

National Parks in Ireland and Portugal: conceptualisation, spatial organisation and management

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This article examines how the distinct conceptualisations of National Parks in Ireland and in Portugal are reflected on the parks' spatial organisation and on their management policies. Particular emphasis is placed on the Killarney National Park and on the Peneda-Gerês National Park.

By international standards, the history of National Parks in Ireland and Portugal is relatively short (see Richez, 1992, for a comprehensive history of National Parks in Europe). In Ireland, although it started in 1932 (Bourn Vincent Memorial Park Act) when the first National Park was established, very little was done in terms of National Parks conservation until the late 1960s (Sarmiento, 1996). By then, the Office of Public Works (OPW), together with the Department of Lands, one of the major conservation agencies at the time, established a section named 'The National Parks and Monuments Section', responsible for developing National Parks in Ireland. Nowadays, there are five National Parks in Ireland, namely Killarney National Park (KNP) established in 1932, Connemara National Park and Glenveagh National Park designated in the 1980s (1980 and 1986, respectively), and the Wicklow Mountains National Park and the Burren National Park established in the 1990s (1991 and 1993, respectively). A sixth National Park is planned for Northwest county Mayo, incorporating a large expansion of intact blanket bog, in the Owenduff catchment (Hickey, 1994a and 1994b).

In spite of the existence of five National Parks, there is no specific legislation at present governing this type of protected areas, and the only reference to the term 'National Park' in Irish Law still is the Bourn Vincent Memorial Park Act 1932. Although the OPW has 'worked' a National Park Act, it never went to Parliament, and as Ireland has no National Parks Act, in legal terms they do not exist as such (Sarmiento, 1996).

In Portugal, the first and only National Park, Peneda-Gerês National Park (PGNP), located in Northwest of the country, was created in 1971 following the European Year for Conservation of Nature, and the legal support for the creation of National Parks and other Reserves (Edwards, 1990; Sarmiento, 1996). However, the history of National Parks in Portugal goes back at least 60 years, as, in fact, since the 1930s, several groups concerned with nature protection, such as the Gerês Mountain Forestry Project, were demanding some form of protection of the Gerês and Peneda mountains (Sarmiento, 1996).

Three major conceptualisations of interpreting National Parks can be distinguished (Gahan, 1986; Sarmiento, 1996). The first one, operating in England and Wales, whereby the great majority of the land within the National Park is privately owned was the one adopted in Portugal. Here the emphasis of the park authority is placed upon the protection of the scenery. The second one, is the conceptualisation advocated by Scotland, a nature conservation system which actually has no National Parks, as there is a high proportion of scenic landscapes when compared to the population. Although the usual procedures associated with National Parks are taken, no actual areas are delimited. The third National Park conceptualisation, adopted in Ireland, is the one of the US, where the concept originated and blossomed. This conceptualisation is based on the state ownership of the park lands, and on the park management by a single authority.

As mentioned, the OPW, under the responsibility of the Department of the Environment, is the only authority managing National Parks in Ireland, through the National Parks and Wildlife Services (NPWS), with headquarters in Dublin. Local management is in the responsibility of the parks superintendent, based at the 'core' of the National Parks (OPW, 1990). Although the OPW is the only authority with power, there are two other important administrative bodies with decision influence, namely, the Urban District Councils adjacent to the park lands, and the County Councils. They assume an important role, since the OPW has no control over any development that occurs outside the park's limits (Sarmiento, 1996). Problems related to sewage, urban developments or road developments, for example, may affect the park, and if co-ordination

between these agencies is poor, negative impacts as regards the National Parks may occur. As National Parks do not exist in Irish legislation, the OPW cannot establish reliable legal agreements with other authorities, in order to protect the park from external influences. The efficiency of buffer zones depends on the determination of the local authorities, and any political change they may occur will have consequences in the established informal agreements, as these authorities' aims may differ substantially from those of the park's management authority (for a detailed discussion of cross-boundary management problems see Schonewald-Cox, 1986 and Schonewald-Cox *et. al.*, 1992).

Peneda-Gerês National Park has three types of land ownership, namely public, private, and *baldios*, that is, communal land, restricted to the local community members, and only for traditional practices (for a discussion of the uses and management of communal lands in Portugal see Brouwer, 1993). Therefore, the management authorities of PGNP have to co-ordinate three distinct types of land ownership, each of which pose different problems and opportunities (Edwards, 1990; Sarmiento, 1996; Silva, in press). The management of the lands of the Portuguese National Park is also under the responsibility of several management and administrative institutions. Firstly, the park's management authority is under the direction of the National Conservation Institute (ICN), a section of the Department of the Environment and Natural Resources (MARN). Secondly, the authorities of the five *concelhos* (councils), which are partially within PGNP, have their own development plans (PDMs) not all of which are yet implemented. The municipalities' politicians, although interested in the protection of the park's natural features, are more absorbed in development strategies that can yield to votes in the next elections. In spite of the existence of an environmental consciousness among some politicians, the great majority are still very focused on economic aspects and consequently, development practices reflect precisely this (Sarmiento, 1996). There are also two different regional tourism boards with jurisdiction within the park lands, namely the Tourism Region of the Alto Minho and the Tourism Region of the Costa Verde. Both tourism boards have specific promotion programmes for their areas of the park, and strategies remain to be carefully co-ordinated, in order to respect the park's objectives.

The headquarters of the PGNP management authority are located in Braga, 40 kilometres from the park and the offices of the ICN (Nature Conservation Institute) are located in Lisbon, 400 kilometres from PGNP. Four of the five *delegações* (local management offices) are also outside the park's limits. The only *delegação* located within the park is Terras do Bouro, at Gerês. An important consequence is that the park's managers perceptions are conditioned by the fact that their headquarters are located in Braga, a large urban area, at considerable distance from the park. By living outside the problem areas, managers do not always appreciate and get a full understanding of many of its problems.

The official conceptualisation of Irish National Parks is according to the traditional National Parks (Gahan, 1986; Sarmiento, 1996). Accordingly, the Irish National Parks are state owned, managed by an authority with full power within the limits of the park, but with no special rights of consultation regarding developments near the park lands. The parks are usually perceived as protected bastions, and the OPW can only object to proposed developments in the same manner as private citizens. Co-operation between the park's authorities and other agencies is often uncoordinated. One of the most striking differences between the Irish and the Portuguese National Parks is that the former are uninhabited, and can even be understood as relic demesnes. By contrast, PGNP is still a vibrant rural *milieu* especially because of the *modus vivendi* of its communities, where one can appreciate the daily vernacular practices of the communities within the park. In a sense, PGNP can be referred to as a 'living eco-museum'. Obviously, due to this complexity (conservation of nature, public enjoyment, agriculture, farming and forestry, urban developments, etc.) and to the number of authorities involved in the management of the park lands, management is very complex and coordination and dialogue are fundamental between all authorities involved.

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