of global developmental governance while tackling climate change and working to preserve oceans and forests, assuming that humanity's welfare don not need to entail destruction of the natural ecosystem and biodiversity. Main mission is to deal with the ongoing crisis concerning the effects accruing by human unsustainable exploitation of natural resources to support overpopulation.

The unusual situation created by COVID-19, has clearly undermined the general approach toward sustainability. Even in 2019, the world was not on track for many SDGs, but the pandemic has made their timely attainment even less likely (Shulla et al, 2021, Moriarty and Honnery, 2020). Thus, the impacts of COVID-19 emerged multifold factors that questioned the progress of SDGs. However, as humanity enters the post pandemic era, societies should redefine their current *modus operandi* and shift economic activities to more sustainable, humanistic models of development to support their recovery plans but not neglecting UN Agenda 2030 and its goals. To do it so, each country has to exploit its competitive advantages to a fair manner that benefits every single citizen with no exclusions.

COVID-19 disease referred as a zoonotic one that broke out due to the increasing human population and the anthropogenic activities that have negatively impacted the environment. These activities relate to habitat fragmentation, deforestation, biodiversity loss, intensive agriculture and livestock farming, uncontrolled urbanization, pollution, climate change (Mishra et al, 2021). In effect, it is inevitable that governments worldwide should evolve strategies and adopt operational planning to prevent further degradation of natural environment which undermines resilience to such zoonotic agents. To this direction and as we go forward to pursuing a more sustainable world, it is critical to examine positive externalities of protected areas (PAs) on SDGs achieving simultaneously a twofold target, that is nature protection and prevention of further zoonotic diseases outbreaks. PAs are the only natural ecosystems remaining for large areas and their formulation is critical for safeguarding biodiversity, preserving important habitats, building resilience to climate change, providing global food security, maintaining water quality, conserving natural resources, driving economic success etc. However, debates emerge as to whether PAs designation may play a contradicting role on local communities' welfare.

The chapter will first analyze some conceptual, legal and managerial issues of PAs. The analysis will be followed by the potential contribution of PAs to sustainable development in a win-win context that fosters both environmental protection and SDGs achievements. Taking into consideration that PAs are usually situated in remote regions, it becomes crucial to investigate their contribution on local citizens' welfare as well as on how environmental benefits could be equally diffused to each individual without exclusions. The main mission of the chapter is to trace which goal can be met in the framework of a PA providing implications for the potential contribution on countries' recovery plans. In order to address potential tradeoffs, the analysis will continue with negative impacts that may arise due to the designation of PAs, presenting certain best practices to avoid them. Besides, a case study from a Greek PA will be included in order to make a primary approach in controlling the findings from the literature review on reality. The analysis will be closed with implications on policy recommendations as to what are the prerequisites for strategies that simultaneously meet human welfare and PAs' conservation goals.

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