

ATLANTIC ISLANDS OF GALICIA NATIONAL PARK

EXPLORING THE SOCIAL VALUE OF THE NATIONAL PARK FOR LOCAL COMMUNITIES



FULL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION



Illas Atlánticas de Galicia National Park, also known as the Atlantic Islands of Galicia National Park, is a national park located in the region of Galicia, in northwestern Spain. It was designated a national park in 2002 and covers an area of approximately 1,200 square kilometres (460 square miles). The national park is primarily composed of a group of islands and islets off the coast of Galicia, in the Atlantic Ocean. The four main islands that make up the park are:

1. Isla de Ons (Ons Island)
2. Isla de Cíes (Cíes Island)
3. Isla de Sálvora (Sálvora Island)
4. Isla de Cortegada (Cortegada Island)

The Park's most representative natural systems are the coastal area and the Atlantic Continental Platform, home to a wide variety of plant and animal species, making it an important area for biodiversity conservation. All the islands have areas reserved as breeding grounds for sea birds, principally the yellow-legged seagull and the shag and the most representative flora is found on cliffs and dunes.

The management of the National Park is shared by the General Administration of the Spanish State and the Xunta de Galicia (regional government), through a joint management commission, composed in equal parts by representatives of both institutions. There are restrictions in place to protect the delicate ecosystem of the islands, and access to certain areas may be limited during certain times of the year.

Most of the areas of the park are considered Special Protection Area on the Conservation of Wild Birds, under the European Union Directive. Under the Directive, Member States of the European Union have a duty to safeguard the habitats of migratory birds and certain particularly threatened birds. The regional government has proposed this park as a candidate for the UNESCO World Heritage status.

METHODS



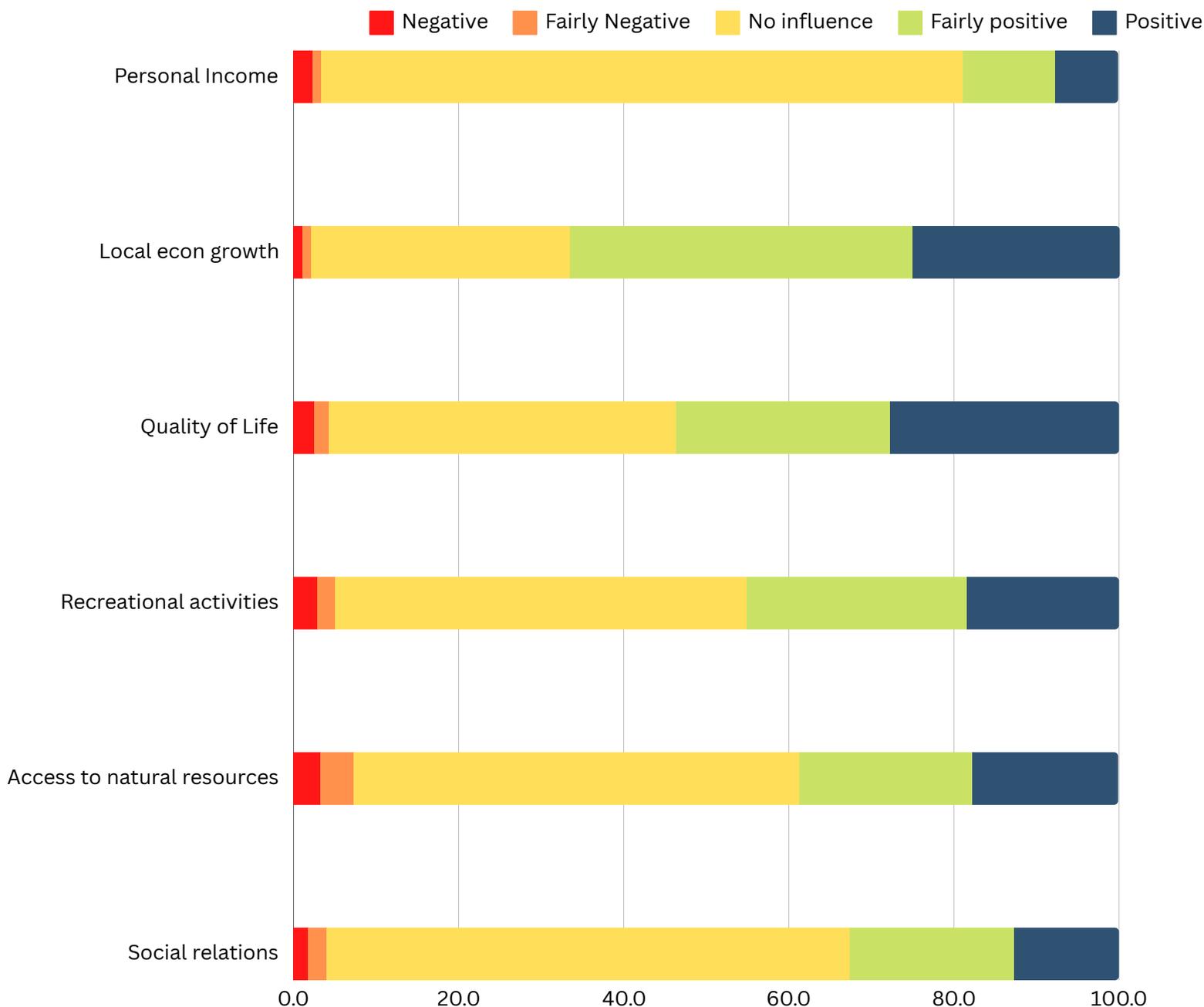
In order to explore people's views on Atlantic Islands of Galicia National Park, we used the Social Impact Assessment Tool for Protected Areas (SOCIAT) which has been developed by researchers at the University of Warwick and the University of Cambridge in collaboration with several park authorities across Europe. This consists of a structured questionnaire including 19 questions covering a variety of topics. Further information on SOCIAT can be found here: www.warwick.ac.uk/sociat.

The questionnaire was distributed during Autumn (1/10 2021 - 12/11 2021) to local communities living inside the boundaries of or near the national park. In total, 301 responses were recorded of which 163 were permanent residents, 3 were owners of second home who visit the area regularly and 127 were visitors or non-permanent workers in the area. 27.5% of respondents were male and 72.5% female. Regarding the age of the respondents, 36.7% were between 36-44, 23.1% were 45-53, 18.1% were 27-35, 10.3% 54-62 and approximately 5% were over 63 and 7.5% were below 26 (minimum age of participants was 18). In terms of educational level 4.3% had completed primary education, 10% secondary, 11.3% had a degree (Bachillerato), 31.6% had Formación profesional (vocational training), 23.3% Licenciatura (undergraduate studies) and 11.3% had a master or PhD.

RESULTS

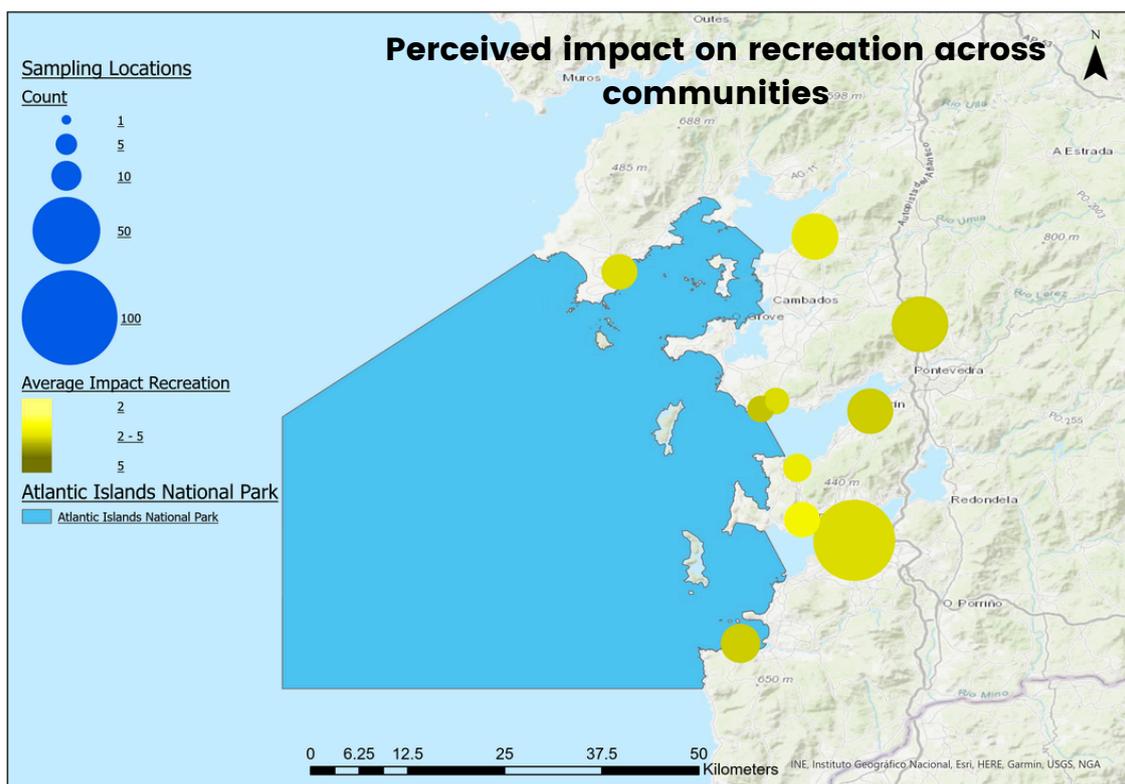
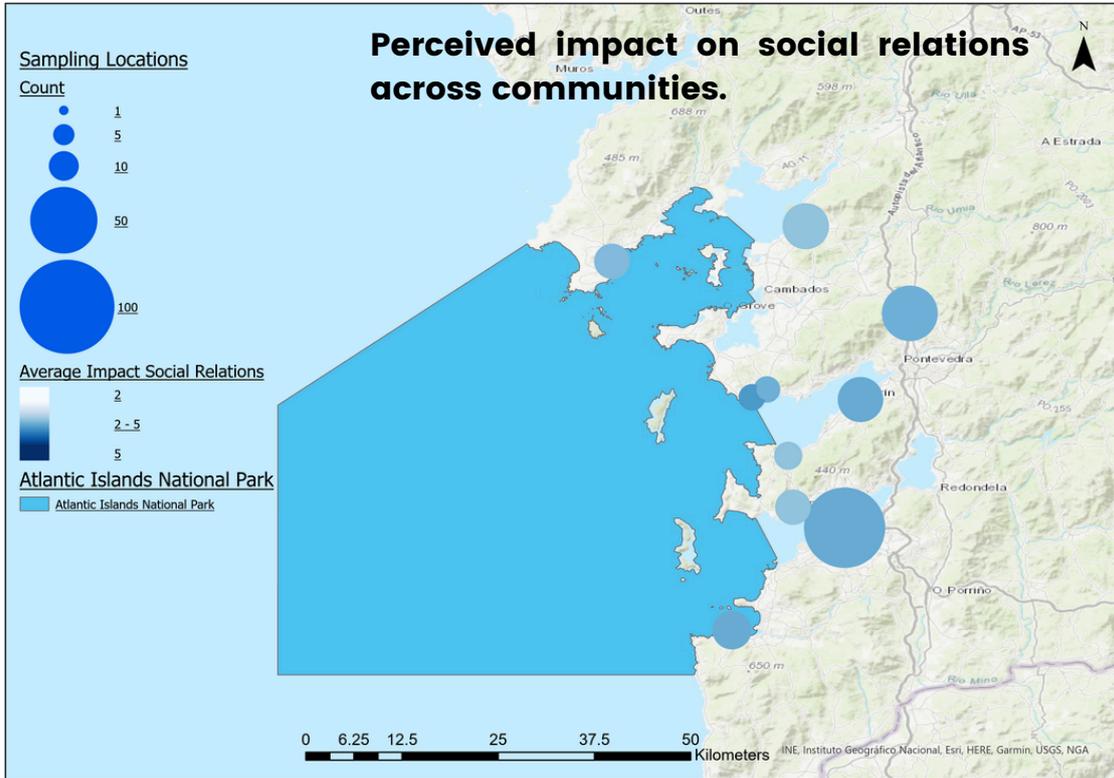
SOCIAL OUTCOMES

From the results of the study it is evident that the national park has multiple benefits for local communities and visitors. The most important ones are the benefits on quality of life and the local economy. Impact on personal income is less important, however. Regarding the distribution of these impacts. 44.5% of the sample considered that those engaging with tourist activities are the main recipients of benefits and 23.3% that the benefits are both for local and tourists (13.9% stated that only visitors benefit from the park). Regarding the potential negative impacts 33.6% of the sample consider that these mainly fall on locals and 26.9% that they impact the professional fishers.

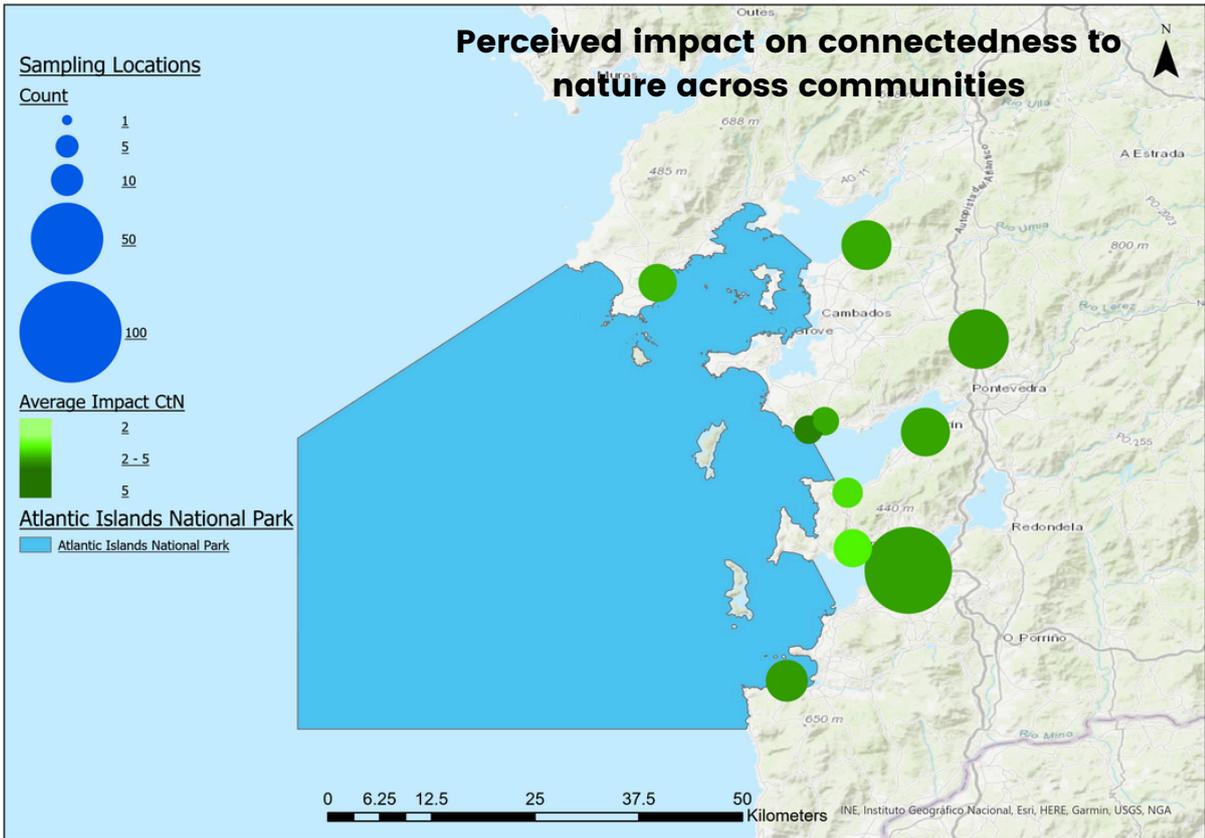
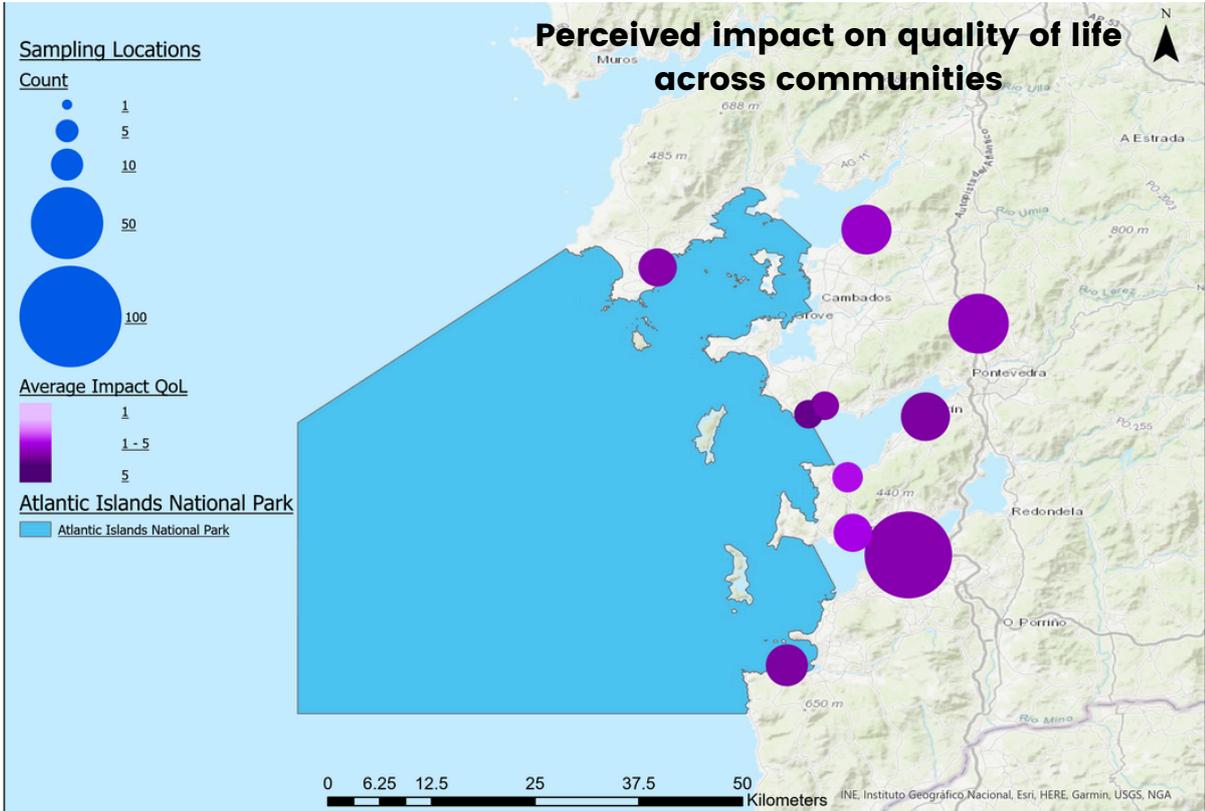


DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL IMPACT

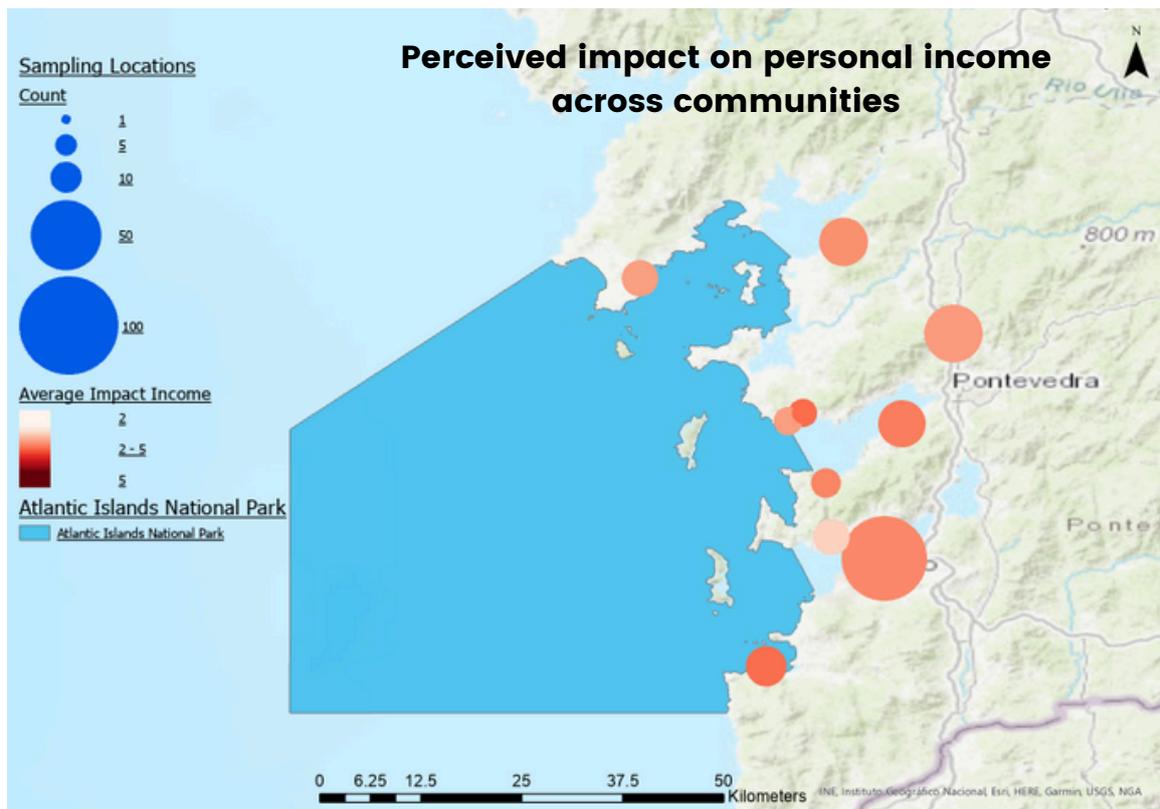
The maps below show the distribution of social impacts across the communities living near the national park. The average score for each impact was estimated for each community. We present here 5 maps. The size of the circle indicates the sample size while the colour represents the average score with darker circles revealing a higher benefit. The maps show that there are variations between communities on the way social impacts are perceived.



DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL IMPACT



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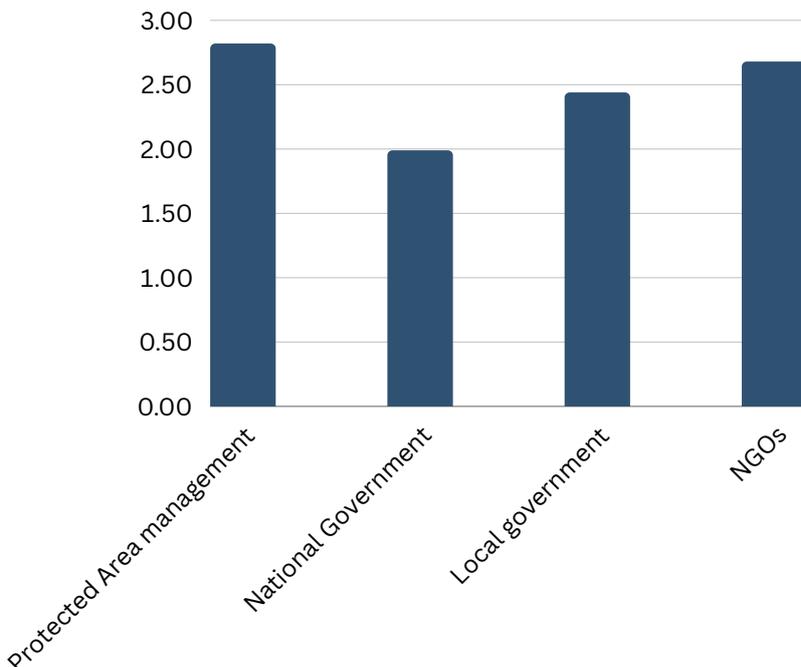
GOVERNANCE & TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Participants were asked how easy it is to express their opinion for the national park to the relevant responsible authorities. 9.8% mentioned that it is almost impossible and 19.6% that it is relatively difficult. 10.2% stated that it is very easy or relatively easy. Furthermore., 45.9% of respondents felt that they don't have the ability to influence future decisions for the national park and 13.3 that they can influence a little bit. Only 7.3% felt that they could influence decisions a lot or completely. Despite this low level of engagement in decision-making processes, 33.9% stated that they would be interested in participating in such decisions and 21.6% that they would not be interested (35% said maybe').

Although only 8.7% of participants had participated in a voluntary activity supporting the existence of the park (e.g. beach cleaning) 31.8% of stated that they would probably or definitely be willing to participate in voluntary activities helping the national park.

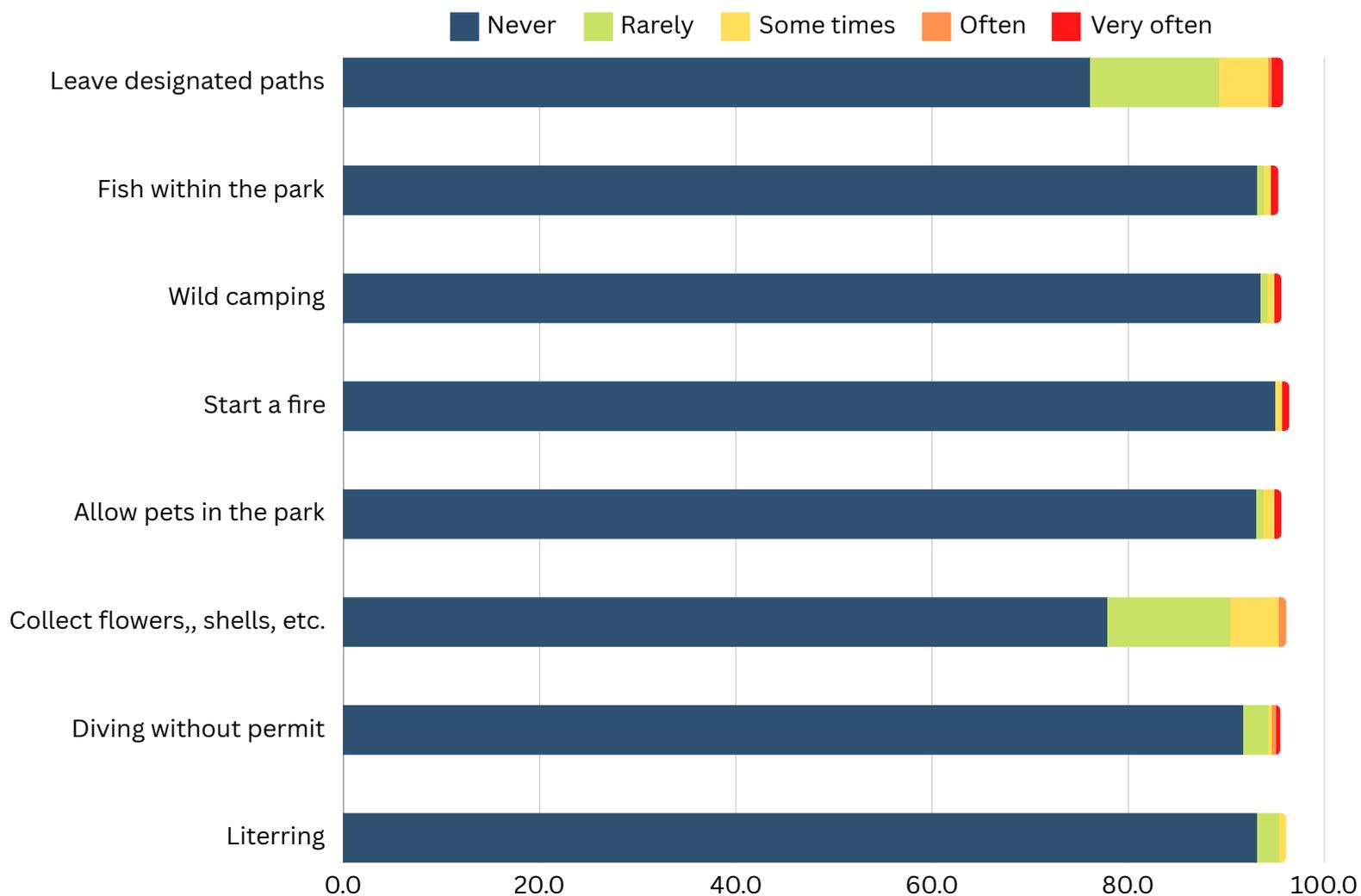
The park authority is the most trusted institutions

Respondents were also asked how much they trust four institutions involved directly or indirectly in the management of the nature reserve. This was measured on a 5-point Likert scale with 1 representing the lowest and 5 the highest level of trust. The institution trusted the most was the management authority of the National Park followed by NGOs and the local government. Trust in the national government is low.



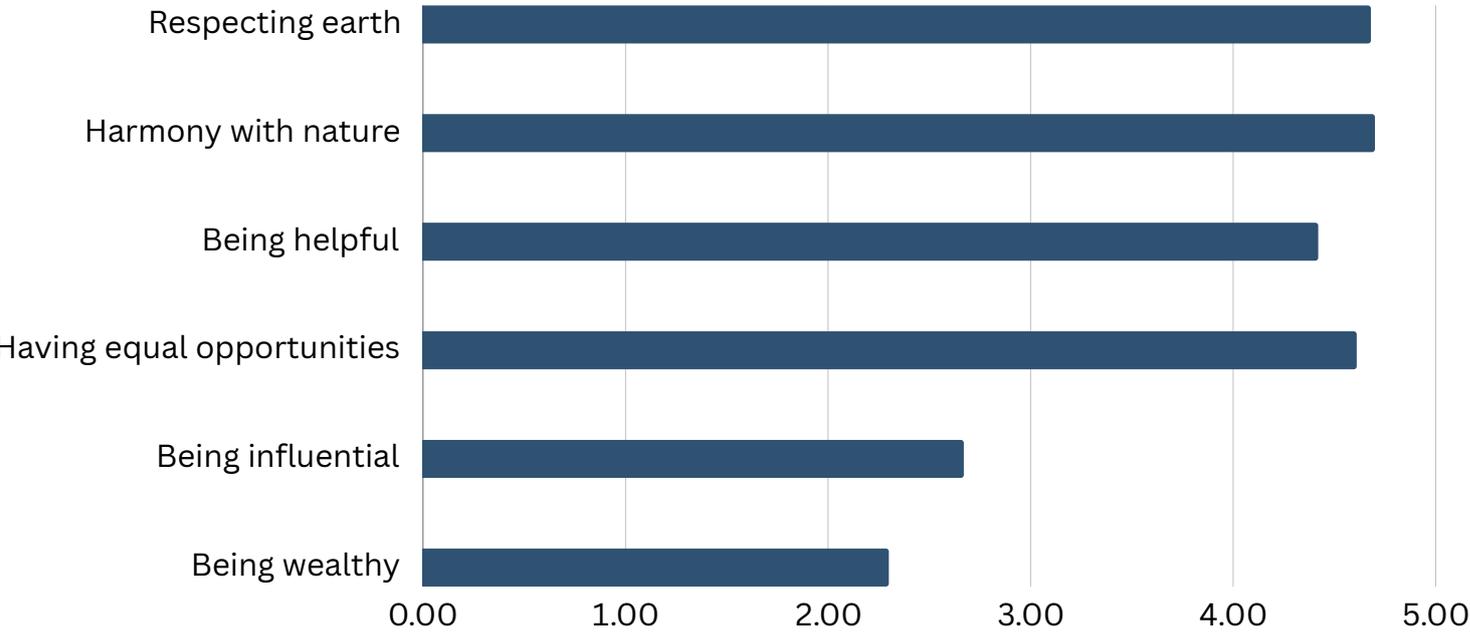
ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR

Overall, most of the respondents behave responsibly when they are within the national park, as 89.2% agreed that they have never broken the regulations. The sample show a 93.3% of users behaving responsibly in relation with fishing, camping, starting fires, bringing pets or diving without authorization. Unfortunately, the percentage is slightly reduced in terms of walking away from designated paths or collecting flowers/shells or fruits, with a 77% of the sample complying with these two regulations. It is also worth to mention that the breaking of the regulations does not happen constantly, as 12.85% indicate that they have done it rarely.



SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL & PLACE VALUES

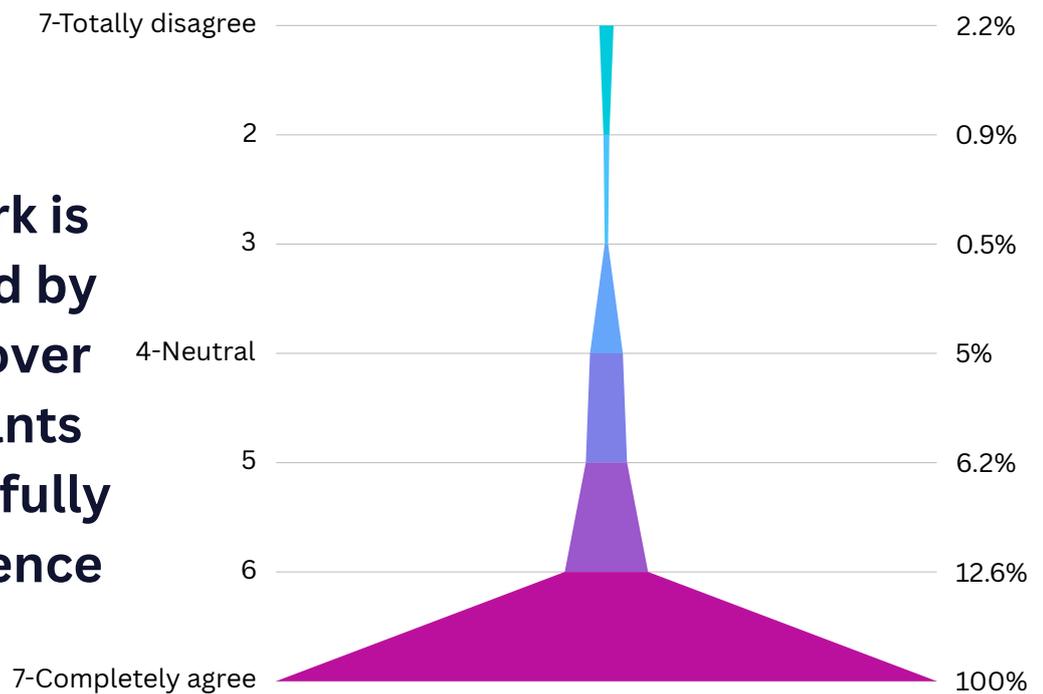
A set of questions explored social, environmental and place values of respondents in the National Park. These questions were measured on a 5 point Likert Scale with 5 representing highest agreement. Strong environmental values were recorded with the mean score for the importance of respecting earth being 4.68. Egoistic values, such as being influential and being wealthy were considered as less important by respondents.



PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE NATIONAL PARK

Almost everyone in the sample were aware of the national park (99.3%). When asked on a scale 1-7 how supportive/unsupportive they are of the national park the majority of respondents stated that they fully support its' existence. Respondents were also presented with a hypothetical question asking them whether they would vote in favour/against/abstain in a referendum proposing the continuation of the park in the future. 97.2% of respondents stated that they would be in favour of its continuation with only 1.7% stating that they would vote against this proposition.

The National Park is widely supported by the public with over 75% of participants stating that they fully support its existence



Another questions asked about the protection zones that currently exist and whether these need to change. Regarding the prohibition of professional fishing in specific zones 42% stated that these zones should become bigger. 35.3% that they should remain the same, 3.5% that they should be reduced and 4.9% that they should be eliminated. Regarding recreational fishing (prohibited in all areas of the national park) 37.2% stated that the size of these zones should be increased, 43.2% that it should remain the same and 6% that is should be reduced. Only 4.7% stated that the zones should be eliminated.

CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

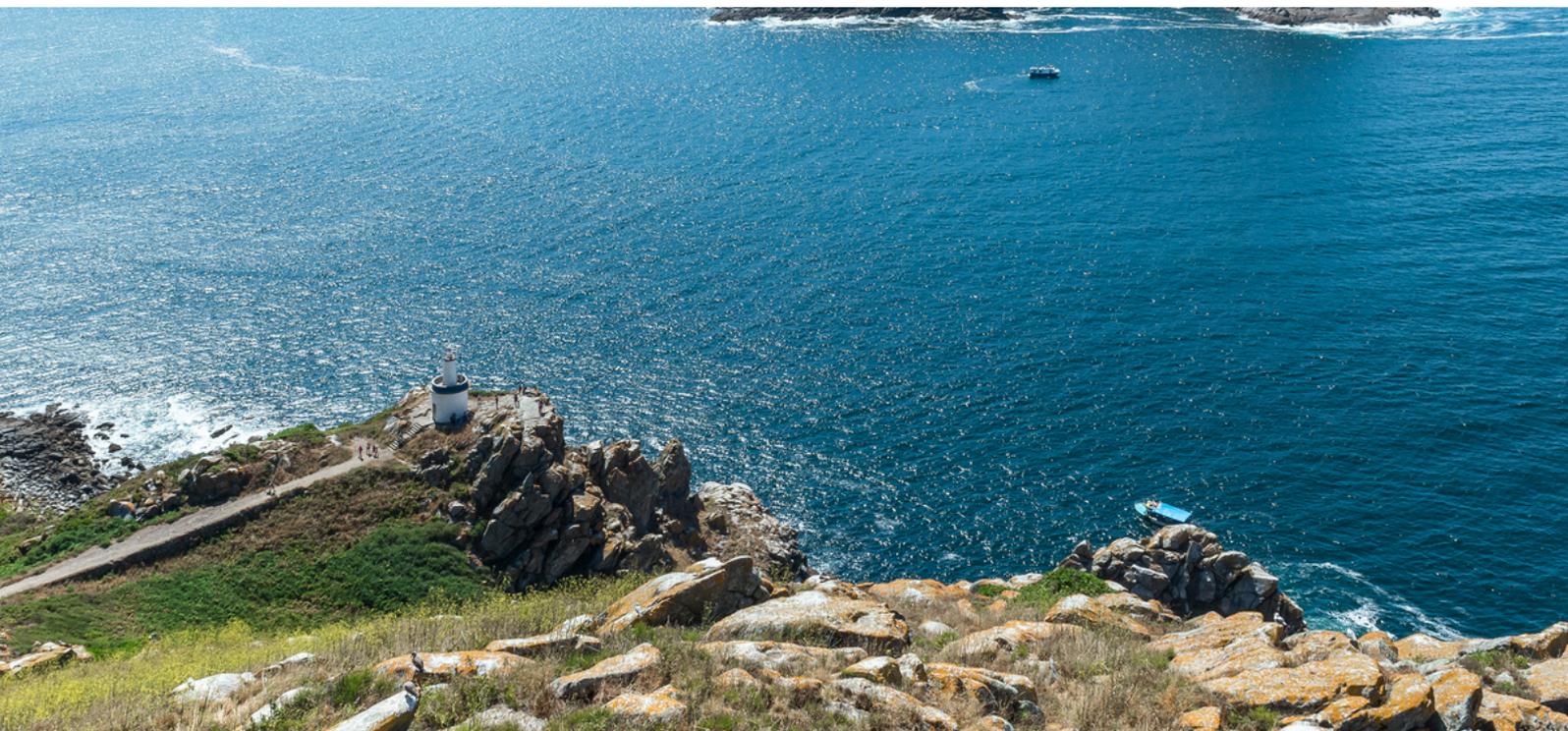
The results of this research show that the park of Atlantic Islands is very well accepted by locals offering a number of benefits for local communities. Impact on personal income is the least important benefit but the economic benefit for the wider region was highly recognised. Other important benefits were noted for recreation and quality of life. Impact on social relations is not though as important. To enhance further the economic advantages for local communities from the national park, targeted measures can be considered. Promoting sustainable tourism initiatives that involve local businesses can generate more income for residents in an environmentally friendly way. Creating opportunities for eco-tourism, such as guided sea tours and wildlife observation may help integrate the park's conservation efforts with the local economy. Local events incorporating the locals could also help with strengthening social relations between different stakeholders in the area.

In terms of governance and public engagement, our results show that more could be done with incorporating locals in decision making processes. Several studies have now shown that effective governance of protected areas requires robust stakeholder engagement. New assessment tools capturing issues around governance and social equity could be used to indicate new pathways for engagement in the area. These pathways could include local communities, NGOs, and other stakeholders. For example, creating regular forums or committees where these groups can express their opinions and participate in management decisions. Such initiatives could help with increasing the level of trust in institutions involved in the management of the park, and the environment in general. Our results showed that the level of trust towards institutions is not very high and thus additional efforts could be focused to increase trust and cooperation.

Increasing engagement in decision-making processes and trust can also be achieved through an increase of volunteering opportunities. Considering the limited resources that nowadays national parks have across Europe, involving volunteers can be vital for the sustainable management of the protected areas. Expanding volunteer programs that focus on conservation activities, such as coastal clean-ups, and habitat restoration, can increase community support and foster a sense of ownership among locals. Developing educational and training programs for volunteers can also provide them with the necessary skills and knowledge to contribute effectively to the park's conservation efforts.

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