
An approach to assess the socio-economic impact of conservation projects

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Abstract

Small oceanic islands host unique ecosystems with important rates of flora and fauna endemism. But their ecosystems are also typically threatened by invasive species pressure and human settlement. Conservation projects have ecological and scientific impacts, but as they channel funds to, usually, rural areas they are also positive funding sources to the local economies. Based on the experience of the Safe Islands for Seabirds LIFE project, a methodology to assess the socio-economic impact of a nature conservation project on the local community is presented. The study focuses on the wealth created and the jobs supported directly and indirectly by the project. To assess the impact of the Safe Islands for Seabirds project (Azores, 2009-2012) a combination of methods to analyse the project expenditure, the jobs created directly as a result of it, and, by means of multipliers, the incomes and jobs it supported indirectly was used. During 2009–2012 period a direct expenditure of EUR 344,212.50 from the project increased the gross domestic product of the Azorean region by EUR 206,527.50. In addition to the 4.5 jobs created directly by the project, it also supported indirectly the equivalent of 1.5–2.5 full-time jobs. The project also provided the opportunity to preserve and promote natural amenities important for the quality of life of the local community. Findings show that a nature conservation project can have positive economic impacts, and recommendation is made to the creation of a standardized tool to calculate in a straightforward but accurate manner the socio-economic impacts of conservation projects. Conservation projects make sense on small islands due to their ecological characteristics, but they are also the opportunity to support these isolated and rural economies.

Keywords: conservation project, LIFE, multiplier, protected area, Corvo Island, socioeconomic impact

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