

## ***Interactive comment on “Resolving conflicting objectives in the management of the Plastiras Lake: can we quantify beauty?” by A. Christofides et al.***

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The authors open up some fundamental philosophical questions: what is beauty, what is value, and what is choice? All are questions that have concerned philosophers for millennia; in particular, whether beauty and value can be objectively defined or whether they are ultimately subjective. Unless these questions are explicitly addressed then the answers are implicitly assumed in the technical approach used. Notably, the authors criticise the assumptions in orthodox economics that individuals are rational, and that that value is given wholly by individual preference. They join the philosophical debate between objectivity and subjectivity which is reflected in the argument between reason and intuition, although reason is a claim to rigour and not to the existence of an objective truth. Unlike the authors, I would argue that we need both: decisions are

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frequently too complex for us to be able to rely wholly upon our intuition; we need a rigorous framework of analysis to reduce the complexity to a level that we can understand. The deficiencies of orthodox economics are a reason to replace that economics with another; not a reason to abandon reason altogether. Equally, the limitation of intuition is that does not create an audit trail through which others can follow the chain of reasoning that lead to the conclusion. When large amounts of other people's money are being spent, accountability is a minimum requirement.

The decision as to the management strategy to adopt for Plastiras Lake raises other equally fundamental philosophical questions, notably: what is a fair or just means of making this decision, and what is a fair outcome? These latter two questions are not raised by the authors but, in a period where decisions about water management must follow the Aarhus convention and the provisions of the Water Framework Directive with regard to stakeholder engagement, they are critical questions. In particular, the management of the Plastiras Lake is one in which there are multiple stakeholders, with multiple conflicting interests, and as such it seems an obvious candidate for the use of Alternative Dispute Resolution procedures, including Deliberative Multi-Criteria Analysis. Stakeholder engagement is, by definition, a social process: central to that process is the debate, argument and negotiation of values. It is a process of learning through which we learn what to choose and simultaneously what we want. It is a process which the authors, in their closing paragraph, report having gone through themselves.

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