

Understanding community conservation in Europe

Workshop organised by ICCA

(http://www.iccaforum.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=103&Itemid=104)

Gerace (Calabria, Italy) – September 10-16, 2011

The threefold link in community conservation: nature, culture and institutions. The case of the Italian mountain common-pool resources

Pier Carlo Zingari, PhD

ABSTRACT

Elinor Ostrom, ten years before receiving the Nobel Prize for Economy in 2009, organised the World Conference of the “International Association for the Study of the Common Property“, (Bloomington, Indiana, USA, June 2000). This was a key step in a long term work in Europe and beyond (e.g. Mongolia in 2010) devoted to understand community patterns and process for sustainable management and conservation of natural resources. Since then, this work has been including forests, grasslands, water and water basins in an interrelational continuum with anthropological aspects such as the perceptions and representation of the environment. In this context perceptions are processes of awareness of the environmental benefits and representations are organisational performance of the physical space (Watkins 2006; Vitale 2010; Zingari 1998, 2000).

One of the example considered in understanding community is taken from Italy. Italy is a mountain dominated country through the Alpine (1,200 km long) and the Apennine ranges (1,400). The complex system of interlinked local cultures did not originally oblige the Roman administration, which ruled on a federative basis, to apply restrictions in the use of mountain natural resources to local peoples and communities. In many examples agro-silvo-pastoral resources are reported to have been under local commons arrangements throughout the Middle Ages, both in the Alps and in the Apennines, much less in the lowland. A well-known example is the Valley of Fiemme in the Dolomitic Alps where the ‘Magnifica Comunità’ still provides a model of sustainability in the use of resources (Merlo, 1995; Morandini, 1996). A less-known example is that of the *Comunaliae Parmensi*, led by early Ligurian peoples across the Northern Apennines and evolving today to a successful participatory scheme in the conservation and sustainable development of local communities. The capacity of such local systems to secure the continuity of resources has been somehow integrated in the Italian law of 1923 on the protection of the hydro-geological systems (soils, vegetation, mountain slopes) producing the so-called ‘*forest consortium*’. This arrangement is a collaborative mechanism in which all parties, local inhabitants, mayors of villages, private and municipal owners, are called to join efforts in a long term, actually permanent, action towards the conservation and economic management of local natural resources assets, goods and services. Although the scheme applies to all municipal forests as an obligation and to private forests as a choice, the implementation of this law has been delayed until recently when the concept of and the demand for sustainability in management started to increase. Experience has shown that anywhere a Consortium is established by municipal forest owners, a number of private owners join the scheme avoiding, either the abandonment of management or the mismanagement of forest resources.

In conclusion, we can move to the understanding of conservation through concrete examples of balance as a threefold link between nature as provider of benefits, culture as a driver of perceptions and representations, and institutions as regulators (Kellert and Speth, eds, 2009, The coming

transformation. Values to Sustain Human and Natural Communities. Yale).