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How to learn to be a sustainable tourist: an ethnographic approach to marine protected areas

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ABSTRACT

How to learn to be a sustainable tourist: an ethnographic approach to marine protected areas

Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) represent both a normative and social tool for the conservation of marine habitats and species. This has resulted in the declaration of many MPAs around the world. These marine areas perform three key functions: preserving marine biodiversity, contributing to the local economy, supporting sustainable tourism enjoyment processes. In Italy, MPAs are created both for the preservation of naturalistic landscapes and as an environmental education device. This essay considers the case of the Underwater Marine Park of Gaiola in Naples by exploring, through the ethnographic approach, the socio-cultural implications that shape a relationship between visitors, environmental protection and tourist practice.

KEYWORDS

Marine protected Areas
Sustainable Tourism
Visitors
Zoning

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Guest Editor

Dionisia Russo Krauss
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How to learn to be a sustainable tourist: an ethnographic approach to marine protected areas[2]

Introduction

Marine areas offer opportunities to increase sustainable tourism. They have a positive impact on tourism in several ways, including: generating revenue for local communities, fostering economic and job-market growth, driving the development of new infrastructure, facilitating cross-cultural exchange, improving the quality of life, and promoting the protection and conservation of environmental areas. Cost-benefit analyses of tourism development have tended to concentrate on these positive outcomes, while scant attention has been given to the social, environmental and other costs associated with development. Human activities related to the tourism industry are exerting considerable environmental pressure on the oceans, thereby threatening marine ecosystems and sustainable maritime activities through a series of negative processes such as soil erosion, increased pollution, toxic emissions, natural habitat degradation, the entanglement of marine species in fishing gear, disturbance from boats, species endangerment and rendering marine life more vulnerable (Drius *et al.*, 2019). In many parts of the world, ongoing disturbances linked to tourist activities hinder natural processes, degrade aquatic, terrestrial and atmospheric resources, and the cause irreversible loss of biological diversity (Shiva, 1993; Vitousek *et al.*, 1997).

These transformations are not usually limited to specific events, but are usually part of a set of interlaced impacts derived from tourism activity and resulting in a more complex impact on the environment (Lai *et al.*, 2017). This phenomena is typically examined via the lens of a territory's worldwide anthropization. In areas with a certain degree of territorial or environmental complexity, the concept of anthropopization is not simple to analyze, let alone to approach. It is a phenomenon that is sometimes categorized as diffuse when there is no obvious cause for the problems that are currently present or when this cause is truly a result of numerous causes (Bottini, 2017). Additionally, we frequently discover that these root causes are related to one another or mutually feed off of one another.

Tourism directly and indirectly affects the ecosystems of marine areas when unsustainable practices or those carried out in inappropriate locations cause damage. The list of such threats is long and varies by local area. Europe, especially in the Mediterranean areas, is facing multifaceted critical issues, above all anthropogenic pressure from tourism on its territorial capital as a whole and a delay in supporting the development of sustainable tourism (UNEP, 2017). A document from the EU Commission (EC, 2018) shows that European countries do not always give priority to environmental sustainability and often disregard environmental protection models in favor of economic development.

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Many destinations have strategies and plans in place to use tourism to help alleviate poverty and conserve the local natural and cultural heritage, for example by creating and managing Protected Areas and National Parks. World Heritage sites are recognized by UNESCO for their outstanding universal value, but nearly 50% of such sites not have tourism management plans in place to prevent the negative impacts of tourism (Canterio *et al.* 2018). Paradoxically, at the same moment that the value of marine socio-biological diversity is gaining recognition, the ecosystems hosting this diversity are fast becoming degraded.

New thinking about how to conserve marine areas, above all costal ones, has resulted in "Marine Protected Area" (MPA) patterns that incorporate principles of landscape ecology, adaptive and ecosystem management and education, and zoning in protected-area plans (Corbisiero, 2021a). In particular, MPAs are places designed to protect marine species and ecosystems while sometimes allowing for sustainable touristic activities within their boundaries. The names used to refer to these sites are multiple: Marine parks, marine conservation zones, marine reserves, marine sanctuaries, and no-take zones. In their overall relationship with sustainable tourism, MPAs perform three key functions in various countries: safeguarding marine biodiversity from tourism processes, contributing to the local economy, and supporting processes of sustainable tourism fruition (UNEP, 1994; McManus *et al.*, 1998).

In Italy, where norms or methods of social regulation have proven ineffective or harmful, MPAs are also set up to protect the coasts from complex socio-environmental conditions, as a device for public environmental education and a site for learning sustainable tourism. The revenue-generating aspects of these sites remain quite marginal and, in any case, derive from the presence of tourists (Alamán, Mora, 2011), while very little is known about their socio-cultural aspects (Badalamenti *et. al.*, 2002). If this multi-part conception of MPAs (Agardy, 1994) aims to strike a balance between protecting ecosystems and preserving their multiple uses with the further aim of changing the way visitors and tourists understand their use of the environment, it is an incubator of risk.

The most recent morphostructural analyses and physiographic profiles of Italian marine areas (www.medpan.org) reveal anthropization processes that have irreversibly modified the original characteristics of Italian coasts. The country presents an uninterrupted continuum of built-up areas encompassing urban areas, ports, seaside settlements, infrastructural networks, and urban voids positioned one after another. Marine zones represent transitional areas in which exchanges between the terrestrial and marine environments intersect, and in Italy there are 644 municipalities in such areas that – despite representing only 8% of all Italian municipalities and 14.3% of the overall surface area of the country – amass over 17 million inhabitants, with a density of about 400 inhabitants per square kilometer as compared to 168 for non-coastal areas (ISTAT, 2020). ISPRA data (2018) indicate levels of coastal land consumption three times higher than those of the rest of the country. The overall situation is exacerbated by the fact Italy's regulatory deficit in the field of combating land consumption and geographical heterogeneity bring it out of synch with European policy guidelines (Mazzette and Mugnano, 2020).

On closer inspection, the basic motivations for setting up MPAs seem to lie in the need to preserve the environment and local areas by limiting the most critical consequences of human adaptation and touristification and ensuring that the beneficial effects of and profit from natural heritage use are usable by the entire community, even outside the areas themselves. This spillover of benefits has been defined in literature as the "park effect" (Brockington, Duffy, Igoe, 2008; Romano *et al.*, 2021). Given the importance of MPAs in the relationship between environmental protection and tourist behavior, in this article I consider the "Parco Sommerso di Gaiola" (*Gaiola Underwater Park*) in Naples. In this study, I look at how people react to the preservation of MPAs that are open to tourism through a case study. This article critically analyzes the relationship between visitors' understandings of sustainable tourism and the way sustainability is taught and developed through guided tours of the MPA. The research question is whether shielding a piece of the sea from inexperienced tourists makes visitors more aware of and knowledgeable about sustainability by fostering environmental knowledge, attitudes and values among visitors. More specifically, I explore the socio-cultural implications that take shape between locals and tourists in their use of this Neapolitan protected marine area. Beyond regulatory dictates on environmental education the concrete outcomes of which depend on how effectively the rules are applied, I will try to illustrate how the cultural and educational activities of the "Submerged Park of Gaiola" have triggered environmental learning processes and made the approach to tourism in the area more sustainable.
To test out this thesis, I have chosen to investigate – through an ethnographic approach – a case in which a pro-active approach to recovering and regenerating the area has been juxtaposed with an open-ended and non-exclusive characterization of the site. The particular profile of this habitat, which combines a marine park with an archaeological one, has greatly increased tourist interest in the area and increased the number of visitors. The research data were collected over a three-year period (2018-2020), focusing on the structural aspects of the marine protected area and visitors' learning process. The analysis is supported by a socio-cartographic description of the area and the interpretation of qualitative data relating to the use of the area.

1. Marine Protected Areas (MAPs): natural areas or adventure parks?

In Italy, it is quite recently that researchers have begun paying attention to the sociological aspects of the relationship between tourism and protected natural areas. This delay is a result in part of the fact that the sociology of the country has been focused on more traditional interests, mostly urban phenomena and related environmental issues rather than tourism aspects as a whole.
The late establishment of MPAs has also prevented tourism from being treated as a significant variable in sociological research, with the result that policymakers engaged in the management of protected areas initially looked to biology and anti-tourism fields for scientific direction and advice.[3]

[3] The MPAs are established and regulated in Italy by laws No. 979 of 1982 and No. 394 of 1991. The institution of an MPA takes place with a specific Ministerial Decree that defines its name, perimeter, general objectives and regu-

The spread of MPAs in Italy represents a topical moment for sociological studies given that these areas have begun to attract tourism and, consequently, take shape as territorial units of sociological analysis (Marino, Stawinoga, 2011). Tourism in these areas grew immediately after the financial crisis of 2008-2011. In a general context of expansion – except for the interruption of international tourism due to the Covid-19 crisis between 2020 and 2021 – nature tourism and associated sustainable ways of travelling continue to show a decidedly positive trend: the ecotourism industry worldwide was estimated at 181.1 billion U.S. dollars in 2019 and forecasted to reach 333.8 billion U.S. dollars in 2027, registering a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 14.3% (www.statista.com, 2022).

Contiguous to ecological holiday spots, the protected spaces of these areas offer the right conditions to bring in tourists in search of sustainable experiences, especially in the Mediterranean area where the spread of MPAs is rather high. There are 190 sites designated at a national level, covering 1.27% or 32,065 km^2 of the Mediterranean Sea. The surface covered by nationally designated sites has nearly doubled since 2012 with the creation of 9 new sites, some of which are very large (more than 1,000 km^2) (MedPAN *et al.*, 2016).

At the same time, there is a consolidated need for a better scientific understanding of the most specifically socio-cultural aspects of the areas involved. Italian MPAs become a space worthy of attention not only by virtue of their landscape-environmental capital, representative of Mediterranean biodiversity and representing a specific ecosystem of the Mediterranean Sea, but also because they are of distinct historical, archaeological and cultural interest.

Nevertheless, at least in Italy it is still not clear what the term "Marine Protected Area" really means. Sometimes the term is defined in terms of a space closed to all human activities, while other times it is treated as a special area reserved for ecological tourism (it is the case of areas where camping is allowed) or even commercial use (such as areas where fishing is allowed). Even the founding law on MPAs suggests a heterogenous array of purposes, legal authorities, agencies, management approaches, levels of protection, limitations, and licensed uses (Spadi, 1998).

The *International Union for the Conservation of Nature* defines an MPA as a clearly defined, recognized, dedicated and managed geographical space for the long-term conservation of marine nature and ecosystem services (data from the waters, seabed and stretches of coastline facing it) and cultural values associated with legal means of protection or other recognized systems (IUCN-WCPA, 2019).

MPAs are designated zones within which human activities are regulated more stringently than elsewhere in the marine environment. The protection afforded by MPA status can vary widely, from minimal protection to full protection aka no-take reserves. Such areas are carved out to maintain, at least to some extent, the natural environment of the designated area for ecological, economic, socio-cultural, recreational, and other purposes (Cormier-Salem, 2006). The latter dimension is also leading to a gradual increase in MPAs worldwide due to awareness of the economic benefits that the relationship between the tourism industry and marine systems can

lations. Subsequently, they are managed by local administrations, scientific institutes, environmental associations or consortia. In Italy there are 27 MPAs (Figure 1), pursuant to Law No. 979 of 1982 and No. 394 of 1991.

Fig. 1 - Italian MPAs

Source: www.mite.gov.it (2022)

bring (EC, 2018). In addition to potential environmental benefits, MPAs are expected to profit from the park effect, contributing to an increase in the development of local communities by hosting fishing activities and the development of blue tourism (López Ornat, 2006). This is especially true in the Mediterranean Sea, where several sites are now accessible to tourists and thus classified as multi-use marine areas (Badalamenti *et al.*, 2002, *op. cit.*).

This openness to tourism is not without consequences. In critical terms, there is a risk of excessive saturation of tourist carrying capacity levels when the rules for accessing these spaces are not clearly outlined. In more positive terms, on the contrary, there is growing awareness of the potential for environmental valorization and education in sustainable tourism. In terms of this last aspect, research on the subject has shown that MPAs themselves provide favorable conditions for educational activities (summer schools, marine laboratories, internships...) and increase awareness in the field of naturalistic and sustainable tourism.

On the other hand, one of the objectives these sites are legally tasked with pursuing is the promotion of education, training and scientific research activities, as well as recreational events. Other studies (Cvitanovic *et al.*, 2013; Sala, Giakoumi, 2018) have explored the mechanisms of cooperation vs. conflict generated by the overall governance of MPAs, attempting to assess the responses of local communities to institutions in these areas. This aspect is particularly relevant in Italy where the protectionist and anti-tourist logics fueling the institution of MPAs have fueled resistance and conflicts with local communities and tourists, producing a sort of "sanctification" of natural heritage linked to stringent codes of conduct and prohibitions against access, bathing, fishing and navigation. The over-protection of natural areas can be a critical issue in sustainable tourism that not only ineffectually affects the marine areas themselves but also creates a barrier hindering an experiential and educational approach to sustainable tourism.

An in-depth survey of MPAs along Australia's southern coast (Turnbull *et al.*, 2019) has discovered that excessive protections are mostly useless for both maintaining biodiversity and boosting people's enjoyment of the protected zones. Partially pro-

tected marine reserves, according to the study, are "red herrings" that provide an illusion of protection and squander scarce conservation resources.

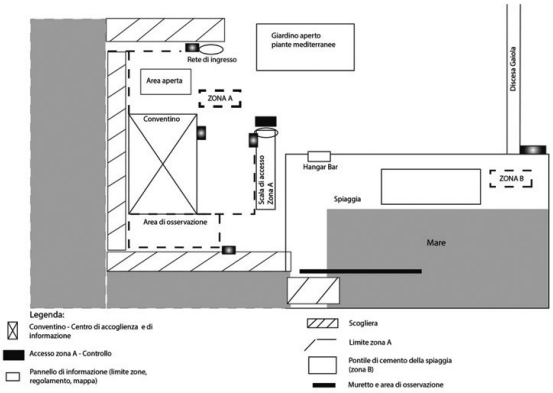
As we will see, the debate around the environmental protection of MPAs to date is not clear-cut. There are some views in this discussion that represent the MPA environment as a provider of raw material, or what Newby (1988) calls a "cash crop". In our case-study, for example, the issue of whether or not small boat trips should be allowed in the protected regions for touristic purposes provides insight into the divergent views involved, such as locals who are trying to make a living in the region and some stakeholders and volunteers who want to protect the untouched marine environment, effectively preventing tourism activity in the local area.

2. The Italian Archipelago of Mediterranean Sea "sanctuaries" and the case of Parco Sommerso di Gaiola Naples

By definition, the primary goal of an MPA is the long-term conservation of nature. Efforts to regulate local Mediterranean Sea MPAs must be viewed first of all within the context of the many problems and issues affecting this area. The common use of destructive fishing practices, as well as the presence of multiple commercial fisheries and, above all in Italy, severe overbuilding have destroyed much of the reefs and significantly reduced levels of marine coast protection.
It is for these reasons that not all Mediterranean MPAs provide the same ecological and social benefits. A Mediterranean system of MPAs that is equitable, well-managed and connected, and includes areas managed with a level of protection sufficient to deliver desired outcomes would be the best for achieving national goals. A number of environmental regulations direct Mediterranean countries to safeguard a variety of coastal and marine habitats in order to maintain natural systems' ability to offer their associated ecosystem services. On a global scale, these include the "Convention on Biological Diversity" (CBD) and "United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development" (the Sustainable Development Goals, or SDGs). On a local level, these include the "Marine Strategic Framework" and "Marine Spatial Planning Directives" of the European Union and the "Specially Protected Areas and Biological Diversity (SPA/BD) Protocol" of the UN regional Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment and the Coastal Region of the Mediterranean (Barcelona Convention). The most important of these international conventions, the CBD, formulated the Aichi targets and national commitments in 2010, with Aichi target 11 stating that "10% of coastal and marine areas constituting an ecologically representative and well-connected network of protected areas" should be created by 2020 (Santini *et al.*, 2016). Nevertheless, two years after 2020, the CBD target of effectively protecting 10% of Mediterranean marine and coastal areas is still far from being achieved. For EEA/UNEP (2021) there are barely 1,233 Marine Protected Areas and other effective area-based conservation measures: coverage exceeds 8.9% of the Mediterranean Sea, but only 10% of these sites implement proper management plans.
Like many other coastal states, Italy has established a network of MPAs. Although Italy has a long history of protecting resources onshore in the form of national parks, it is

only recently that the country has begun the process of designating and managing marine areas. Italy's system of MPAs stems from a law passed in 1982 ("Law No. 979") that authorizes the designation of up to 50 marine protected areas in Italy's coastal waters. After a delay of more than ten years after the endpoint of 1979 specified in Article 83 of Presidential Decree No. 616 of 1977, and with the aim of guaranteeing and promoting the conservation and enhancement of the country's natural heritage, the regulatory reorganization on nature protection was achieved through the framework law on protected areas No. 394 of 6 December 1991. This framework law began to regulate marine protected areas, an operation already provided for in Title V of Law No. 979 of 1982 but from that point on carried out under the name of "marine reserves". Since 1991, the spread of Italian MPAs has gradually increased to reach 29 marine sites (Fig. 1) comprising 228,639 hectares, located mainly in southern Italy. In addition

Fig. 2. Gaiola zoning



Source: www.gaiola.org (2020)

there are the two submerged parks of Baia and Gaiola (219 hectares) and the International Sanctuary for Marine Mammals (2,526,909 hectares), as well as the marine components of the two National Parks of the Tuscan Archipelago and the La Maddalena Archipelago (72,049.72 hectares).[4]

According to Italian regulations, the establishment of these areas must pursue specific purposes: (a) the conservation of animal or plant species, plant or forest associations, geological singularities, paleontological formations, biological communities, biotopes, scenic and panoramic values, natural processes, hydraulic and hydrogeological balances, or ecological balances; (b) the application of management or environmental restoration methods suitable for integrating humans and the natural environment, in part through the protection of anthropological, archaeological, historical-architectural values and agro-silvo-pastoral and traditional activities; (c) the promotion of education, training and scientific research activities, including interdisciplinary activities, as well as compatible leisure activities; (d) the defense and reconstitution of hydraulic and hydrogeological balances.

[4] In Italy, the Protected Natural Areas registered in the official list (decree law of 27 April 2010) are 871 for a total of 3,163,590.71 *ha* of protected area on land, 2,853,033.93 *ha* of protected area at sea and 658.02 *km* of coastline. Sicily and Sardinia are the regions where most marine protected areas fall both in terms of number and protected marine area. Between 2012 and 2019 the area of MPAs increased by 1.9%, thanks to the establishment in 2018 of the 2 Areas of Capo Testa - Punta Falcone in Sardinia and Capo Milazzo in Sicily.

Given these aims, it seems clear that the establishment of an MPA is designed as a device to counteract processes that would compromise the environmental characteristics and natural beauty of portions of the Italian landscape. These principles are accompanied by an additional level of protection, represented by the division of sites into zones (A, B and C) involving various protection measures. The maximum protection is applied to the areas of greatest environmental value (Zone A - "Integral Reserves") and any activities that may cause damage or disturbance to the marine environment is prohibited. In these small zones, only scientific research activities and service activities or guided tours with limited access are generally allowed. Zone B ("Partial Reserve"), bordering Zone A, is a buffer zone where the regulations of the managing body are less binding; diving and swimming are allowed, as are guided tours and transit, mooring and anchoring on special buoys, and rowing or sailing boats traveling at reduced speeds, with corridors generally set up for the transit itself. Only artisanal and non-invasive fishing is allowed, for the protection and maintenance of fish species. Zone C ("General Reserve") status is used to ensure a gradual approach to the most protected areas, and here the transit of motorboats at a reduced speed and preferably with minimal environmental impact is allowed. This zoning is considered the most suitable tool for replenishing and preserving biodiversity and also contributes to supporting the resilience of ecosystems through cascading ecological effects.
In terms of local governance, the management of the area is entrusted to a specific body with legal status under public law and with legal and administrative headquarters in the area itself; the body is then subject to the supervision of the "Ministero della transizione ecologica" (*Department of Ecological Transition*). In order to ensure more efficient and effective administration, local bodies are supported by a "Reserve Commission" that formulates proposals and suggestions on all the problems related to the functioning of the area: in particular, it provides an opinion on the proposal to implement regulation of the MPA founding and organization decree, including by forecasting management expenses.

2.1 The Marine Protected Area in Naples

The Marine Protected Area "Parco Archeologico Sommerso di Gaiola" was established through interministerial decree No. 7/8/2002 with the aim of guaranteeing the protection of, knowledge about and enhancement of an area of the Gulf of Naples with significant environmental, historical, archaeological and cultural value, including for social and employment purposes (OJ, General Series No. 285 of 05/12/2002).
With an area of just 41.6 hectares, Gaiola is the smallest MPA in Italy and certainly one of the least publicized, as compared to the prestige of Portofino or the Egadi islands. Set in the coastal landscape of the Neapolitan district of Pausilypon between the village of Marechiaro and the Bay of Trentaremi, this submerged park is rendered unique by the combination of geo-biological and historical-archaeological elements that make this tiny coastal landscape one of the most evocative in the Gulf of Naples. On the seabed of Gaiola visitors can observe vestiges of the Roman Empire,

mainly belonging to the Imperial Villa of Pausilypon, flanked by the remains of the imposing first century BC Theater that belonged to the Roman Iberto Publio Vedio Pollione and was already part of the archaeological complex of this area (Simeone, De Vivo, Masucci, 2012). The park includes the area in front of the promontory of Pausilypon and the two islets of Gaiola, as well as the sections of the coast belonging to the maritime domain. Neglected throughout the course of the twentieth century, today Gaiola (along with the Baia site) is one of the only underwater archaeological park in Italy. The number of visitors has been greatly boosted by the redevelopment of the site, as well as the fact that it is one of the few free-of-charge public beaches in the metropolitan area of Naples. Among the various critical issues of the case under investigation, this aspect is quite significant. In particular, field notes on coastal bathing highlight an interesting fact. Due to the morphology of the coast, the concentration of maritime-industrial activities (nautical clubs and private bathing establishments) and the limited points of public access to the sea (eleven such points were identified), the distribution of bathers is rather uneven: there are very dense concentration peaks at the public access points, such as Gaiola or the adjacent area of Marechiaro. The few public access points are flanked by dozens of private routes exclusively for access the coastal villas of Pausilypon or providing hybrid access, reachable only by sea via a boat service. The marine park can be accessed through a path called "descent of Gaiola" which, setting out from via Tito Lucrezio Caro, descends from the foot of Pausilypon hill to the sea. After an initial driveway the descent becomes pedestrian, winding through Mediterranean landscapes, cultivated terraces, and a few clusters of buildings until it reaches, through stairs cut into the soil, the Gaiola area itself. As we will see, this unrestricted passage exposes the site to problematic issues.

Unlike most Italian MPAs which consist of up to four zones (A, B, C, D), depending on the degree of protection necessary for the site and its overall surface area, Gaiola is divided into only two zones: a Zone A of "Integral protection" and a Zone B of "General protection" (fig. 1). The overall objective of zoning is to ensure as much as possible the protection of the marine ecosystem without completely preventing access to the area for environmentally friendly tourism or recreational purposes (Fig.2). In Zone A there is the "Centro Studi Interdisciplinari" (CSI)[5] where the operational management activities of the site are concentrated in the premises of the structure known as "Conventino", including research, teaching and informational activities. The small structure, opened to the public in 2010 by the "Archaeological Superintendency of Naples and Pompeii" after more than thirty years of abandonment and improper use by the locals, is set up as the technical-operational center of the MPA. There is a visitor and tourist reception center, an educational and conference room, an educational museum, a Mediterranean aquarium, a dressing room for underwater activities and a scientific laboratory for biological monitoring activities and visitor training. A virtuous example of social infrastructure, this structure represents an attempt at "building for people" (Klinenberg, 2019) that promotes interaction between visitors and the circulation of ideas, thereby accelerating the process of educating visitors in sustainable tourism.

[5] The managing body that has continuously dealt with the management of the area since the signing of the first agreement with the local government (prot. n. 38615 of 19/12/05).

The outdoor spaces, recovered and reclaimed, have been transformed into a large Mediterranean botanical garden for pedagogical use, to assist educational activities and guided tours. This area is open for limited daily access and regulated by strict regulatory restrictions. Zone B acts as a cushion around the next level of protection by acting as a junction with the Conventino, which is accessible only through this zone. It consists of a rather narrow space, but one which has greater usability both because it is less bound by environmental protection standards and because it is the area most frequented by beachgoers. The two types of zones are delimited by geographical coordinates shown on the cartographic totem installed at the access point to the area.

Widening our gaze to the socio-territorial context in which this case study is embedded, we can say that the management of this marine protected area requires specific planning and management tools to ensure: a. fair access and conscious use by locals and tourists; b. the day-to-day management of resources; and c. environmental, cultural and economic sustainability. These three points are difficult to implement in an area historically characterized by environmental emergencies, ineffective heritage management and misguided environmental awareness (Corona, 2001). In a context such as Napoli traditionally plagued by insufficient financial resources and administrative inefficiency (Becchi, 1989), the needs of environmental protection and its translation into pedagogical plans clash with a lack of economic resources. All the more so if we consider that the funds for MPAs are allocated annually by the Italian finance law which, together with a system of local government that is fragmented into different scales of management, weakens the effectiveness of the initiatives and prevents multiannual programming.

The local institutional actors (the Campania Region and Napoli Metropolitan Area) are not substantively involved in setting the guidelines adopted for MPA management; their role is limited to purely administrative activities such as ensuring the safety of the area, the regular maintenance of sanitary facilities or waste management. The resulting type of governance represents a "Neapolitan model" of environmental protection and tourist reception "without governmentality" (Corbisiero *et al.*, 2021). Management policy for the structure extends beyond the boundaries and roles of institutional governance, using memoranda of understanding, technical knowledge and voluntary work to solve, in situ, all critical issues related to the management of the place. The local community is called on to compensate for institutional shortcomings, most often in a non-explicit or indirect way.

3. Methodology

It often happens in ethnographic investigations, especially those with frequent and quite long periods of observation, that the research is intertwined with the biography of the researcher. So it was in my case as well. This study is delimited in both time and geographical scale, and the timeframe under consideration is the 3-year period between 2018 and 2020. The strength of the ethnographic method lies in its emphasis on long-term and qualitative research (Austin, 2003). This approach focuses on obtaining fine-grained data that, among other concerns, frequently

addresses questions of power and social relationships between people of different ethnicity, areas, status, or gender. While ethnography often uses formal quantitative methods as well, data collection is based around forming long-term relationships of trust between the researcher and local informants in order to obtain social data of greater depth.

The participant observation in this case was carried out in a systematic manner – returning to the field two days a week – over the course of two successive summers (2018 and 2019), with an extra phase conducted between July and September 2020 when the Covid-19 pandemic seemed to be waning somewhat. The objective of the fieldwork was to identify and understand the mechanisms of social regulation that underlie visits to a marine protected area and what learning devices about the environment and sustainable tourism visitors engage with. To do so, I considered on one hand the practices of "re-appropriation" of the site by locals and, on the other hand, the more or less conscious practices of sustainable use of the MPA. How can visitors' level of awareness be observed? What tools have been used to promote the (re)discovery of the site? Has there been a learning process around the subject of sustainable tourism?

The techniques used are those typical of ethnographic research: participant observation, informal interviews, and interviews conducted *in situ*. This approach proved indispensable due to the peculiarity of the object of study and the period in which the observation was carried out. The Gaiola area is, in fact, both a hub for excursions and tourists and a site of permanence (albeit temporary) for beachgoers, especially in the summer. To obtain accurate data on "sensitive" topics such as these is difficult and requires the development of the kind of long-term trust-based relationships that are such a central focus of ethnography. The implications of this MPA among different users – in terms of commitment to touring, settlement history, or management of the area, among other categories – is a specific insight that ethnographic research can and does contribute to developing.

As a researcher, accessing the field and positioning myself along the two zones was tricky. Given the nature of this setting, dedicated to leisure and relaxation, it was necessary to negotiate my "intrusive" presence at each encounter. The overcrowding of the site, the fact that bathers arranged themselves on the rocks, in the water or in transit along the access path to the sea and more generally the rather tortuous shape of the site made interaction with people particularly complicated. In any case, I made my presence in the field known to the CSI by participating in the activities of the area as a user. This methodology also allowed me to grasp the experience of the place and the feeling of being a visitor. To understand how the management strives to make visitors aware of proper uses of the MPA and delve into aspects that might remain unclear from participant observation alone (motivations, behavioral aspects related to the local area, communication codes, etc.) I conducted approximately 50 semi-directed interviews with visitors, dive operators and divers, fishers, scholars, government officials, and non-governmental organization workers.

This phase of the research was complemented by participation in guided tours and environmental awareness days. The analysis of secondary sources (institutional documents, visitors' digital assessments, research and activity reports of the associa-

tion) rounded out the empirical research that I briefly present in this article. At the end, I made a map of the area through photographs and video footage to visually describe the field.

4. Results and discussion

MPAs are often viewed as an excellent tool for preserving marine landscapes both by conservationists and those focused more on sustainable tourism management. This is because MPAs have, in theory, both the strict protection area so favored by conservationists wishing to protect biodiversity, and also the spillover effect that appeals to those who wish to increase the level of knowledge about sustainability issues outside of MPAs. They therefore aim to satisfy all stakeholders, including the tourism industry and visitors themselves. Much of the literature on MPAs has emphasized the ways in which tourism, local community and MPA management could potentially work together. The findings presented in this article demonstrate that this relationship is complicated in the case of an urban area such as Naples.

The creation of a MPA in an urban context constitutes an action of "recognition of places" (Magnaghi, 2011) through which the sea of Naples seems to lose its historical impenetrability caused above all by coastal overbuilding. The way inhabitants and tourists use this site no longer corresponds to purely recreational activity, such as swimming; it also reveals a cultural process of reappropriation of the sea as an urban public good. The contradiction in the relationship between the city and the sea is well-known due to the novel "Il mare non bagna Napoli" (literally "The Sea Does Not Reach Naples" or "Naples is not on the Sea" by Anna Maria Ortese, 1953), a metaphor for Neapolitan urban life that not only implies that the sea is effectively invisible in Naples, but that the sea's cleansing and restorative power is also absent from the city.

A public good that, in addition to constituting the breathtaking landscapes known all over the world, is surprisingly denied to beachgoers. There are many causes: the pollution of some points on the gulf due to industrial discharge, the uncertain delimitation of bathing areas, and the archipelago of motorboats that moor in the gulf but also the presence of nautical clubs, villas and palatial properties located on the coast that rise up from Mergellina to branch out in the district of Pausilypon, effectively hindering people's unrestricted use of the sea.

After years in which the site was abandoned and subject to degradation, the implementation of the submerged park of Gaiola has redefined the actors in play and enriched the *parterre* to encompass "historical" visitors (local Neapolitans), tourists, volunteers, fishers, and scholars. The unveiling of the area with its new configuration created thanks to the establishment of the submerged park is a "tourist staging" that dissolves the boundaries between once distinct social spheres, in particular between locals and tourists, and transforms a potential environmental sanctuary into a space and shared experience. The element of sharing is so mar-

ked here that the normative elements asserted throughout the area – prohibitions, regulations, recommendations, and codes of conduct – are culturalized through an educational rather than repressive process. The establishment of the park has also changed the attitudes and behaviors of traditional users, even the most recalcitrant. For instance, while the fishermen of Marechiaro were initially reluctant to accept the new MPA, they have since become its most tenacious "defenders", embodying the expression of the law. Now they cooperate with management and report anyone they see poaching. Coinciding with the revival of tourism in Naples, the area is drawing more and more visitors and has progressively gained recognition among the inhabitants of the Pausilypon district as they realize the benefits it brings, especially in terms of economic development.
Following the long period of abandonment and degradation, the establishment of this MPA represents an important change in sea access from the west coast, especially on the part of Neapolitans. That is not all, however. The success and visibility of the park derive in part from changes in the socio-economic conditions of the area that have led local communities to accept its new tourist role. The progressive inclusion of Gaiola in the local productive fabric, made up chiefly of fishing and hospitality services, seems to have suppressed the longstanding conflicts that characterize this older local system that never appeared to prioritize environmental protection. During an interview, the coordinator of the ISC (Interdisciplinary Study Center) described the initial resistance of some locals against the creation of the area and its strict regulation:

> «In the early 2000s, locals felt dispossessed of what they considered to be their territory, of their ability to manage, to do what they wanted, including illicit behavior such as drug dealing, fighting or stabbing but also illegal economic activities, especially related to poaching, practiced mainly at dawn and in the late evening. Given the small size of the MPA and an exponential increase in the attendance of the park for bathing, it is very difficult to catch those who still practice trolling even today, as the crossing time of the park is only a few minutes. This type of illegal fishing is increasing considerably due to the strong demand from the catering sector which has increased due to tourism. Over time, however, we have managed to contain these behaviors. People have also come back intrigued by the possibility of bringing here school-classes from the city to understand what it means to live more sustainably in a coastal city». (Int. No. 5, July 2018).

This field consists of aesthetic, urban and discursive devices that mediate participation and interaction between local visitors and tourists through informal, fortuitous or unspoken apprenticeships. Let us examine the dynamics through which this occurs. La Gaiola attracts a user base of local hikers as well as Italian and foreign tourists. Their presence is closely linked to a renewed and unprecedented offering of tourist services in the city that takes possession of the sea through boat tours, excursions or diving in the marine park, and recreational activities such

as kayaking, swimming or sunbathing. At the same time, the area also promotes geo-archaeological tourism, common mainly in the Greco-Roman settlement located in the ancient center of Naples. Together with the neighboring "Environmental Archaeological Park" of Pausilypon-Grotta di Seiano, reopened to the public in 2009 after several years of closure, the management of the MPA organizes educational programs and various itineraries for visitors, including underwater ones, to discover the charm and beauty of imperial Pausilypon.
My field notes suggest that people are generally motivated to visit the submerged park the due to its environmental qualities ("the water is cleaner"), the beauty of the landscape ("the view of the Gulf of Naples is among the most spectacular"), but also by the fact that MPA status indirectly exerts a selection process among potential visitors ("Since it is a marine reserve, it is less frequented").
The flow data collected at CSI Gaiola in 2019 confirm a progressive increase in tourism, amounting to a thousand visitors and hundreds of dives and kayak tours in the summer alone between 2017 and 2018. The eco-tourism learning process theorized as accompanying the establishment of an MPA has its own local dimension in Naples residents' (re)discovery of the free use of the sea. Two young Neapolitan beachgoers I met reported that:

> «An oasis in the chaos of this city that we did not expect to find. Usually from Posillipo you look down at the gulf from the road and you think how lucky the residents are with their seaside villas and private sea access. Having public access to the sea in this part of the city seemed like a miracle to us. Even more surprising is the fact that even though we were all there in the sun, there was silence, respect for the oasis. The mysterious charm of that islet you see just in front, the submerged Roman ruins make everything magical. The boat tour allows you to discover an enchanting stretch of coast with all the natural and historical beauties of Naples. Then you can get there easily by motorbikes, car or even by public transport» (Int. No. 19, local inhabitant, July 2018).

Fig. 3 - "Area Marina Protetta Parco Sommerso di Gaiola" - *Zoning Map*

Source: Centro Scientifico Interdisciplinare Gaiola (2022)

The fact that entrance to the protected area is free of charge, the breathtaking beauty of the landscape, and the fascinating caves of Pausilypon hill show local visitors a city center that is different from clichéd representations of Naples. As visitors arrive at the site, they are lead through a progressively more "environmentally aware" rite of access through informational signs, maps showing the regulations for each zone, and photos illustrating the historical transformations of the area. In the sea, floating buoys delimit the different zones. The locals, people from the suburbs of the city most adjacent to Pausilypon and the metropolitan area, stay mainly in Zone B; this part of the park attracts a more working class and younger crowd and is more suitable for family groups who come "for the day". These visitors, often regulars, list various reasons for being drawn to the park, including the "charm of the place", its beauty imbued with mystery and an ambience they define as "esoteric". Evoking its singularity or uniqueness, users note that "There are no other places like this in Naples".

Nevertheless, these same visitors are aware that making use of a quality site requires that they accept regulations and prohibitions:

> «We come from San Giovanni a Teduccio. We also used to come earlier when there was still no zone division. Today even if we have to shrink a bit due to the presence of zone A we come here because it is free, the water is clean, we can enter for free. The place is clean, too. We also eat here: sandwiches or whatever we bring along. On the other hand, in zone A you cannot eat or drink anything. In the end, we collect everything and throw it into the bins outside, as is shown by the signs» (Int. No. 4, Inhabitant, August 2019).

> «Since the access to the area was regulated, it seems to me that there has been an improvement in the general conditions of the area. I remember that when I was a teenager, we used to come here to grab some beers ... I remember that there was waste everywhere and there was no compliance with any safety measures. We could pass in hundreds from one part of the area to another. Today this regulation of flows has made us Neapolitans rediscover the wonder of bathing in the city and tourists learn the uniqueness of this landscape and the underwater park» (Int. No. 11, Inhabitant, September 2020).

Local visitors comply with the operational standards imposed in Zone A but with limited environmental awareness; rather, instructions and exhortations serve to help them accept a relationship of obligation with the site. In Zone B, users' awareness of the purposes of a MPA remains partial. Knowledge of the state of the area and current regulations is more straightforward: users have taken on board the prohibitions (diving, climbing on the islets, eating or drinking in the integral reserve area, using a motorboat) even if they do not always comply with them 100%. The abundance of instructions for using the park and following regulations, the provision of functional (parking lots and roads) and commercial (restaurants, accommodation facilities, sports and cultural activities) infrastructure in the area and the complex of nature trails welcoming visitors to the MPA produce a "borderline effect", especially on

Neapolitans: through these mechanisms and elements, the park is represented as an iconic space for protecting the environment and local area in which everything is prohibited, much is safeguarded but, in the end, little is controlled. For locals, the educational function of the MPA is less pronounced and leaves room for self-learning.
The site's educational center is visited mainly by tourists. The few local people who take advantage of it are mostly students.

> «We went to the study center to see how the staff promotes the protection of sea life. There were a large number of "artworks" that volunteers had made from waste collected on the Gaiola beach. The center is certainly worth a visit especially for families with small children. We have three kids. We expect to spend about half an hour there. Entrance is free but our donation "for the cause" was appreciated». (Int. No. 32, Tourist, September 2020).

> «This place is awesome! I've been lucky enough to enjoy this area before it was even a protected area. Best location in Napoli, if you think about it, you feel like you're in Capri. The study center is one of the reasons why it was worth walking all this way. Wow! What makes this unforgettable destination even cooler is the staff. They love their job and it shows. They made our visit even more memorable. From marine education to ways to save the environment, you'll learn a thing or two while enjoying beautiful Gaiola beach» (Int. No. 34, Tourist, September 2020).

Although it does not provide for an absolute limit to traditional activities related to the sea (tourism, first of all), the zoning of the site regulates its development according to the different park conservation and protection needs. The intent is to ensure maximum protection to ecosystems whose natural value is particularly accentuated – mainly the case of Zone A – through very stringent protection regimes that also prohibit basic activities such as consuming food, smoking, diving, and using plastic products. In fact, the institutional documents analyzed for this research and interviews carried out with some biologists at the educational center cite the principle of "sustainable use of the marine protected area" by replacing, where possible, the term prohibition with the word regulation. For this reason, until three years ago there was also a small bar operating in Zone B, set up in one of the caves in this area, as well as several unauthorized sellers (Fig. 3).
The tourists I met during the research, mainly visitors in Zone A, were rather well-educated about the rules and devices of environmental protection in the site: signs, panels, images, and videos projected inside the structure of the CSI convey to these users the historical process of regeneration that this "niche" tourist site has undergone and the current project of environmental recovery. A closer analysis brought me to talk with a kind of tourist who visits the park as a form of alternative tourism different from urban travel and already has some knowledge about sustainable tourism. These tourists are demanding and intrigued by this unprecedented aspect of Naples. For instance, one person I spoke to had booked her visit in advance in the knowledge that there is a waiting list to ensure that the site's limited tourist load capacity is respected:

> «My first visit was in October 2019 and I came back here regularly since. Each year. It's just stunning, well worth the trip out. The best time to come is fall or during early summer. Not so good in hotter months. You have to walk for about 20 minutes, descending from about 80 m to the sea level…I think it is one of the most interesting places in this city. You can see animals and plants of the Mediterranean and with a glass bottom boat you can also see underwater Roman ruins and volcanic gas from the sea floor». (Int. No. 43, Tourist, September 2020).

Many parts of the submerged archaeological park (the defensive walls in *opus incertum*, an ancient marina, colonnaded rooms, a large area of seabed on which the complex system of fishponds developed, etc.) is located only a few meters underwater inside the two adjacent bays of Pausilypon and can be visited without deep diving. This is one of the factors that encourages the kind of archaeological tourism promoted by the operators of the Gaiola Center.

For the tourists I interviewed, the difference between taking a dip in the sea and experiencing sustainable tourism is blurry. In contrast, local visitors emphasized especially the more specifically "recreational" side of the park, experiencing the pedagogical aspect of the MPA in a less conscious way.

The park offers a form of "guided learning" (Brougère, 2012) through which tourists participate in and share an established practice with a trained guide. This set of park visitors are educated in a conscious approach to environmentalism and sustainability. Since these more aware visitors are obliged to pass through Zone B in order to reach Zone A, the presence of sustainably-minded tourism also influences the perceptions of non-sustainability experts, thereby enabling the educational aspects to reach a wider and less socialized audience. This points to a dual character of the park. My *in situ* observation revealed a clear segregation of the space being occupied, differentiated on the basis of visitors' geographical origins and the social uses of the two different areas. Visitors to Zone A must make reservations and are subject to a waiting period, as well as being required to leave an identity document as a guarantee. This regulated access is perceived by the visitors sunbathing in Zone B as restrictive and as interfering with their planned relaxation. The tourists interviewed in Zone A, on the contrary, view themselves as escaping from the packed and overcrowded Zone B beach and "taking refuge" in a more exclusive part of the park. A maximum of 100 visitors at a time are allowed to access Zone A and this is regulated via a numbered pass delivered at the entrance, together with information about the rules of conduct visitors must follow and the national legislation in force. On the back of the pass there is an extract of the area regulations that includes, among other rules, a ban on swimming in the entire complex. Even in this case, however, the rules are sometimes hazy.

Although the awareness-raising practices being enacted in Zone A follow a formal logic and are based on the environmental pedagogy of the CSI protocols, visitors' use of the area also falls under the umbrella of experiential tourism. The descent to the oasis accompanied by glimpses of the gulf, the boat trips with underwater viewing

ports or kayaking activities generate pleasure, relaxation and forms of "sustainable learning" through the practice itself. The mobilization of the senses is essential in this tourist experience, fundamental for perceiving the beauty of the site and evaluating its cultural dimension, as confirmed by a tourist from Croatia who discovered the area by chance:

> «I had accidentally found out about Gaiola area after googling "things to do" in Naples. It immediately caught my eye as most of the articles were titled: "mysterious island with cursed villa"[6] I said to myself I should go there. It is a bit of a trip to get there but it is absolutely worth it. What you're looking for is zone B-this is where the 'cursed island' is. Once you climb up a short flight of stairs in zone A, you'll find yourself at the top of zone B. A man sitting at a desk asked for a valid ID to pass into the area which is completely free. Only 100 people are allowed in the area at a time. We were lucky because the day we went was overcast so there was a total of 8 people on the entire beach, otherwise I hear it can be pretty packed. The beach is absolutely gorgeous and the actual cursed island is just a short swim away from where you'll lay your towels. No one actually specified that you weren't allowed to clamber onto the cursed island, but that was quickly confirmed once the 'security' guy started blowing his whistle the moment I set foot on the island. A kind of 'look, don't touch' sort of policy» (Int. No. 15, Tourists, May 2019).

In both areas of the MPA, the learning process and development of environmental awareness can also happen informally. Visitors perceive and experience the presence of rules, the constant monitoring of the area both on land (by CSI volunteers and, more rarely, the municipal police) and at sea (by the lookouts at the harbor master's office), and the guided tours of the park. In addition, the presence of scholars carrying out research activities on site is another perceptible indicator of the activities of the scientific center.

5. Conclusions

This paper discusses how the presence of an MPA is useful for raising people's awareness of sustainable tourism practices. Italian MPAs encourage learning from sustainable tourism in ways that, to different degrees and depending on type of visitors in question, meet the objectives set by international conventions and Italian law: to preserve and protect the environment while bringing tourists into contact with nature through environmental education programs. The Gaiola underwater park contributes to these aims to the extent that it is characterized as a space of limited recreation where a particular type of social experience, namely tourism, takes place. In this area, however, the tourist experience is regulated through multiple mechanisms, not only those explicitly stemming from the precepts and codes of

[6] A local's legend narrates Gaiola such a "cursed island". The reputation developed from the frequent misfortunes and premature deaths in the families of its 20th century owners. In the 1920s, the island owned to the Swiss Hans Braun, who was found dead and wrapped in a rug. A little later, his wife drowned in the sea. The next owner was the German Otto Grunback, who died of a heart attack while staying in the island's villa. A following owner, the pharmaceutical industrialist Maurice-Yves Sandoz, committed suicide in a mental hospital in Switzerland.

conduct imposed by law but also including a number of informal and hidden social codes that interfere with the "right to tourism" (Monaco, 2019).
The stakeholders of Gaiola park, in particular the managing body dedicated to protecting and valorizing the site, face challenges around the balance between legal norms and social behavior: on one hand, there is the management of a marine park conceived as an "environmental sanctuary" to be preserved and venerated from a distance while, on the other hand, the organization of guided learning processes paradoxically contributes to attracting local visitors and tourists who are not necessarily focused on the sustainability mission. This dual way of enjoying the site typical of the city of Naples, juxtaposing both "mass" and "elite" visions of park use, reflects the ideas held by those who already have some familiarity with environmental sustainability models (mainly tourists) and those who are only just beginning to engage with such models (mainly local users). While visitors' positioning as either tourists or locals most likely leads them to formulate a different cultural representation of the area, however, they all share a common recognition of the MPA as a naturalistic enclave to be safeguarded. Through their sporting experiences in kayak or taking guided tours in glass-bottomed boat, tourists experience sensations and emotions and acquire knowledge of the site as a general form of learning about environmental sustainability. The experience of local visitors, on the other hand, is more complex.
First of all, my fieldwork suggests that the re-appropriation of an already familiar part of the city is necessary, but that it must come about in the form of "commoning" (Harvey, 2012) in which a public and free use of the sea represents the most unprecedented aspect. Questions about how the different users of the site coexist and regulate their respective learning about a common public space are interesting. Alongside the formalized coding system operating in the spaces of the park, users also engage in informal learning in which forms of access to and the limits of the common good are constantly negotiated in an unstable balance among environmental protection goals, didactic approaches and tourism promotion.
Far from the chaos of the city, Gaiola is perceived as a "free haven of peace" and learning here takes place in a way that is potentially less mediated and more spontaneous but always closely intertwined with the rules and limits imposed by the MPA. Rather than abusing the site as might occur elsewhere, visitors to take on forms of self-control that are in contrast with the rule-bending practices of a segment of the Neapolitan population. The result is ambiguity around representations and understandings of the behavior to be adopted when in Zone B. In this zone, the natural space is represented and used as a common public beach in ways that do not always reflect the model of a protected area. However, the visibility of the eco-tourism and environmental education activities introduced in the park also contribute to locals and tourists' awareness that this site is undergoing restoration and requires preservation. In light of the findings of this research, we can consider this process of awareness-raising among MPA visitors as not only a simple (re)discovery of an old part of Naples, but also the implementation of a participatory process.

Foregrounded in this process is locals' willingness to "be educated", tourists' willingness to "be guided" and the commitment on the part of the MPA's management, and a set of Italian institutions, to build a bottom-up social process. The research data show that most of the conservation initiatives were proposed by volunteer and non-governmental organizations leaded by the association "ISC Gaiola"; a few part of these initiatives have been successfully implemented by the local, regional and federal governments. The common ground for all these efforts is the establishment of a network of Marine Protected Areas along the coastline of the gulf of Naples and beyond. Such initiatives have generated among Neapolitans, visitors and official institutions considerable public consciousness concerning the health of the Gulf of Naples and its touristic processes. However, as expressed in many of my interviews, there is still a great deal of technical information (geographical, ecological, sociological, etc.) that needs to be incorporated to promote an even more incisive form of education in sustainable tourism than the one analyzed in this article.

Each marine protected area, and Gaiola in particular, would need a plan describing how tourism and associated development will be managed. This issue still represents a gap between the local management of the MPA and the entire institutional supply chain, from the local government to the Italian Ministries in charge of this area.

Such a plan would represent the desired future state or condition of the protected area and the most efficient and equitable path to achieve a sustainable future. It would need to detail the specific goals and objectives mandated for the MPA in its founding legislation, decree or government policy, describe the objectives for sustainable tourism development in each case, and specify the management actions, budgeting, financing and park zoning needed to reach those goals. In a sense, park plans for managing tourism attempt to maximize the benefits of tourism while minimizing its costs, especially in the sense of carrying capacity.

Tourism development and MPA growth are, naturally, more complex than they may appear in this ethnographic research, meaning that some further issues still remain to be investigated. To pursue such remaining issues, it would be interesting to conduct similar interviews with stakeholders once another or all of the MPAs in the bay of Naples have been completed. The findings of such a study could shed light on the effectiveness of the MPA management processes that have been implemented and assess whether sustainable tourism educational processes are being sufficiently integrated into this sustainable change. As this research represents one of the first sociological studies specifically examining marine protected areas in Naples, it is essential that further research be conducted to also evaluate national progresses related to this field and to provide updated recommendations for further positive change. For a city such as Naples, marine protected areas could provide many benefits to both the city's inhabitants and marine resources, heightening the sustainability of the coast as we move into the future envisaged in the planning financed by the PNRR Decree Law and its financial support to the tourism sector.

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