

Putting ICCA into context in Turkey: Opportunities, challenges and examples

In Turkey, official story of protecting land for nature conservation was started in 1958, when the first national park was declared. Since then this task are performed by two institutions; ‘General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Park (GDNCNP)’ and ‘Authority for the Specially Protected Areas’. Another important institution relevant to conservation and natural resource management is General Directorate of Forestry (GDF). The relationship of these institutions with local people is key to understand the governance system of natural resources management and the future of ICCAs in Turkey.

Between 1960 and 2000 GDNCNP managed the protected areas as islands with no interaction with its surrounding. As expected, this approach has generated enormous amount of problems by resulting in two extremist groups; ‘do not touch anything’ or ‘everything is for humans’. This process did not result a healthy environment neither for conservation nor for the local people, as both approaches were not right conservation strategy. The main reason behind the incorrect start was imitation of US National Park Service’s approach, which was designed for large empty areas without any human settlement and activities. As half of the Turkey’s population was in the rural areas and dependent on the natural resources this was not a good starting point. By year 2000 first example handling the issue in a proper way was conducted in Küre Mountain National Park, which was formed after intensive stakeholder meetings, considered the rights of local people and tried to avoid any jeopardy between conservation objectives and local livelihood. This study has showed that it is not really necessary to fall into conflict with local people to do conservation. However, this study has been the only example, as it was not replicated by the high level managers of GDNCNP. Although it has been 50 years since the establishment of the protected areas, the valid approach has moved from ‘keep people away’ to ‘do not touch the people’; instead of ‘we should plan and manage with people’ or ‘let people manage’.

Another dimension and relevant path towards CCAs is the management of forest resources. Although officially GDF is the one and only organization responsible for the forest management and all the forests in Turkey belongs to state, there are two systems operating hand in hand. The first system is the official system and it is governed by GDF and the second system is unofficial one governed by the local people. Although there are some legal constraints GDF has succeeded to manage forests hand in hand with local people. This happens in two ways;

1. The local people protect forests that provide valuable ecosystem services around the villages. They do not harvest these forests and also do not allow the GDF to do any timber production. This is an extensive system and there are hundreds of villages and forest patches protected in this way.
2. Second example is about the sustainable management of the forests by the families. Although ownership of the forests belongs to state each family has their own piece of forests that is even recognized by the GDF. The families govern decision-making process and a higher council made up of elders evaluates the proposals and decisions.

As a conclusion disadvantages for establishing ICCA’s in Turkey can be summarized as; established state-public relationship, strong central organization, uneasiness about the problems that may rise with ethnical groups, lack of capacity to implement participatory approaches properly. Advantages are; well established sustainable local natural resource management system, unofficial acceptance of this system among the relevant institutions, tendency not to create a problem to local people while accomplishing conservation.