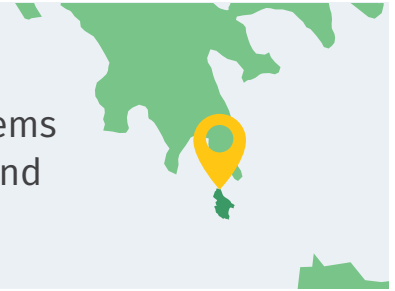


MOBILISING LOCAL CITIZENS FOR FIRE PREVENTION

Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature (HSPN) and the Institute of Mediterranean and Forest Ecosystems (IMFE) in Greece mobilised local citizens of Kythira island to prevent, and better respond to, future wildfires.



Kythira is an island south of Greece with a population of nearly 4000 people.

BACKGROUND

Kythira is an island located south of the Peloponnese peninsula in Greece, with a population of nearly 4000 people. It has poor connections to the mainland by boat or air, and has experienced many remarkable forest fires in the past.

A fire in August 2017 burned almost 10% of Kythira island, lasting approximately 18 days before being declared extinguished.

This fire event sparked action among the local authorities and state agencies, with the aim to improve prevention and suppression efforts, and reduce probability and severity of future fires. Efforts included improvement of flood protection work and prevention infrastructure.

A novel approach was taken by the Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature (HSPN) together with the Institute of Mediterranean and Forest Ecosystems (IMFE). A project to improve local fire prevention capacities evaluates local fire risk and mobilises local citizens for cooperation using the “window of opportunity” provided by the disastrous wildfire in 2017.



LOCATION

Kythira Island, Greece



ACTORS

Hellenic Society for the Protection of Nature (HSPN), Institute of Mediterranean and Forest Ecosystems (IMFE) of the Hellenic Agricultural “Demeter”



CHALLENGE

Greece has over 200 inhabited islands with limited firefighting capacities. Often located at long distances from the mainland, it takes time for reinforcements to arrive and fires have a greater potential to grow, threatening people, property and the environment. Thus, it is important for these islands to improve fire prevention capacities.



INNOVATIVE APPROACH

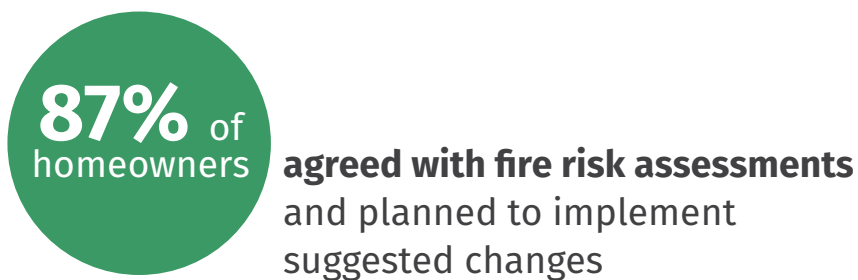
Assessing fire risk in Kythira

The novel project, coordinated by HSPN and IMFE, focused on social components of fire management, and especially on mobilising local people for fire prevention through volunteer work and awareness raising. Emphasis was also placed on understanding fire risk in Kythira, specifically as a foundation for efforts in preparedness and pre-suppression.

Understanding fire risk in Kythira involved analysis of the island's fire statistics and preparation of a forest fuels map.

Mobilising and informing local citizens

The project focused on certain settlements in Kythira but also included actions covering the whole island. Prevention planning for at-risk settlements was made with the help of fire modelling and volunteer-led vulnerability assessment of 610 structures. The owners of these structures received an informative risk assessment form with recommendations. Talks and workshops on fire prevention were carried out for locals (including schools) to raise awareness and improve local capacities, encouraging people in fuel management and forest rehabilitation work. Communications materials included brochures, videos, articles and radio interviews addressing fire prevention.



More information of the project (in Greek):

http://www.fria.gr/kithira_info.html

Main reference:

Xanthopoulos, G., Athanasiou, M., Nikiforaki, A., Kaoukis, K., Mantakas, G., Xanthopoulos, P., Papoutsakis, C., Christopoulou, A., Sofronas, S., Gletsos, C. & Varela, V. (2022). Innovative Action for Forest Fire Prevention in Kythira Island, Greece, through Mobilization and Cooperation of the Population: Methodology and Challenges. *Sustainability*, 14(2), 594. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14020594>

Lessons learned

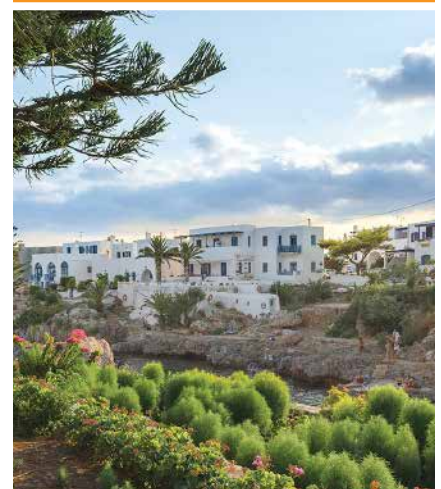
The project in Kythira was designed specifically for the local population.

Community participation was a joint effort by experts and local citizens, rather than managed top-down by official agencies.

Involving motivated individuals in prevention activities can have long-term impacts and work with limited funding.

A network for local volunteers could help resolve weaknesses and improve outcomes.

Any prevention programme should consider the particular situation and address people locally.



Volunteers assessed the risk of destruction of 610 buildings in three settlements in Kythira. Volunteers received training to carry out these tasks.

