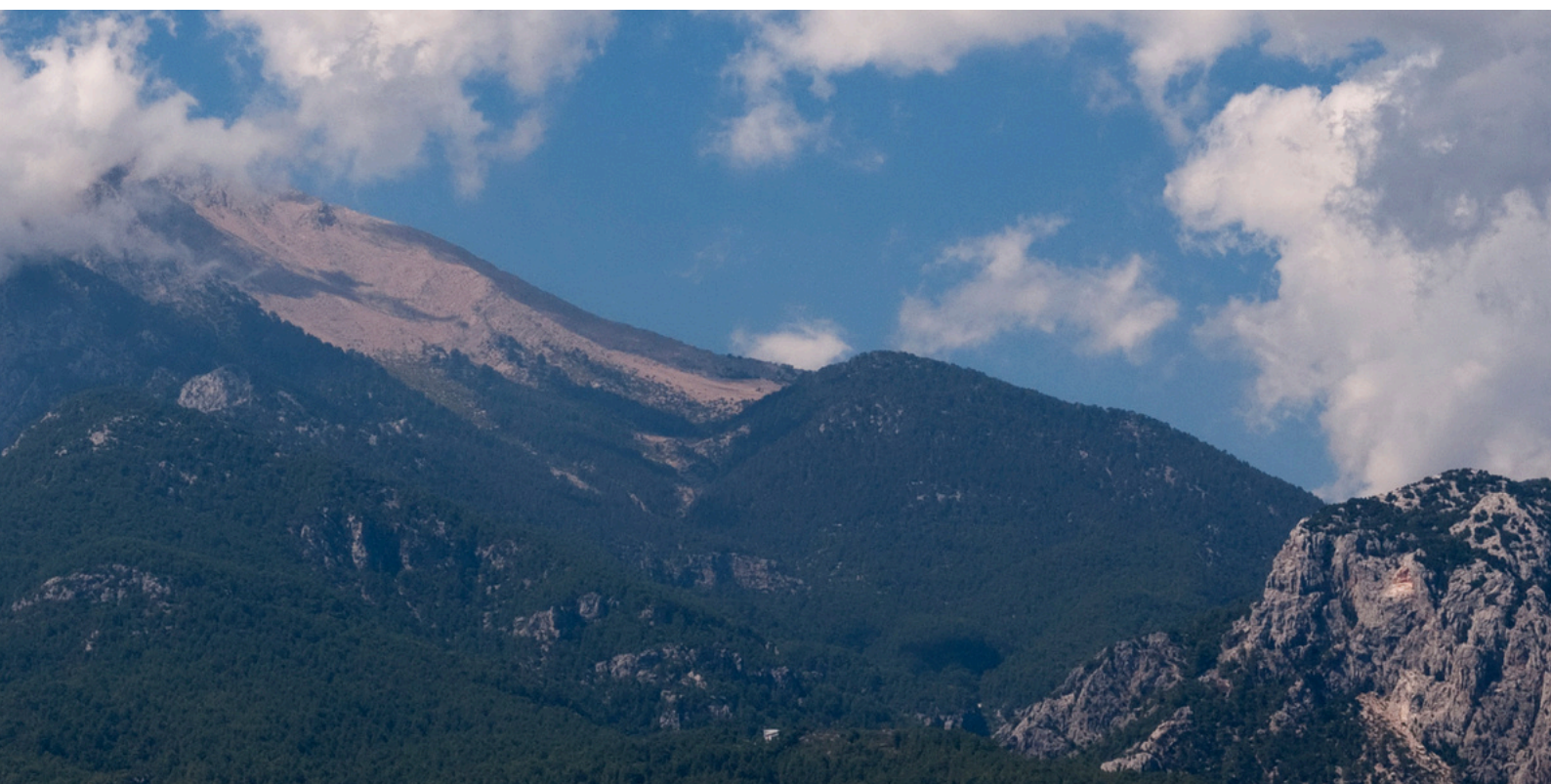


OLYMPUS NATIONAL PARK

EXPLORING PEOPLE'S VIEWS AND SOCIAL
OUTCOMES OF THE NATIONAL PARK

2024



UNIVERSITY OF
CAMBRIDGE

Department of Land Economy



WARWICK
THE UNIVERSITY OF WARWICK

FULL REPORT

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July 2024



This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (Grant agreement No. 802605)

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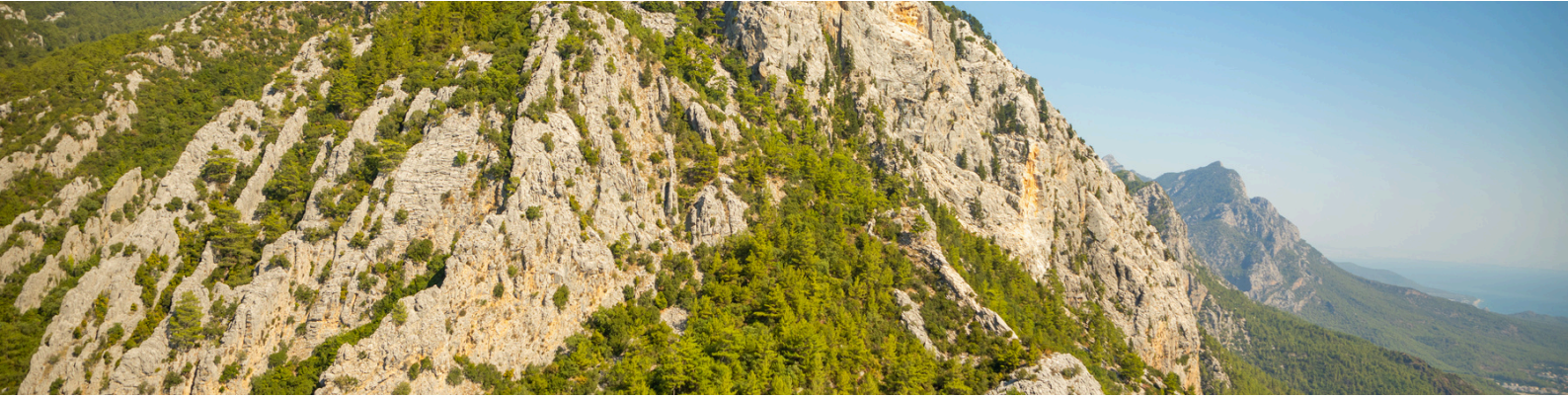
INTRODUCTION

Olympus National Park, located in northern Greece, is a stunning natural reserve that encompasses the iconic Mount Olympus, the highest peak in Greece and the mythical home of the ancient Greek gods. Established in 1938, the park covers an area of approximately 238 square kilometers and is characterized by its rich biodiversity, rugged landscapes, and cultural heritage. The park features diverse ecosystems ranging from dense forests and alpine meadows to deep gorges and pristine rivers, making it a haven for nature enthusiasts and scientists alike. The variety of habitats supports an impressive array of flora and fauna, including rare and endemic species, making it a critical area for conservation efforts.

The ecological importance of Olympus National Park cannot be overstated. It is home to over 1,700 plant species, many of which are endemic to the region, such as the Olympus St. John's wort and the rare Olympus fern. The park also provides crucial habitats for a range of wildlife, including the Balkan chamois, golden eagles, and several species of bats. Its rich biodiversity contributes to the overall health of the regional ecosystem and plays a vital role in maintaining genetic diversity. Additionally, the park's varied topography and pristine natural environments make it an excellent natural laboratory for ecological and environmental research, helping scientists understand more about climate change, species adaptation, and conservation strategies.

For people, Olympus National Park is not only a natural treasure but also a cultural and recreational asset. It attracts thousands of visitors each year who come to hike its scenic trails, explore its historical sites, and experience the breathtaking views from Mount Olympus. The park's cultural significance is deeply rooted in Greek mythology and history, adding a unique dimension to the visitor experience. Local communities benefit economically from the tourism generated by the park, which supports jobs and local businesses. Moreover, the park offers educational opportunities for schools and universities, fostering a connection between people and nature and promoting environmental stewardship among future generations. Through its combination of natural beauty, cultural heritage, and recreational opportunities, Olympus National Park plays a crucial role in enriching both the natural environment and human lives.

METHODS



In order to explore people's views on Olympus 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/fidelio/tools.

The questionnaire was distributed during 2023 to local communities living near the national park. The distribution of the questionnaires was conducted by a researcher from the University of the Aegean (Dimitra Gianniki) under the close supervision of Professor Nikoleta Jones and Professor Panayiotis Dimitrakopoulos. The questionnaire was distributed via personal interviews (face to face) and also online via social media.

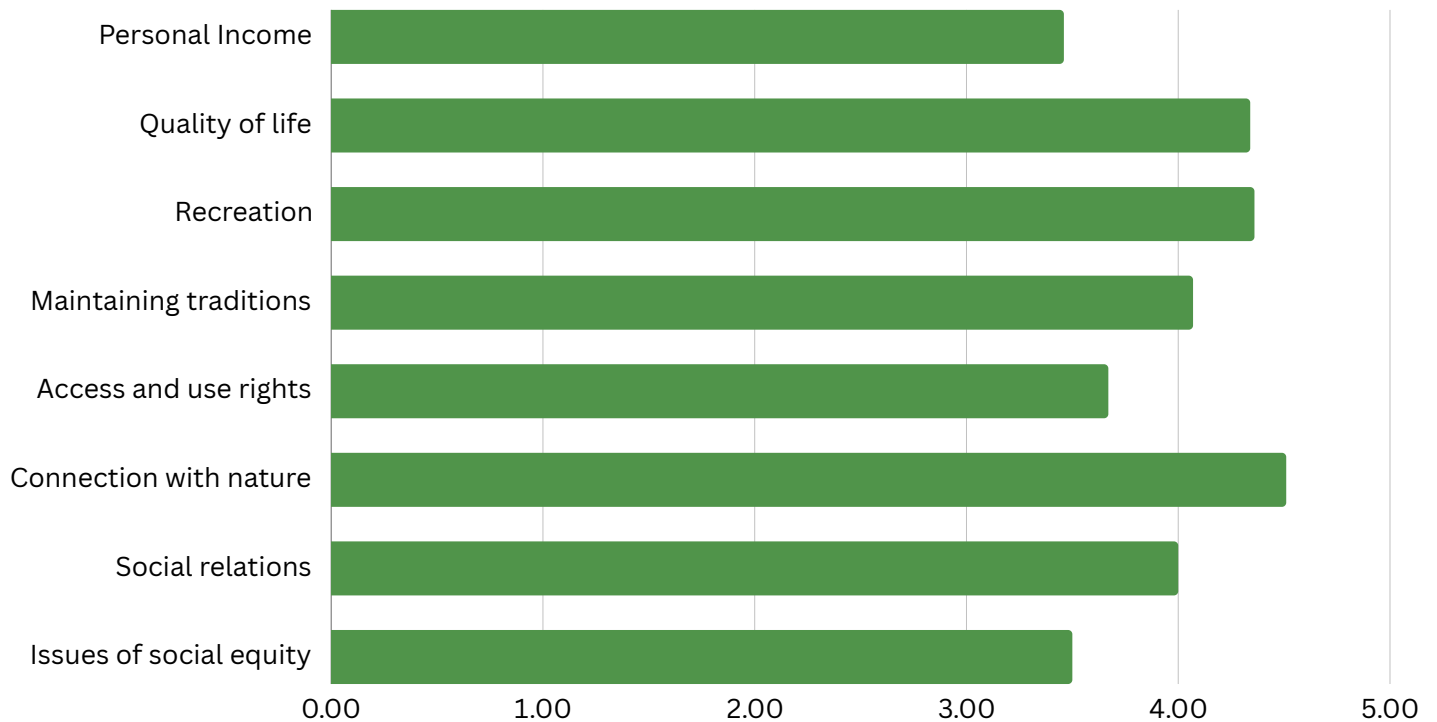
In total, 187 responses were received. 79.8% of respondents were permanent residents and 17.5% owned a second home or rented a property in the area and visited regularly. Approximately 80% of respondents live in the area for more than 10 years. 51% of respondents were female and 49% male. 6.95% had completed primary education, 26.7% had finished secondary education 11.23% post-secondary education and 53.84% higher education. The age groups breakdown is: 15% (18-25), 12.6% (26-35), 22% (36-45), 27% (46-55), 14% (56-65), 4.4% 66-70 and 4.4% was over 70. Respondents were also asked if they struggle to cover their monthly expenses. 11% said they never struggle, 26% rarely, 41% some times, 17% often and 5% said that they always struggle to cover their monthly expenses.

RESULTS

SOCIAL OUTCOMES



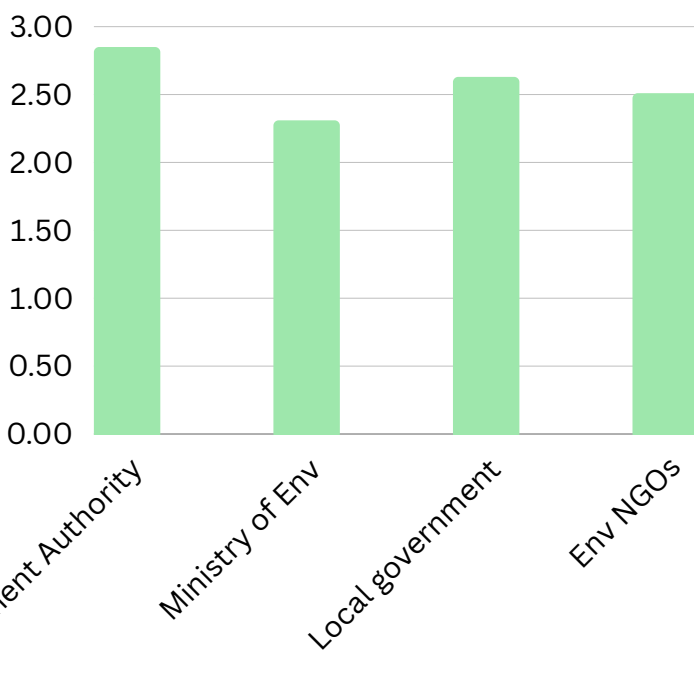
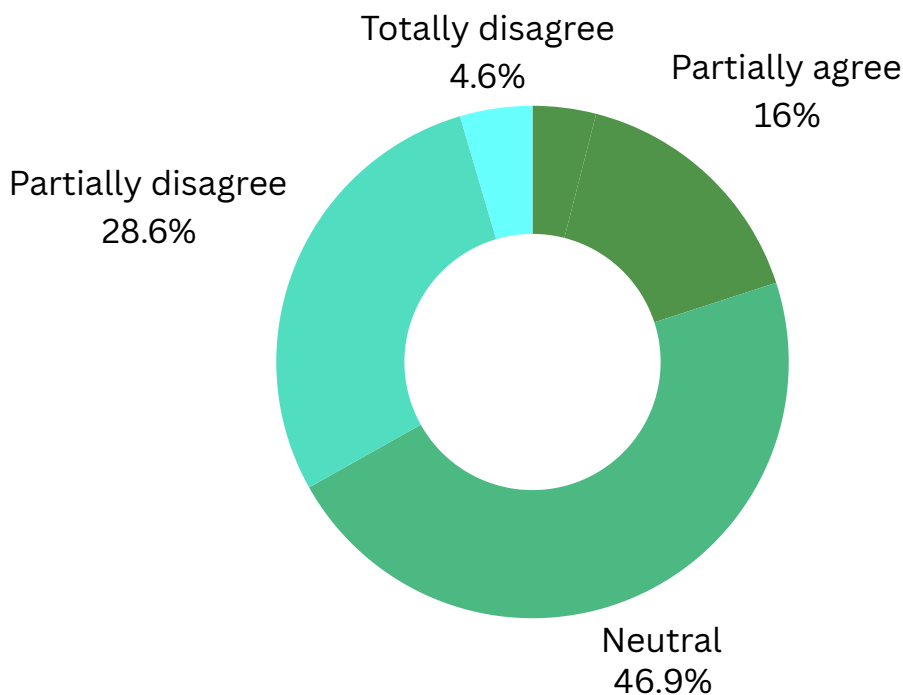
Social outcomes were measured on a 5 point Likert scale, 1 representing negative impact, 3 neutral and 5 the most positive impact. Several outcomes from the national park were considered significant by participants. Notably, recreation, connection to nature, and quality of life were considered as the most important, will all having an average score of over 4. In contrast, the impact on personal income and issues of social inequality (the distribution of outcomes across the local communities) were considered as the least positive according to respondents.



GOVERNANCE & TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Around 14% of respondents mentioned volunteering for Olympus National Park in the , which included a variety of activities. The most common ones were wildfire lookout, litter picking, cleaning paths and opening up new hiking paths, Participants were also asked about their availability of time, financial resources, and opportunities to participate in park-related initiatives. Only 18% agreed or partially agreed with this statement that they have enough time, money and opportunities to support the national park

Level of agreement: I have enough time, money and opportunities to support the national park

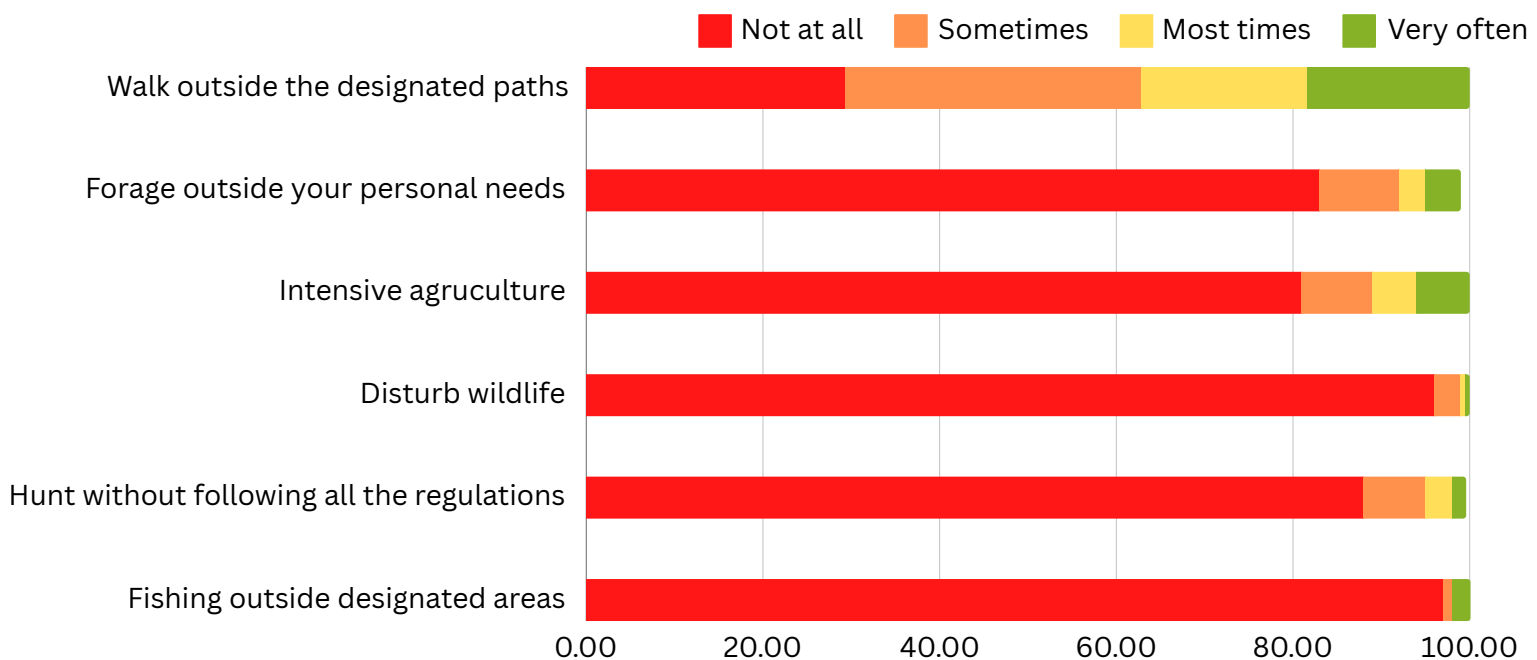


Participants were also asked about their level of trust in four institutions linked to the management of the national park. They rated their trust on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating the lowest and 5 the highest level of trust. Central government (Ministry) received relatively lower trust ratings, while the management authority of the park and the local authority had higher levels of trust compared to the other institutions.

ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR



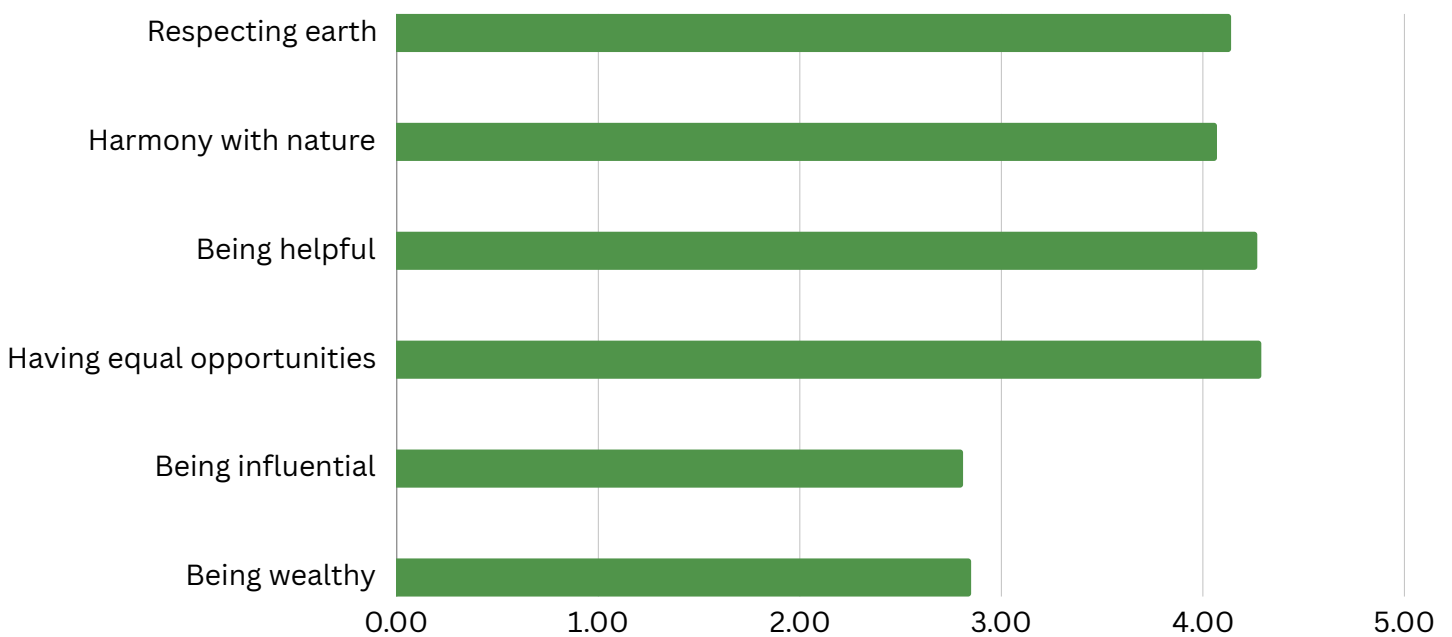
Participants were surveyed regarding their ease of responsibly utilizing the park, with 80% either fully agreeing or agreeing with this concept. Moreover, 90% of respondents indicated their anticipation for fellow national park visitors to exhibit responsible behavior. While the majority of participants generally adhere to the primary park usage guidelines, around 20% admitted to occasionally straying from designated paths. Nearly all respondents affirmed their commitment to refraining from disturbing wildlife, gathering resources solely for personal use, and following fishing regulations diligently.



SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL & PLACE VALUES

67% of respondents stated a strong place attachment with the area of Olympus National Park

A series of inquiries delved into the social, environmental, and place-related values within the local communities surrounding Olympus National Park. These inquiries were evaluated using a 5-point Likert Scale, with a rating of 5 denoting the highest level of agreement. The study revealed notably high environmental values, as indicated by a mean score of 4.14 for the significance of respecting the Earth and 4.07 for living in harmony with nature. Values associated with altruism, such as being supportive and advocating for equal opportunities, garnered comparable ratings to environmental values at 4.27 and 4.29, respectively. Conversely, self-centered values like seeking influence and wealth were deemed less significant by respondents. Notably, a strong attachment to the location was evident, with over 60% of participants expressing a deep connection to the Olympos mountain area.

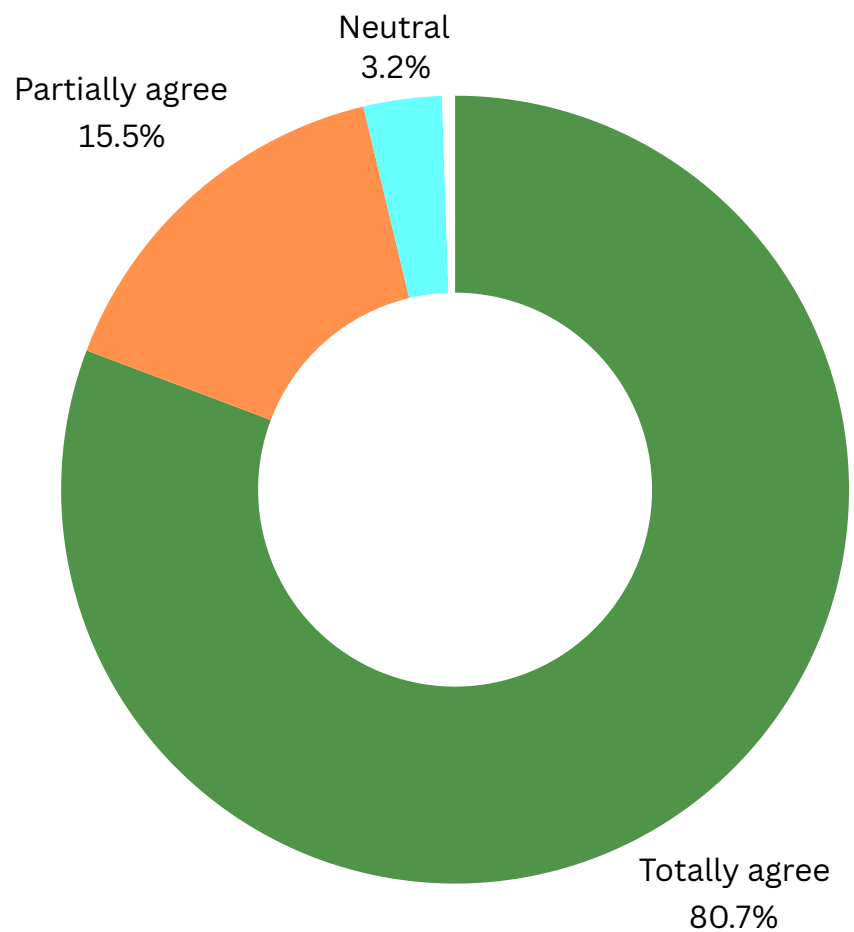


PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE NATIONAL PARK

Respondents were surveyed regarding their stance on the national park's existence. A significant proportion, 80.7%, expressed full agreement, while 15.5% indicated partial agreement. A minority, less than 1%, voiced complete disagreement with the national park's presence. This data underscores the substantial support for the national park among respondents.



approximately 95% of participants support the existence of the national park



CONCLUSIONS

Olympus national park is one of the oldest and most important parks in Greece, both due to its ecological value and also its socio-economic importance. Our assessment of social impacts associated with Olympus National Park provides valuable insights into the perspectives and experiences of nearby residents that can be useful for practitioners and those involved in decision-making.

The results of the survey reveal that the national park significantly enhances the quality of life in the communities that live near or within its boundaries. The park fosters a deeper connection with nature, offering recreational activities, and promoting overall well-being in local communities. Nevertheless, the potential positive outcomes of the park on income, at personal level, were less evident. Concerns were also raised regarding the distribution of social impacts across local communities, flagging potential issues around spatial social equity.

Public support for the park is overwhelmingly positive, with a majority acknowledging its significance for environmental preservation and cultural heritage. Yet, there is a clear desire among local inhabitants for increased involvement in decision-making processes and opportunities to contribute to conservation initiatives. Although several respondents mentioned that they have been involved in volunteering activities, such as wildlife lookout, there is still significant room for improvement, to engage more people in such activities.

Confidence in park-related institutions, including the park management and local government, is moderately established, with the central government receiving comparatively lower trust ratings. This signifies a need for enhancing relationships between the community and higher governmental entities, despite existing trust in local and park authorities.

Local communities exhibit profound environmental values, showcasing a profound reverence for nature and a dedication to responsible conduct within the park's premises. Place attachment is very high with the majority of respondents stating that they feel that the area is very important to them.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on our findings we would like to propose the following recommendations which can facilitate the management of the park and potentially increase its social and ecological effectiveness:

Enhance Community Engagement and Participation

- Increase Volunteering Opportunities: Develop programs that encourage local residents to participate in park conservation activities, such as habitat restoration, wildlife monitoring, and environmental education. This could strengthen the community's sense of ownership and responsibility towards the park.
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- Public Involvement in Decision-Making: Create platforms for regular dialogue between park authorities and local communities. This could involve town hall meetings, workshops, and digital forums where residents can voice their concerns and suggestions, particularly regarding park management and conservation strategies.

Promote Sustainable Economic Opportunities

- Support Sustainable Tourism: Encourage the development of eco-friendly businesses that align with the park's conservation goals. This could include incentives for local entrepreneurs to create services like guided eco-tours, sustainable accommodations, and local craft markets, ensuring that economic benefits are distributed equitably.
-
- Balanced Tourism Management: Implement strategies to manage visitor numbers and reduce the risks associated with overtourism. This could involve establishing carrying capacity limits, promoting off-season tourism, and investing in infrastructure that minimizes environmental impact.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen Trust in Institutions:

- Greece and other Southern European countries often exhibit lower trust in institutions compared to West and Northern European Countries. Our study is consistent with previous findings on this topic and shows that trust in the management authority of the park and also in local authorities is higher compared to central government. Considering the level of trust in institutions it is recommended to improve transparency in park management by regularly updating the public on conservation efforts, financial management, and decision-making processes. Clear communication can help build trust, especially in institutions that currently receive lower trust ratings.
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- Collaborative Governance: Foster partnerships between the park management, local government, NGOs, and community groups to co-manage certain aspects of the park. Collaborative governance can enhance trust and ensure that multiple perspectives are considered in park management.

Address Social Equity Issues:

- Equitable Benefit Distribution: Develop programs that specifically target marginalized groups within the local communities to ensure they benefit from the park's presence. This could include job creation initiatives, targeted support for local businesses, and educational programs that enhance access to park resources for all residents.
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- Income Diversification Initiatives: Introduce alternative income-generating activities that are sustainable and align with conservation goals, such as organic farming, local handicrafts, and renewable energy projects, ensuring that the economic benefits of the park are more evenly distributed across the community.

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