

Submitted Abstract

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|---|---|
| First Author First Name Last Name | Luis Martin Agrelo Janza |
| Submitting Author First Name Last Name | Luis Martin Agrelo Janza |
| Correspondence | martin.agrelo@usc.es |
| Co-Authors >> E-Mails will be not listed | |
| Organisations | Universidade de Santiago de Compostela, Galicia, Spain |
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Abstract

Mountains have been a priority in nature protection policies since the emergence of national parks in the 19th century. Indeed, highlands are widely recognised by public institutions as territories that require specific attention due to their relatively large natural values, but also for their cultural and social significance. These processes of legitimisation usually lead to new protected area designations, linked with extremely diverse impacts in terms of restrictions, regulations and public investments. Consequently, protected areas play a critical role in sustainable development policies. They are expected to be instruments that limit or boost some economic activities, determine how ecological or cultural elements must be preserved or assure social justice in nature conservation actions.

Despite the existence of several understandings of what sustainable development and nature protection mean, the role played by local communities presents a key challenge. They are often reluctant to new protected area designations coming directly from a government decision, in a top-down manner without any kind of participatory processes. Confrontations with political actors can also occur when the initiative for a new designation comes directly from local communities, in a bottom-up movement, and the government concerned rejects such a proposal. This second possibility is the object of study in this paper, focusing on the demands by local communities for two new natural parks in the Galician (Spain) mountains: Trevinca and Monte Pindo, where nature protection devices—albeit with less legal rank—currently exist.

This research is based on semi-structured interviews where participants were free to share perspectives on their respective protected areas, following a list of partially open-ended questions. To analyse these interviews, coding methods from the transcriptions were used, reducing the data to a list of codes. The analysis of the interviews shows diverse visions of how sustainable development should be translated in terms of protection mechanisms. Several strategies are verbalised by participants, demonstrating differences but also agreements in what changes should be implemented by the Galician government, which seems to be apathetic towards environmental issues.