

Recognition, Dedication and Management of the Protected Areas, as and Understanding and Enhancing of the Ecotourism are Great Opportunities Given through Education, a Request of Time in Albania

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Abstract

A new fast growing trend in tourism is ecotourism, in which tourists visit with the temporary stay of a few hours to a few days on natural ecosystems under low impact, no consumptive and locally oriented activities. Through these activities species and habitats are maintained and typically, underdeveloped regions are emphasized. Ecotourism provides a great alternative, great opportunity, especially for rural, forest and undeveloped area. At the same time, despite its many benefits, it also poses many risks for the naturally protected areas. If ecotourism is practiced improperly degradation and irreversible damages could be the unwanted result. In addition, the lack of education with the training programs in the field of Protected Areas and Ecotourism in Albania makes it a necessity to be developed. Such an education with the training programs is being implemented with the lead partner the staffs of faculties and institute. The entire partnership has two Universities, seven SME-s and one National Park from some different countries all over Albania. The training programs will have 12 educational modules that will be available online and will prepare professionals that will be able to implement ecotourism in a sustainable way. Only through awareness and education a sustainable ecotourism will be achieved in the protected areas of Albania. So, think that a recognition, dedication and management of the protected areas, at the same time, as and understanding and enhancing of the ecotourism are great opportunities given through education, a request of time in Albania.

KEYWORDS- sustainability, opportunity, enchaining, management, training program, protected areas, ecotourism.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Council of Ministers' Decision no. 102, dated 04.02.2015 "On Establishing the organization and functioning of the National Agency of Protected Areas Protected Areas and Regional Administrations", published in the Official Gazette no. 18, 2015, pp. 821-823 [1] was one of the first important steps on protected areas, but not all, that time, humanity and self protected areas and activities to activities that are, after deficiencies own decision, which we believe to be improved further steps in [1].

Protected area is clearly defined as one geographical space, recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means to achieve a long term conservation of nature and made man biodiversity with associated ecosystem service and cultural values.

Protected areas provide wide range social, environmental and economic benefits to people and communities worldwide. They are a tried and tested approach that has been applied for centuries to conserve nature and associated cultural resources by local communities, indigenous peoples, governments and other organizations.

More than instruments for conserving nature, protected areas are vital to respond to some of today's most pressing challenges, including food and water security, human health and well-being, disaster risk reduction and climate change.

As the world continues to develop at a rapid pace, pressure on ecosystems and natural resources intensifies. Protected areas, when governed and managed appropriately and embedded in development strategies, can provide nature-based solutions to this pressure, and take their place as an integral component of sustainable development [2].

Ecotourism, the tourism that focuses on natural environments, is a large and growing part of the tourism industry. There are many benefits for its advancement, although at the same time, if it is implemented without a scientific basis and well-trained personnel it can have detrimental and irreversible consequences to these natural areas. Education and awareness are key factors for the sustainable implementation of ecotourism [3].

One of the reasons that ecotourism is growing is because of the increased number of protected areas in our country, as everywhere in Europe and worldwide. Lockwood et al. [4] mention that the establishment of protected areas is one of the greatest land-use transformations of the 20th century. The importance of protected areas has been well-accepted worldwide and has led to the establishment of more than 100,000 sites that cover 12% of the earth terrestrial surface [4]. These areas are essential because they help sustain life on earth by protecting different types of landscapes that are rich in biodiversity levels while also providing many benefits to humans [2], [3].

In the European Union the ecological network of Natura 2000 has been established (European Commission, n.d.) [5]. The purpose of the network is to conserve and protect its biodiversity, while also ensuring the sustainability of Europe's agriculture as well as its energy and transport policies [6]. Currently, the network has nearly 26,000 protected areas with a total area of more than 850,000 km² that protect 200 habitat types and over 1,000 rare and threatened animal and plant species [7]. This clearly indicates that a large portion of the EU is protected and since the purpose of the network is to maintain these areas but also advance economic development, ecotourism can provide the ideal alternative for these areas [2], [3].

The purpose of the study is to present the importance, benefits and potential disadvantage of protected areas and at the same time the ecotourism. It is very substantial to understand these concepts since Europe and Albania too is experiencing a rapid adoption of ecotourism. At the same time the development of training programme "Management of

Sustainable and Ecological Tourism" with the acronym MEST will be presented. This is funded through the ERASMUS Life Learning Programme, specifically the European programme of Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency. The Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP) was designed to enable people, at any stage of their life, to take part in stimulating learning experiences, as well as developing education and training across Europe [2], [3].

II. PROTECTED AREAS IN ALBANIA

The Council of Ministers' Decision no. 102, dated 04.02.2015 "On Establishing the organization and functioning of the National Agency of Protected Areas Protected Areas and Regional Administrations", published in the Official Gazette no. 18, 2015, pp. 821-823 [1] was one of the first important steps on protected areas, but not all, that time, humanity and self protected areas and activities to activities that are, after deficiencies own decision, which we believe to be improved further steps in.

National Agency of Protected Areas, that is founded by the Council of Ministers, Decision No. 102, date 04.02.2015 [1], aimed management, protection, development, expansion and operation of the protected areas in our country, which today account for about 16% of the territory of Albania. NAPA manages the network of protected areas and other natural networks as Natura 2000, under management plans. NAPA monitors flora and fauna in these areas. National Agency of Protected Areas has a staff of 224 people, of which 20 in the central office and 204 in the Regional Administration of Protected Areas [2].

National Agency of Protected Areas:

- Manages the network of protected areas.
- Designs and implements the management plans for protected areas.
- Proposes changes and improvements to the legal framework for management of the PA [2].

Protected areas are important because:

- **provide drinking water** to one in three of the world's 100 largest cities;
- **store** the same amount of **carbon** as the tropical rainforests;
- keep us **healthy** by being the source of clean air and water, as well as new medicines;
- help **reduce the risks and consequences of extreme events**, such as floods, storm-surges, drought and sea-level rise;
- **enhance food security** by boosting fisheries and preserving wild relatives of crops; d
- **Provide homes, jobs and livelihoods** to millions of people around the world.

- **Create** the conditions for carry our lot of activities, etc. [2].

At the start of the 20th century, there were only a handful of protected areas in the world, although many have existed for generations. Over time they have been recognized as a mainstay of biodiversity conservation as well as contributing to people’s livelihoods. Today, there are approximately 200,000 protected areas in the world, which cover around 14.6% of the world’s land and around 2.8% of the oceans [2].

At the time of the World Parks Congress in Sydney, the latest update on protected area coverage will be made public.

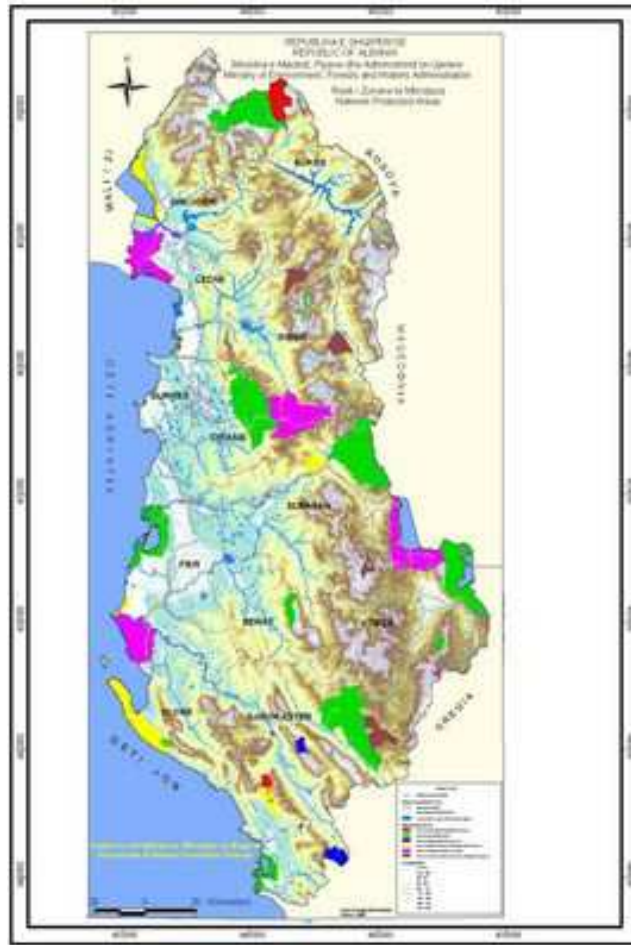
The Government of Albania has established a representative system of Protected Areas (PAs), which covers almost 16% of the Albanian territory. The system of protected areas consists primarily in 15 national parks; several managed natural reserves and protected landscapes that shelter the greatest natural and biodiversity values of the country. This large network is recently being complemented with Regional Protected Areas, established and managed by local authorities [2].

A summary of protected areas system as by January, 2015 [2] is given in the table below:

Protected Areas Categories	Description of the category	Number	Area (ha)	%
Strict Nature Reserve/ Scientific Reserves (IUCN Cat. I)	- Territories bigger than 50 hectares, with special natural value, where no intervention is allowed	2	4,800.00	1.04
Nation Parks (IUCN Cat. II)	- Wide territories usually bigger than 1000 hectares, representing unique national and international values, where in some parts of it, tourism and recreation are allowed	15	210,501.40	45.76
Natural Monuments (IUCN Cat. III)	- Natural formation (including special wood), with an area up to 50 hectares, the formation of special geologic / geomorphologic, a habitat of a rare type and in threat of extinction or with an importance scientific value	750	3,470.00	0.75
Managed Nature Reserve/ Natural Park (IUCN Cat. IV)	- Territories that represent bio-centers and bio-corridors with regional and local importance or areas with plants, animals	22	127,180.10	27.64

	that are especially protected			
Protected Landscape (IUCN Cat. V)	- Large territories more than 1000 hectares with a well formed harmonic landscape, with a developed relief, with a variety of ecosystems, sea or land, etc.	5	95,864.40	20.84
Protected Area of Managed Natural Resources (IUCN Cat. VI)	- Areas that include large areas of territory and relatively isolated and uninhabited, where is difficult to go or regions that are sparsely populated	4	18,245.00	3.97
*Regional Nature Parks (IUCN Cat. IV of V)	- Territories/Areas with natural values and important to the local communities that are under the management of local government, such as forests, grasslands, reservoirs, wetlands, etc.	4	51,383	
Total		798	460,060.90	100%

*There area had been endorsed by the Region Council but still their plan had to be approved Ministry of Environment, so there are not still included in the PA system [2].



Map of Protected areas in Albania on January, 2015

Concerning the surface of protected areas the Ministry is working with the establishment of several other important areas and other regional parks. Therefore, by the end of 2016, the total area of PAs will be more than 18% of the territory. Prior to the establishment of the National Agency of Protected Areas (NAPA), protected areas were managed by the Ministry of Environment through forest service departments in each district. Management plans are developed for a number of these protected areas, but few of the activities planned in these plans are implemented. Most of the foreseen activities are not implemented for lack of financial means and limited number of staff. The overall number of people working in protected areas before the establishment of NAPA was about 150 employees all over the country. However, they were not been fully involved in this sector since priority was given to forestry related activities [2].

III. PROBLEMS

Despite the efforts and progress made so far, especially with increasing the surface of PA-s, a number of issues and problems are still to be addressed including:

- (i) Improper functioning of the administrations of protected areas, lack of the necessary personnel in the area and weak capacities;
- (ii) The quality and applicability of the management plans for PA-s;
- (iii) The lack of funds and financial resources to implement the activities;
- (iv) Implementation and promotion of local practices / traditional use of territorial planning, and the development of eco-friendly tourism with the environment;
- (v) Evaluation and preservation of endangered plants and animals inside and outside the protected areas system, which will be part of Natura 2000 network (as a requirement of membership in the EU) [2].

During the last 25 years, protected areas have not been integrated properly into national and local development policies in order to become part of the economic development of the regions and the country. Vulnerabilities, weaknesses, opportunities for reforms, problems and solutions have been long discussed with representatives of the Ministry of Environment, with national and international experts, mainly during 2014. All parties have agreed that the process of restructuring, upgrading, strengthening and implementation of an effective administration of the protected areas in Albania requires active involvement of numerous interested parties, administrations, institutions, NGO and the public. This will be the philosophy of our work in the future [2].

IV. VISION

Protected Areas in Albania are transformed in territories for the conservation and protection of nature and biodiversity, promoting a multitude of other values (tourism/recreational, cultural, gastronomic, aesthetic, health, spiritual, etc.), by supporting the sustainable development and positively affecting local communities [2].

V. MAIN GOAL

The main goal of NAPA is to improve the management of protected areas according to the requirements and international standards and the experience of European countries, providing for both nature conservation and sustainable use of natural resources [2].

VI. THE MAIN OBJECTIVES

The main objectives of the strategy are:

- Within two years, protected areas are effectively managed and administered by the staff of NAPA and the Regional Administration of PA-s (RAPA);
- A sound and sustainable financial management system is established and implemented in protected areas, including the approval of a special fund for PA-s collecting contributions from incomes generated from PA-s, donors and the State budget;
- Within four years protected areas and their values are well known and adequately promoted at local, national and international level;

- New elements related to communication, awareness and education will be introduced for changing the perception and role of this area in nature conservation and sustainable development [2].

The most important directions of the program

Following the main objectives, the activities of the strategic program for the coming 5 years will be based in three main pillars of the future work of NAPA [2].

VII. EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE OF PROTECTED AREAS

This is the most important thematic area NAPA and the main indicator of its success in achieving expected results. The first step in this direction is the consolidation of staff, at both central and regional level, and assuring their presence in the protected areas to which they are assigned to. Dedicated, motivated, well trained and adequately equipped PA personnel are key in providing an effective management and governance of protected areas. The drafting of the new law on protected areas and completion of the legal framework related to PA-s will support effective management and provide for better law enforcement and monitoring of activities from rangers. Furthermore, in the next two years, investments supplied by state budget and donor support will improve the infrastructure and equipment inventory providing better working conditions for the staff [2].

An overall assessment of the protected areas system, particularly related to the adequacy of IUCN categories assigned to PA-s and contribution and effectiveness of these areas to nature conservation efforts in the country, will contribute to a better distribution of both human and financial resources to important protected areas [2].

Capacity building and training at all levels of the PAs administration staff is a necessary requirement for the successful management of the PAs, either in order to manage the sites according to the international standards and expectations which are required of any PAs, or to be able to transmit the principles of conservation, protection and sustainability to the wider public. Capacity building and training plan will target each staff member of the PA administration in order that they will be able to undertake their tasks to the highest possible standard, using modern approaches in their individual areas of expertise [2].

VIII. SUSTAINABLE FINANCING FOR PROTECTED AREAS

In order to provide for an effective management of PAs, the NAPA and RAPAs staff must be supported with adequate financial resources that allows for the implementation of management activities and maintenance of equipment and infrastructure. The first step in this direction is the inventory of infrastructure assets (buildings, investments made, tools, equipment, etc.), and assessment of their effectiveness in supporting management. Exploration of income generation mechanisms and activities/ways to implement them into various protected areas will be continues priority. This process will be linked to the support of sustainable tourism development in the territories of PAs as required by the legislation and international standards. Another priority is ensuring better donor coordination and more effective project interventions and synergies. Continuous

communication and cooperation with donors will improve financial support for protected areas. The final goal is to establish a dedicated Fund for Protected Areas as a good opportunity to increase support for their effective management [2].

IX. COMMUNICATION AND AWARENESS RISING

It is of crucial importance to the goals of nature conservation that protected areas are well known and appreciated by general public and specific target groups. The activities under this thematic area will focus both on the visibility of the NAPA as an institution responsible for the management of PA-s, as well as the promotion and awareness rising on the Albanian Protected Areas System, making clear and visible the concept of the protected area and what they represent. A variety of media tools and channels will be used for the purpose. The process will be enriched with educational elements by increasing the educational function and impact of protected areas. NAPA will operate a new website with new elements and will have a continued presence in social networks. It will use the local festivals and celebrations to promote the values of the protected area and the participation of the public, particularly the collaboration with the schools [2].

X. DETAILED PLAN OF WORKS ON PROTECTED AREAS

No.	The description of measures that will be taken to achieve the target	Determination of indicators for the assessment and implementation of any measures	Institutions/ persons responsible	Deadline
<i>I. Management and well administration of PA-s</i>				
1	The completion and increasing the number of NAPA staff and determination coverage areas in each region of Albania.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Nomination of employees NAPA and the Administration in the Districts; - Approval of labor contracts; - Approval of territory coverage in the territory of District; - Completion of staff with new employees on the basis of increasing the area of PA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ministry of Environment; - General Director 	- Ongoing
2	Drafting legal acts and the revision of main law with other legal acts related to the functioning of	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drafting the new regulation; - Description of jobs positions in administration; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General Director; - Lawyer of NAPA, Ministry of Environment; - The Ministry of 	- April 2016

	the administration.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Drafting a new law for the PA-s and sending it for approval; - Prepare a package with all necessary government decisions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environment & External experts 	
3	The completion with necessities infrastructure and equipment for the administration of protected by the state budget and donors contributions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Equipping with cars and motorcycles for the staff in all districts; - Equipping with computers (with an average 3 per each district office) and other equipment for office.; Preparation of uniforms for all RAPA staff of each district 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ministry of Environment; - General Director of Administration; - Directors of Projects and donors 	- December 2016
4	Return in operation/function of buildings/offices in protected areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Functionality of all offices of all, and buildings that inherited from FSD; - Rehabilitation of existing information centers (NP Dajt, Velipoje, Valbona, etc.); - Establishing new information centers (Prespë, Theth, Divjakë, Librazhd, Llogora, etc.). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPA; & Directors of Administration 	- December 2016
5	Inventory and identification of legally and illegally activities in the territories of protected areas, major problems related to the good functioning of each area and its relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The final report for each protected area with required issues. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPA; & Directors of Administration 	- March 2016

	with other actors in the area (fishermen, restaurants, services, local authorities, etc.).			
6	Approval and review of management plans developed by analyzing problems that contain.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Approval of all drafted plans that are not made (MPA Karaburun- Sazan, NP Divjakë-Karavasta, etc.); - Completion and approval of plans that are in the process (NP Sheena- Jablanica, LP Bune - Velipojë); - Preparation and approval of new plans (NP of Alps, MNR Porto Palermo); - The review of plans that have expired (NP Dajt, PK Llogara, RNM Karaburun, LP Vjose - Narte); - Assessment of gaps on management plans drafted on last 4 years - Drafting the action plans for the next 3 years. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPA; & - Directors of Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - January 2017
7	Monitoring and control of surface of PA-s and identification of cases where the law does not apply.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Setting up the monitoring and patrolling system in important passage places; - Collection of information from other institutions and interest groups; - Develop monthly 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPA; & - Directors of Administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ongoing

		<p>reports with findings and possible recommendations;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Continuous monitoring of the work of RAPA in districts. 		
8	Supporting of the economic and traditional sustainable activities in PA area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coordination with projects which are implementing in the PA, mainly in tourism; - Support for tourism throughout the period of the year; - Development of an application for tourism in protected areas - Increasing the recreational sustainable activities and promoting new activities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPA; & - RAPA 	- Ongoing
9	Redesigning the management committees for each protected area aiming their empowerment and decentralization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Review all previous decisions of Management Committees for PA; - Implementation of regular meetings for these structures. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPA; & - Ministry of Environment 	- May 2016
10	Cooperation agreement with the state institutions that are part of the management areas (inspectors, general directories of natural resources management, national agencies, regional offices, etc.).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Identification of key stakeholders in protected areas that affects in the resources management; - Establishment of relations of cooperation on a sustainable basis. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPA; & - PA-s Administration 	- June 2016

II. Financial Management of Protected Areas

11	Inventory and audit of present values in PA-s and starting the functionality of buildings in the area.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Admission and completion of documentation for the buildings in PA-s; - Signing the electricity and water contracts for all buildings and registration in the real estate office; - Taking back all the abandoned buildings / constructions to turn them into functional centers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PA-s Administration; - NAPA; - Ministry of Environment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - December 2015
12	Changing the financial management of the Agency by changing the law.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Change of the law on management of revenues from the protected areas; - Approval of the law and its common guideline for use; - Implementation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPA; - Ministry of Environment; & - Ministry of Finance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - May 2016
13	Study and implementation of a new financial plan for the management of areas (NP Dajt, NP Divjakë-Karavasta, NP Llogora), depending on the start of the UNDP project.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Final report for the protected areas with the possible options for income generation; - Implementation of the financial mechanisms of income generation on three pilot protected areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPA; & - External experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - September 2017
14	Study and application of concepts for generating income and increasing the staff number in protected areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Final report for the protected areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPA; & - External experts 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - December 2017
15	Increasing the Agency's budget for operational costs for	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Calculation of the minimum costs for the control of 	General director National and International experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - January 2015

	functioning of the administrate of protected areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - protected areas; - The study of infrastructure needs for good functionality of the agency. 		
16	Materialization of the possibility to create a special fund for protected areas, with the contribution of income from activities in protected areas but also from donors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Setting up a workshop with donors to regulate and increase the efficiency of external financing of Pas; - Workshop in November 2015 for the coordination of projects and increases the efficiency; - Meetings with representatives of the Ministry of Finance to establish a fund within the budget structure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General Director; - External experts; & - Donors (UNDP, WB, SIDA, GIZ, KfW, DGCS, IUCN, WWF) 	- March 2017
III. Evaluation of Protected Areas in the Country				
17	Assessing the surfaces of protected areas and zoning.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Creation of a working group with representatives from all institutions; - Identifying the problems and presentation of the solutions; - Preparation of legal acts for their approval. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General Director; - Ministry of Environment; & - Org. Civil Society 	- January 2016
18	Proposal for the establishment of marine protected area (Porto Palermos, Alpine Park, etc.) and removal of those unnecessary or	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Presenting the proposal on Council of Ministers with all documents completed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General director NAPA; & - Org. Civil Society 	- May 2016

	under development pressure.			
19	The proclamation of the Regional Natural Park (RNP) as a positive innovation in protected areas with the involvement of local authorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Study and preparation of a guide/ manual for the procedures of promulgation of a new PNR; - Organizing of a conference / workshop with representatives from districts for drafting the procedures of these areas; - Preparation of documentation for the announcement of four new areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General Director NAPA; - Org. Civil Society; & - Local authorities 	- Ongoing
20	Study of requirements/current legal standards and the surface of protected areas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The final report for the territory of protected areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPA; & - External and internal experts 	- June 2016
21	The study of the implementation of principles and requirements for the categories and governance of PA-s.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The final report for the territory of protected areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPA; & - External and internal experts 	- December 2016
IV. Building the staff Capacity and Communication				
22	Planning the staff training in groups, with the principles of functionality of Protected Areas and the duties of staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of a training manual and / or a school for the staff of protected areas; - Organization of regular training; - Testing of trained employees. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Director and Administration OSHC 	- Yearly
23	Regular exchange of experiences and information between staff.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organization of meetings every 3 months with all directors of RAPA; - Organization of 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General Director NAPA; and - Administration 	- Yearly

		<p>meetings every 6 months with the staff of RAPA;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Organization of visits to exchange positive experiences at work. 		
24	<p>Preparation and distribution of models for data collecting on the area Pas and completion with these the database systems.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of files for individual data receipt; - Organization of training in the field for collecting information; - Creating the regional database and central database. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPA; and - RAPA OSHC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - December 2015
25	<p>Involving the education for nature in the process of teaching and learning.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Preparation of educational packages for schoolchildren (9 year school); - Organization of open hours and regular visits to the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - NAPA; and - Administration OSHC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - February 2016
26	<p>Increasing the public communication and with media</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Opening a new page for NAPA and the presence of any RAPA on social networks with active elements for protected areas; - Putting the logos identifying for each protected areas; - Organization of visits with journalists in unknown protected areas; - Organization of local celebrations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - General Director NAPA and Administration; - Ministry of Environment; & - OSHC 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Yearly

		and special environmental day to promote protected areas.		

XI. ECOTOURISM - A NEW ALTERNATIVE FOR PROTECTED AREAS

Ecotourism, also known as jungle tourism, nature tourism, low impact tourism, green tourism, bio-tourism, ecologically responsible tourism, is a fairly young concept that has been introduced in mid-1980s and has been rapidly grown ever since. According to [8], it is growing annually by 10–15% worldwide. In 1990, The International Ecotourism Society (TIES) provided the definition and principles of ecotourism as: "Responsible travel to natural areas that conserves the environment and improves the well-being of local people" [9]. Honey [10] describes additional characteristic of ecotourism that includes "the practice of low-impact, educational, ecologically and culturally sensitive travel that benefits local communities and host countries".

The purpose of ecotourism is to engage tourists in the ecosystems under low impact, non-consumptive and locally oriented environments in order to maintain species and habitats especially in underdeveloped regions. Further, tourism in protected areas is originated from three main components:

- protected area;
- tourists and tourism organizations; and
- Local communities (key stakeholders) [11].

However, based on the educational background of each sector, such as environmentalists and governments, they define ecotourism differently. Environmental organizations have generally insisted that ecotourism is nature-based, sustainably managed, conservation supporting and environmentally educated practice [12], [13]. The tourist industry and governments, however, focus more on the product aspect, treating ecotourism as equivalent to any sort of tourism based in nature.

When practicing properly ecotourism, many benefits could be achieved such as traveling to natural destinations, enhance environmental awareness and respect of the local culture, as well as providing direct financial benefits to the local people and conservation purposes. In many countries ecotourism is not only aiming in the protection of biodiversity in the immediate environments, but it is also considered as a source for the national economy. National parks can be unique attraction places for touristic use [14], [15]. A characteristic example is Costa Rica that has the largest percent of protected area in the world, where 25% of the country has been characterized as a protected national park, [16], while worldwide it retains 5% of the world's biodiversity. A study that was

conducted for six national parks of Germany has indicated positive impacts of ecotourism at the region [17]. At this research, it has been shown that the local populations had greater income benefits for all six national parks.

While it can contribute in a positive manner to socioeconomic development and environmental protection, uncontrolled tourism growth can also cause environmental degradation, destruction of fragile ecosystems, and social and cultural conflict, undermining the basis of tourism. So it is very important to understand the benefits but also negative impacts of ecotourism.

XII. ECOTOURISM - BENEFITS

There are a number of benefits for further implementing ecotourism. Following the most important are outlined:

The recognition, safeguarding and maintenance of the cultural heritage:

Get acquainted with cultural heritage: Ecotourism usually involves the visitation of humans to areas where the primary attractions are the existing flora, fauna along with the local cultural heritage. It is aiming to help understand the richness of ecosystems and goods that have been graciously offered to humans. Those goods, in addition to the beauty and the relaxation that they offer to humans, also help understand how interdependent the welfare of humans is in relation to the healthy function of those ecosystems. Any human intervention negative or positive will have a direct or indirect effect on the ecosystems and the quality of human life. Being educated when visiting those areas should be the primary benefit that “ecotourism” has to offer. Thanks to ecotourism, sustainable management of natural resources, ecological processes, biodiversity and cultural integrity can be secured [3].

Economic benefits: Ecotourism can be seen as economic profit with the main goal to achieve greater income. Some people use labels such as “green” or “eco-friendly” to attract tourists. Unfortunately, the desire for more money is a powerful motive that is hard to limit, especial when it deals with low income of the native population and the unpleasant thirsty careless and greedy nature of humans for more money. In order to get more money, rules for sustainable management are step aside [3].

Being environmentally educated: Being environmentally conscious should not only include the ecological functions but also includes how human can interfere to help protect and benefit those ecosystems through proper human behavior when it presents at those areas. That will help understand the need of sustainable management and proper maintenance of the environmental services in order to preserve the diversity of the species in association with the cultural and traditional attributes of those areas. These should help achieve a more efficient and sustainable recreational and educational tourism that should only have positive benefits as outcome through the careful interaction between humans and nature [3].

Enhancement of protected areas: The fact that specific ecosystems that face the threat of extinction have been under protection and preservation of further decline, ensures their welfare on a temporal and special scale. So plant and animal species are further helped to

continue even after events of disturbances (ex. fires, floods). This further ensures the conservation of biodiversity as an additional result of the practice of ecotourism through the additional financial and human resources. Furthermore, in many cases, the additional actions in order to ensure a “safe” practice of ecotourism (ex. reforestation, river bank stabilization) enhance the protection of ecological processes (ex. Reduction of erosion) [3].

XIII. PROTECTED AREAS AND ECOTOURISM - NEGATIVE IMPACTS

Mismanagement: Governments often lack the commitment or capability to manage ecotourism sites effectively. The regulations for environmental protection may be vaguely defined, costly to implement, hard to enforce and uncertain in effectiveness. Mismanagement in relation to lack of regulations and laws is the main factor that initiates all other problems and results to unsustainable and failed projects for protected areas. Further, ecotourism often causes conflict and changes in land-use rights, fails to deliver promises of community-level benefits, damages environments, and has plenty of other social impacts [18]. Lack of laws enabled a few people to benefit while forcing the local population to leave their homes and lands [8].

Direct environmental impacts: Despite the fact that ecotourism is aimed to be practiced in small groups, in order to minimize the negative anthropogenic impact of increased visitation number, this is hard to avoid especially at high touristic season. This mainly results to increased necessity to greater infrastructure and amenities (landscape pollution), as well as the local people especially when the community is not able to respond to the infrastructure demand that are associated with increased ecotourism. That results to inadequate amenities, such as sanitation facilities that usually have an immediate effect on the environment. The disposal of garbage on campsite and nearby rivers becomes common phenomena that also pollute the ground and drinking water. In addition, tourists that interact with environment inevitably disturb the flora and fauna of the area. Even low key activities such as hiking may be considered harmful to ecological activities such as bird nesting, plant and soil damage [3].

Environmental hazards: Ecotourism could have detrimental impact on the species diversity [16]. People that visit the sites might interfere with the species either by their eating habits (ex. leave behind seeds) or by disturbing the site. By disturbing the site the protected plant species might not be able to regenerate and dominate the site and eventually the species might get extinct from the area [3].

The primary factor that affects that is the extent of disturbance. Factors such as abrupt climatic alterations might also result to inability of the specific species to maintain healthy population levels. That is very evident in Mediterranean ecosystems where the water availability, especially during the summer months is very scarce. That, in conjunction with the increased levels of tourism intensifies the problem of water availability for both the flora and fauna of the protected ecosystem [3].

Displacement of people: One of the most powerful examples of communities being moved in order to create a park is the story of the Maasai. About 70% of national parks and game reserves in East Africa are on Maasai land [19]. The most direct negative

impact was for the people of Maasai (Kenya, east Africa), where particularly local authorities utilized the ignorance of the people and they altered most of the areas to national parks and game reserves (approximately 70% of the area). This is one of the examples where “protected areas” limited the activities of grazing and hunting of the local people that was negatively affected the livelihood of the local populations with no economic benefit [19].

XIV. PROTECTED AREAS AND ECOTOURISM – SUSTAINABILITY

As seen previously while there are benefits from ecotourism there are also many reasons for concern with the potential negative impacts. In order to avoid the negative things the following criteria need to keep in mind that should be used in sustainable ecotourism plans:

- Providing sustainable area management
- Maximizing social and economic benefits for local community, minimizing negative effects;
- Maximizing benefits for society, visitors and cultural heritage, minimizing negative effects; and
- Maximizing environmental benefits, minimizing negative effects [3].

Sustainable activities of tourists may include camping, canoeing, hiking, wildlife observation, and photography. Based on sustainable management, the following steps need to be considered based on the spatial and temporal scale depending on the type of protected area that is managed.

Preventing: This is the initial strategy that we should have in mind when managing those areas, because when we reach the final step that is “restoring” sometimes it might be too late.

Planning: This should help us wisely prepare for the unexpected and manage time in a profitable way, both for the tourists, the natives and the surrounding ecosystem.

Monitoring: Be the observer and the scientist in order to prevent any downfalls and achieve the best outcome.

Evaluating/Assessing: These are necessary steps where criteria and indicators are developed. This is a not easy step to be accomplished.

Restoring: The last step, if needed, in order to try to correct anything that might have gone wrong. In this case, any type of restoration should be done carefully in order to benefit the protected areas.

Educating: Inform tourists properly regarding the management strategic and the possible negative or positive impact that human actions might have at the protected areas. Further, it encompasses the way people have learned to look at their environment and themselves, indicating a linkage between humans and their landscape [3].

XV. NECESSITY OF DEVELOPING THE EDUCATION TRAINING

There is strong evidence that Protected Areas and Ecotourism is becoming a major issue worldwide, but especially in Europe and in Albania too. Despite the many benefits from ecotourism there are also many negative impacts that might threaten these protected areas. In the 2012 United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, the importance of sustainable tourism was highlighted. But the key for sustainable tourism to be effective and maintained is by enhancing awareness and by improving the knowledge among already or newly trained people that are involved in the protected areas. At the same time in most European countries there is a serious shortage of staff specialized in the ecological and sustainable tourism management, while there a few (if any) specialized the training education programs in Protected areas and Ecotourism. This clearly indicates the need for such a Training education program [3].

In order to develop an MSc program that offers graduates, the best available tools to get employed after their graduation, the partnership of the project is much diversified. The partnership comprises of six higher education institutions and seven SMEs, from six EU member states (Spain, UK, Estonia, Romania, Germany, Greece), and one candidate member states (Bosnia and Herzegovina), covering a broad range of fields which ensures the interdisciplinary of the project. The Universities are: i) Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, SPAIN - the lead partner, ii) Eastern Macedonia and Thrace Institute of Technology, Greece, iii) Buckinghamshire New University, United Kingdom, iv) Transilvania University, Romania, v) The University of Rostock, Germany and vi) The University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina. The SMEs involved are: i) Mirador de Babia (ecotourism company), ii) Renatur (expertise in wildlife management), iii) Ciudad Sostenible (magazine) iv) Complusoft (consulting and global services company for ITC), v) Project Abroad Ltd (company with environmental and conservation projects), vi) Greenlife Ltd (specialized in water management) vii) SC HCR SRL (stakeholder involvement). Finally, Una was also involved that is a National Park in Bosnia and Herzegovina [3].

The Technical University of Madrid (UPM), that is the project leader, has developed five Erasmus actions in the last years (including this) to address the new challenges appearing in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) through the internationalization processes in higher education, society and economy. The common aim of these projects was to develop and implement study programs in order to assure strategies to modernize specific aspects of higher education in the European area. These actions should improve and protect the environmental quality of life in a sustainable and equitable manner, while adapting to changing climate in the short term and contributing to the mitigation of climate change in the future [3].

The goals of this MSc program

The goals of this MSc program are:

- i) To offer a quality education assembling as professorship the best experts and professionals of each one of the disciplines,

ii) To obtain a multidisciplinary cloister that allows the students to obtain the maximum knowledge and practices to be able to join the labor world with the best guaranty of success and

iii) To develop the capacities of the students and of those professionals and businessmen who already are owners of a tourist company, orientating and specializing his/her business towards a cultural, environmental and social identity that allows commercializing of a tourist product of competitive quality with a guarantee of sustainability that assures his/her future. Finally, another innovation of the MSc program is that it will be through distance learning. This will all be on a Virtual Learning (VLE) platform to satisfy needs of EU students that are doing voluntary work or they decided to take a gap year and they experience reduced internet connectivity [3].

XVI. PROTECTED AREAS AND ECOTOURISM - MSC EDUCATIONAL MODULES

In order to provide the students the necessary tools required being attractive in the job market of protected areas and ecotourism ten educational web-modules were developed. The modules learning outcomes are to achieve competences and qualifications to play a leading role in the management of ecological and sustainable tourism. Its academic portfolio will be focused to promote human understanding and creativity. The modules are separated in those that will provide profound competences – knowledge related to the most important fields of protected areas and ecotourism (Modules I - VI) and those that lead to acquire competences to achieve a position of expert or manager in ecotourism organizations and assessment projects (Modules VII - X). Following are brief description of each module.

i. Concept and Importance of Protected Areas, Ecotourism and Sustainable Tourism: It will provide a comprehensive understanding of the key terminology, principles, concepts and theory underpinning protected areas and ecotourism and be able to identify the experiential, environmental, socio-cultural and economic impacts of ecotourism and critically discuss their management, understand the fundamental concepts and principles associated with ecotourism planning;

ii. Natural Heritage and Biodiversity: It will provide general information on biomass to help understand the significance of biodiversity levels with particular emphasis on flora species and get acquainted with the types and the features of the protected areas;

iii. Cultural Heritage: It will provide the ability to identify heritage destinations in your own country and understand the professional and ethical responsibility in terms of cultural heritage.

iv. Environmental Management and Quality. Certifications. Understand the principles of Environmental Management and its involvement in sustainable and ecological Tourism

v. In addition gain basic understanding for single water technology layouts and solid waste management.

Vi. Ecotourism Products: Through this module students will be able to recognize different species in situ. In addition to identify, formulate and solve problems related to species conservation and recognize a product of nature as an ecotourism product.

Vii. Green Building: Sustainable architecture. Models of energy and energy efficiency applied to tourism projects. This module outlines the principles of ecological design, identifies the key issues to be addressed when developing an ecological design and evaluates the ecological design solutions.

viii. Geographic Information Systems (GIS): Practical applications in protected areas and tourism projects. Route design and cartographic production students will learn how to apply basic principles of Geographic Information Systems to understand basic principles of cartography, to be able to combine science, aesthetics, and GIS technique to build maps for the effective management of sustainable and ecological tourism in protected areas.

ix. Marketing of Ecological and Sustainable Tourism Destinations in Protected areas: Students will be able to identify the major types of tourism marketing activities and practices of destination management and marketing organizations.

x. Economic Resources and Financial Management of Funds: This module will provide knowledge on how to identify, formulate and solve problems about economic resources and practical financial management of sustainable ecotourism in protected areas.

xi. Social Responsibility and Environmental Best Practices: Land Stewardship: Through this module students will learn fundamental EU environmental legislation and policy practices and provide advises towards their compliance and will be able to propose habitat restoration and environmental enhancement processes [3].

XVII. LET'S DISCUSS

Since the decision of the Council of Ministers until now, firstly, it is needed to know about the finalizing the description of measures that will be taken to achieve every target. In fact, our response is still not...

Secondly, we needed to know about the completed determination of Indicators for the assessment and Implementation of any measures? ... Our response is that staff is working...

Thirdly, we continue with our question: are clearly defined are institutions or persons responsible? Based in reality, our answer is that there are many shortcomings and much subjectivity...

Yes deadline, is it implemented? ... Our response is, let's hope

Based on our current status as protected areas and ecotourism as steps are such that it is necessary to have a special training program with relevant modules, such as carried out by our colleagues from experience. So, as acted and are operating our colleagues, we do

the same ... and ... I believe that not discuss longer, because there would be no value, on the contrary...

XVIII. CONCLUSION

Based on experiences of our colleagues, as V. Iakovoglou, GN Zaimas, MP Arraiza Bermúdez-Cañete, JL García, MC Giménez, C. Calderón, Guerrero, F. Ioras, I. Abrudan E W., given by means of the article: "Understanding and Enhancing Education through Ecotourism Opportunities", World Academy of Science, Engineering and Technology International Journal of Social, Behavioral, Educational, Economic, Business and Industrial Engineering Vol 9, No 8, 2015, pp. 2677-2681. International Science Index, Humanities and Social Sciences Vol 9, No: 8 2015 waset.org/Publication/10001964; result of advanced countries, the experience of fragile protected areas and ecotourism; Interagency cooperation with other objectivism, scientific and other research can be concluded that:

Protected areas currently cover about 16% of terrestrial territory [2]. As sensitive and often remote areas, not all of them are currently suitable for ecotourism development. Actually, even good examples of ecotourism are simply attempts to reach the theoretical ideal of ecotourism. Natural, cultural environment and local communities of protected areas are in a constantly changing balance, affected by internal and external forces.

This conceptual paper offers a better understanding to PA managers, local communities and other ecotourism stakeholders for the context of ecotourism and about managing this dynamically evolving process, which interacts and interrelates with the particular environmental, social, cultural, economic, political and technological features of each individual protected area. Finding the right balance is the key for ecotourism development of every PA.

Limited or no access to technology by local stakeholders is an unsolved issue, which limits the ICT adoption in PA areas and makes proper ecotourism development even more difficult to achieve. Introducing and/or enhancing technological involvement, especially in remote PAs and their communities, is a challenging but necessary task for the future; for ecotourism goals to be successful implemented; for PA being part to the global ecotourism market; for local people to be equal citizens of our globalised world.

Ecotourism is a new type of tourism that is gaining more and more acceptance. When properly implemented its main benefits can be twofold:

- i) Maintaining and enhancing the biodiversity of the protected areas while
- ii) Providing an additional income for the population of rural and undeveloped areas. At the same time ecotourism can present major risks when mismanaged that could cause major problems to these protected areas. With proper management and activities the benefits of ecotourism can be maximized in a sustainable way. One of the keys to sustainable ecotourism is education and awareness. With the lack of MSc programs in Europe focusing on ecotourism there is a major need for the development of such programs. This is the objective of a partnership that includes universities, SMEs and national parks that are developing an MSc program that is called "Management of

Sustainable and Ecological Tourism." The MSc will have 10 education modules that will be available online. Through these modules professionals will be trained on different aspects of ecotourism that will be able to implement sustainable ecotourism throughout Europe helping in maintaining and enhancing its protected areas.

Our conclusion is that the recognition, dedication and management of the protected areas, as and understanding and enhancing of the ecotourism are great opportunities given through education, a request of time in Albania.

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