

SOCIETY'S PERCEPTION ON THE ROLE OF PROTECTED AREAS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF SUSTAINABLE TOURISM - THE CASE OF ALBANIA

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Abstract

Albania has a natural and cultural potential that gives it opportunities for social and economic development. Sustainable tourism is a goal of the Albanian economy and the development of new tourist products. Protected Areas, due to the values they carry, create opportunities for the development of natural or cultural tourism. The focus of the paper is to identify citizens' perception of the role of protected areas in the development of sustainable tourism. What are the categories of protected areas in Albania? What is the relationship between Protected Areas and Tourism? How is society's perception of the role of protected areas in the development of sustainable tourism? These questions and others will be answered during the realization of the topic.

The methodology used in the paper will be in function of the topic as: research in libraries and online libraries, analysis, online questionnaire, comparative, statistical, graphic, etc.

At the end of the paper we will have findings like:

- *Categorization of Protected Areas in Albania according to IUCN*
- *The role of protected areas in the development of tourism*
- *The positive perception of society on the role of Protected Areas in the development of sustainable tourism in Albania*

The paper will close with the relevant conclusions and recommendations.

Key words: *Protected Areas, sustainable tourism, natural and cultural potential*

Introduction

Albania is a country rich in natural and cultural potential. Some of these potentials, due to their importance, enjoy the status of Protected Area. The classification of Protected Areas in Albania is based on the criteria of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) (LAW No. 81/2017 ON PROTECTED AREAS, article 5, point 2). Currently, Albania has 18% of the territory protected area (area 5,263km²) or 779 objects. The dominant part of the Protected Areas are classified in the category of Natural Monuments (747) and most have a small area (Ministry of Tourism and Environment, 2022)³

Protected areas represent not only environmental, but also economic and social values. They constitute an important potential in the development of sustainable tourism. The Covid-19 pandemic, climate change are some of the reasons why tourism should be oriented towards sustainability. Protected areas represent an opportunity to realize the concept of sustainability and tourism.

Tourism and protected areas are interrelated in their long-term development. If the protected areas have their own natural or cultural values, tourism optimizes them by using them to create income and improve the social life of the residents where these areas are part of, but on the other hand it contributes to the preservation of their natural values and cultural for a long time. However, the use of the natural or cultural potentials that the protected area offers must be careful, taking into consideration the limitations that the legislation creates for them. In this way, it will be achieved that the protected areas play an important role in the development of sustainable tourism.

Yes, in Albania, do protected areas influence/are they used in/for the development of sustainable tourism? Regardless of the importance given to the declaration of protected areas in Albania, the increase of its surface also within the framework of reaching the EU standard,

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3 Ministry of Tourism and Environment <https://turizmi.gov.al/zonat-e-mbrojtura/> seen on date 16.11.2022

that a country must have 20% protected area. Protected areas still do not manage to influence the development of tourism, despite all the potential they offer in encouraging the tourist movement based on nature and culture. The reasons for this are different.

Our paper on "Society's perception of the role of protected areas in the development of sustainable tourism - the case of Albania" aims to understand society's perception of the role of protected areas in tourism development.

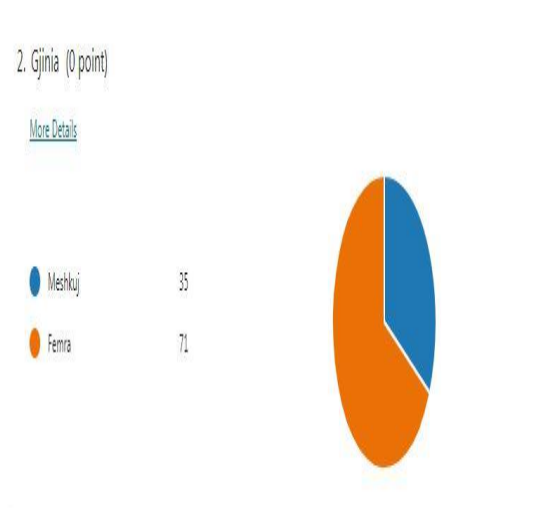
Whose answers will show how much society will contribute to the sustainability of protected areas and sustainable tourism development.

From the reviewed literature, it is identified that this work is the first to be carried out in Albania, so it takes on a special value.

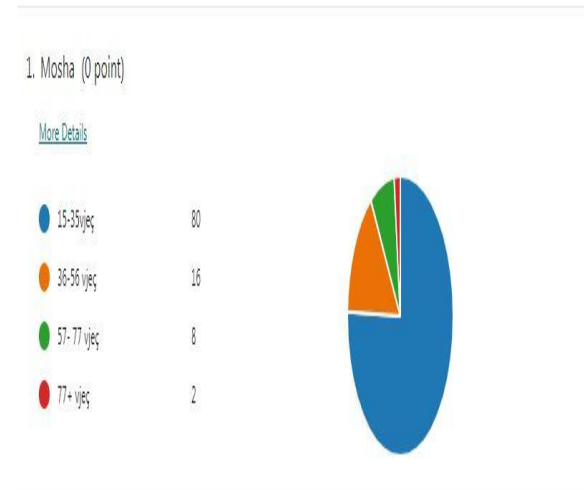
2. Methodology

The methodology of the work used will be in function of the purpose of the topic under study. For the realization of the paper, the library was searched for literature review, in order not to fall into repetition and to identify if this topic had been addressed before. Descriptive, where the relationship of protected areas in the development of tourism, natural and cultural factors affect the development of tourism will be addressed. Questionnaire was a method of data collection. Participation in completing the questionnaire was voluntary and was done online with a participation of n=107. The purpose of the questionnaire was to understand the perception of citizens on the role of protected areas in the development of sustainable tourism in Albania. Demographic data collected identified that 107 people took part in the study, 75% of the participants who completed the questionnaire belong to the age group of 15-35 years, 15% belong to the age group of 36-56 years, 8% belong to the age group of 57-77 years and 2% belong to 77+. These data show that the younger age groups are more familiar with technology, but on the other hand, they show interest in the topic. The participation of young people is an indicator of the knowledge they have about protected areas and their role in the development of tourism.

Picture no.1



Picture no.2



The highest participation in completing the questionnaires was of the gender "Female" with 67% of participants and "Male" with 33%.

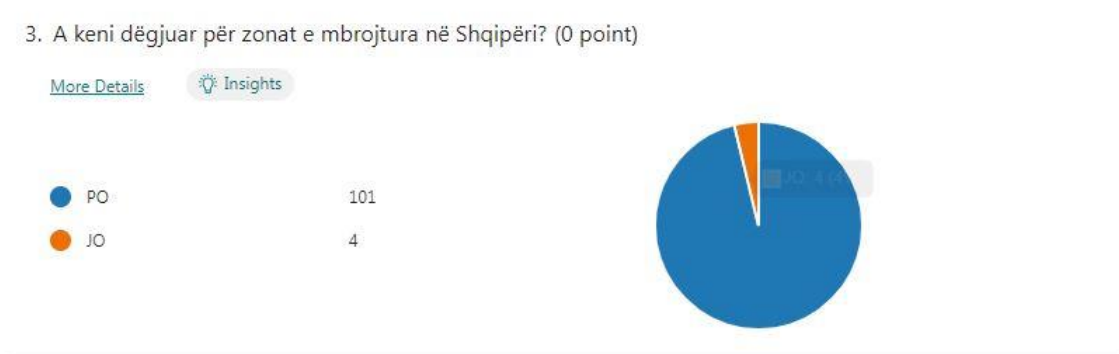
The questionnaire was completed in May-June. The questionnaire contains 28 questions, which were with alternatives and open. The questionnaire was created in google form format and was distributed through all communication methods: email, whatsapp, social networks (instagram, facebook). The data were analyzed quantitatively by calculating percentages. The statistical analysis accompanying the paper is in the graphics.

3. Results

Society's perception of the role of protected areas in the development of sustainable tourism - the case of Albania

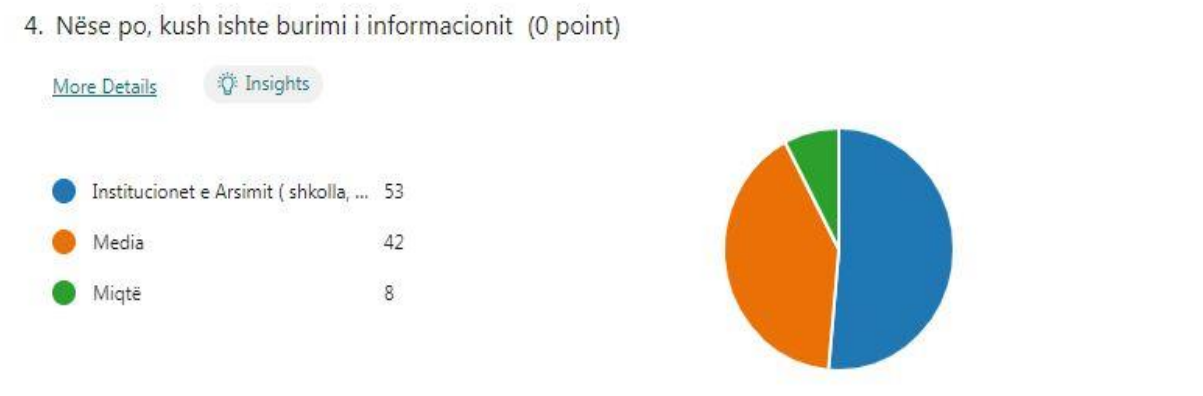
107 people of different age groups participated in the study and there was an inclusiveness.

Question 3. Have you heard about protected areas in Albania? 96% of the participants answered "YES" they have heard about the protected areas, while 4% of the participants did not know. This answer is a good indicator to understand society's perception of the role of protected areas in the development of sustainable tourism.



Picture no. 3

Question 4 If so, who was the source of the information? They answer them that 51% were informed in Educational Institutions, 41% from the media and 8% were informed from friends. This answer underlines that the main source of information is Educational Institutions that influence the transmission of accurate and complete scientific information.



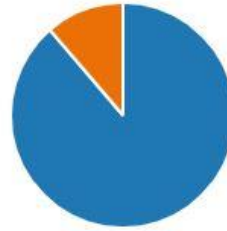
Picture no. 4

Question 5 Do you know any of the protected areas in Albania? From the results of the questionnaire, it is evident that 89% of the participants knew protected areas and only 11% of them did not know any protected areas.

5. A njihni ndonje prej zonave te mbrojtura në Shqipëri? (0 point)

[More Details](#)

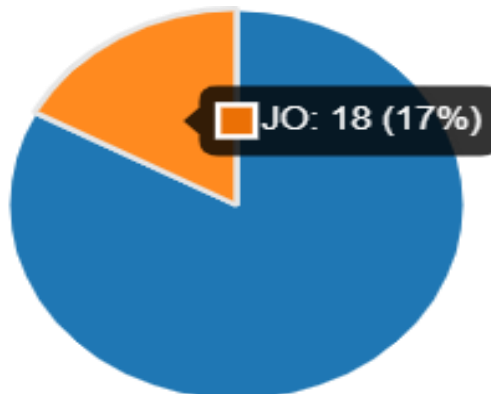
[Insights](#)



Picture no. 5

Question 6 If so, can you tell us which Protected Areas you know? From the answers we received from the questionnaire, it appears that the protected areas that the participants were most familiar with are: Butrinti, Apollonia, Valbona Valley, Syri i Kaltër. The recognition of these protected areas is related to their location in residential centre that have had a tradition of tourism and have been better marketed by the central, local government and other stakeholders.

Question 7 Have you visited any of the protected areas in Albania? 83% of the participants answered "YES" and only 17% of them said "NO" they had never visited the protected area. These indicators identify that the protected areas are not only known by citizens, but are also tourist destinations frequented by them.



Picture no. 6

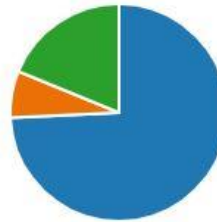
Question 8 If yes, please list some of them: They answer that the most visited places by the participants are: Thethi, Dajti Mountain, Butrinti, Valbona Valley, Syri i Kaltër.

Question 9 What is the reason for visiting Protected Areas? 74% of the participants were for tourism, 7% of them the reason was for a study visit and for 19% of the participants it was the connection with nature. This result shows the importance of Protected Areas for the development of tourist activity.

9. Cila është arsyeja e vizitës në Zonat e Mvbrojtura ? (0 point)

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● Turistike	75
● Studimore	7
● Lidhja me natyren	19



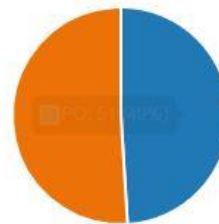
Picture no. 7

Question 10 Do you have a sheltered area in your village/town? They answer that 49% have a protected area in their town/village and 51% of participants do not. This answer shows that the respondents do not know all the protected areas in the country of origin, but the protected areas that have been marketed by the relevant actors.

10. A keni zonë të mbrojtur në fshatin/ qytetin tuaj? (0 point)

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● PO	51
● JO	53



Picture no. 8

Question 11 If yes, please indicate which Protected Area? Some of the respondents answered: Tomorri Mountain, Pogradec Lake, Dajti Mountain, Butrinti, Karavastas Valley, Vjosë-Nartë.

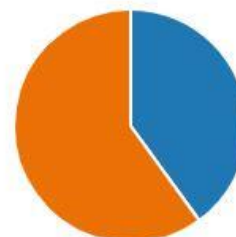
Question 12 In your opinion Does the Protected Area have the right level of protection?

According to the opinion of the participants in relation to the adequate level of protection of protected areas, 40% were of the opinion that they had an adequate level of protection and 60% thought the opposite. This indicator informs us that protected areas may or may not create conditions for the development of sustainable tourism in Albania.

12. Sipas mendimit tuaj Zona e Mbrojtur A ka nivelin e duhur të mbrojtjes ? (0 point)

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● PO	42
● JO	63



Picture no. 9

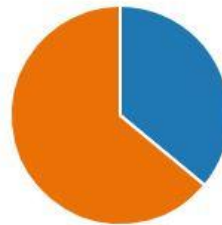
Question 13 If not, what problems are there in the conservation of Protected Areas?
 Some of the respondents' answers on the problems in protected areas are: bad management, lack of funds, investment in infrastructure, road infrastructure, lack of tourist guides for information, their maintenance, etc.

Question 14 If so, do you think the regulation applies to areas protected by citizens and responsible institutions? 36% of the participants think that the regulation for protected areas is applied, while 64% of the participants are of the opinion that it is not applied. This answer is not a good indicator for the future of the protected area, but also the development of sustainable tourism on the other hand.

14. Nëse po , A mendoni se zbatohet rregullorja nga ne për zonat e mbrojtura? (0 point)

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● PO	36
● JO	64



Picture no. 10

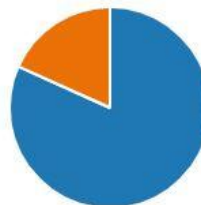
Question 15 Do you think that the Protected Areas in Albania are badly managed?

From the results, 82% of the participants think that the protected areas in Albania are poorly managed, while 18% of the participants think that the protected areas are well managed. This answer shows that the perception of citizens on the management of protected areas is not good, an answer which is in harmony with the answers given in question 12, 14.

15. A mendoni se Zonat e Mbrojtura në Shqipëri janë të keq menaxhuar? (0 point)

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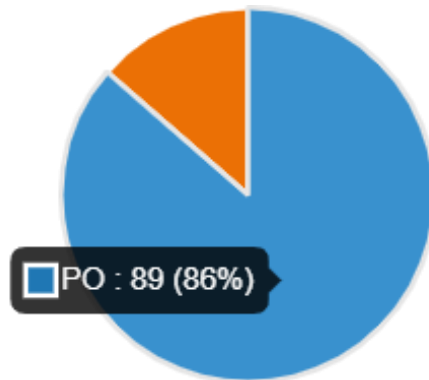
● PO	85
● JO	19



Picture no. 11

Question 16 If so, do you think they need a good management plan? According to 86% of the participants say that a management plan is necessary and 14% of them that such a plan is not necessary. This positive response to the need for a management plan is a good indicator

of the support that society gives for the preservation of protected areas. A management plan would help preserve the values of the protected area and provide a quality tourist offer.



Picture no. 12

Question 17 Do you think that Protected Areas should be under continuous monitoring at all times? According to the data collected from the questionnaire, 91% of the participants were of the opinion that the protected areas should be under constant monitoring at all times, while 9% of the participants thought the opposite. This answer shows the support that the society gives for maintaining the stability of the protected area and sustainable tourist development.



Picture no. 13

Question 18 Have you seen or heard of illegal activities taking place in protected areas? 63% of participants indicate that they have seen or heard of illegal activities taking place in the area of protected areas, while 37% of them state that they have not heard. The high percentage of seeing or hearing illegal activities in protected areas is an indicator that does not favour the role of protected areas in the development of tourism. In this way, the perception of citizens on the role of protected areas in the development of tourism can be shaky..

18. A keni parë apo dëgjuar të zhvillohen aktivitete të paligjshme në hapsirën e zonave të mbrojtura? (0 point)

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Picture no. 14

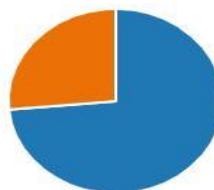
Question 19 Are there penalties for pests that destroy protected areas?

From the answers to the questionnaire, 74% of the participants are aware that there are penalties for damage and 26% of the participants are not aware that there are penalties. This answer shows that the citizens are informed about the punitive measures they take if they damage the protected areas and shows a tool for preserving the protected areas for the values they have and therefore their touristic offer.

19. A ka penalitete për dëmtuesit që shkatërrojnë zonat e mbrojtura? (0 point)

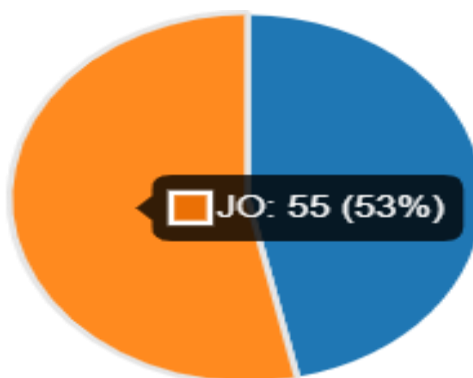
[More Details](#)

[Insights](#)



Picture no. 15

Question 20 Do you know of any protected areas where unauthorized construction is allowed? Out of 103 answers given, 53% of them state that they do not know any protected areas where constructions are allowed without permission, 47% of them are aware of protected areas where these constructions are allowed. Answer, which shows a bad situation in preserving the environmental, biodiversity or cultural values of the protected areas and not favorable for the sustainable development of tourism in Albania.



Picture no. 16

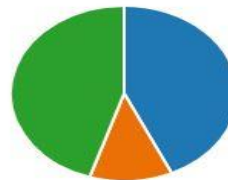
Question 21 The increase in the number of constructions in Protected Areas, Do they help in: the increase of tourist developments, the space of protected areas, socio-economic developments:

In response to the question, 43% were of the opinion that they help to increase tourist development, 12% think that it helps to increase the area of protected areas; 45% of the participants think that it helps to increase the socio-economic development of the residential Center where the protected areas are located. This answer shows that the high number of constructions in the protected area are facilities for the development of tourism.

21. Rritja e numrit të ndertimeve në Zonat e Mbrojtura A ndihmojnë në rritjen e : (0 point)

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● Zhvillimit turistike	44
● Hapesiren e Zonave të Mbrojtura	12
● Zhvillimin socio-ekonomik të zo...	46



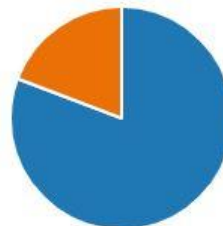
Picture no. 17

Question 22 Do you think that protected areas are a potential for the development of the Albanian tourism economy? 81% of the participants think that protected areas are a potential for the development of the Albanian tourism economy, while 19% of them think the opposite. This answer is a positive indicator that citizens have about the role that protected areas have in the development of tourism.

22. A mendoni se zonat e mbrojtura janë një potencial për zhvillimin e ekonomisë turistike Shqipëtare? (0 point)

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● PO	84
● JO	20



Picture no. 18

Question 23 If yes, please indicate such a case:

Some of the answers given by the participants are "*Tepelena and the reconstruction of the city's Castle and Byron Square; tourists visit many protected areas to see the country's tradition and history, and the more protected areas, the more tourists; The case of Llogara Park, which in addition to nature offers recreational facilities such as restaurants with traditional dishes of the area; Butrint; People who are now informed and motivated by the*

Internet are more inclined to travel to protected areas; Divjak-Karavasta Park, The city of Gjirokastra is visited all the time by tourists who stay there, generating important income for the economy"

These responses from citizens show how the presence of a protected area in a residential centre will affect the development of the tourist destination, construction to complement the tourist infrastructure (hosting, entertainment, services) and educating residents about the tourist importance of the areas protected.

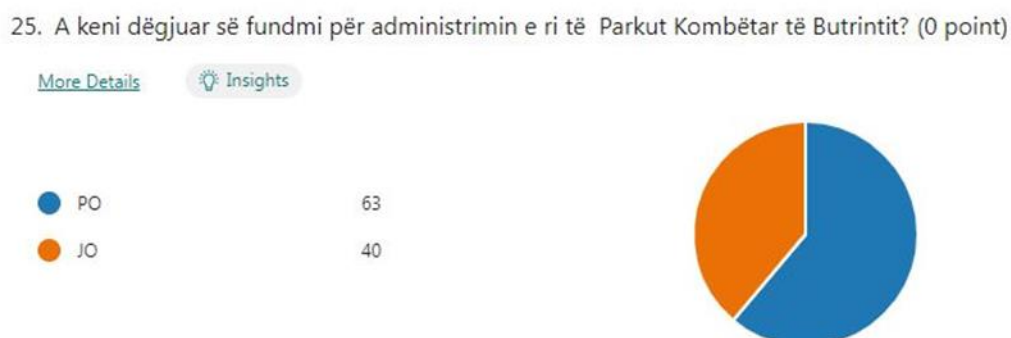
Question 24 Do you think that infrastructural investment and the identification of natural and cultural potentials in protected areas affect the growth of tourism?

From the results obtained from the questionnaire, it was evident that 92% of the participants thought that infrastructural investment and the identification of natural and cultural potentials in protected areas affects the growth of tourism, while only 8% of the participants think that it does not.



Picture no. 19

Question 25 Have you recently heard about the new administration of Butrint National Park? 61% of participants answered that they had heard about the new administration of Butrint and 39% of participants answered that they had not heard. Their answers show an increased interest of citizens for the national heritage.



Picture no. 20

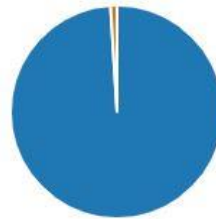
Question 26 If yes, what regrets do you have? The answers given by the citizens are different, showing the confusion they have on this issue. Some of the answers are: "helps in the arrival of tourists from all over the world; every Albanian beauty is being given to foreign investors' other's stated that they "did not agree at all", a minority of them stated that they "agreed with the decision taken by the Albanian government" and a small number of participants "had no information on this decision".

Question 27 Do you think that each of us has a duty to protect these areas?

Out of 103 answers received, 99% of them say that "YES" they have a duty to protect these areas and only 1% of them answered "NO". This shows that the population is aware of the economic, social and environmental importance of protected areas.

27. A mendoni se secili prej nesh, ka detyrë ti mbrojmë këto zona? (0 point)

[More Details](#)



Picture no. 21

Question 28 Do you think that during your vacation this summer you should visit at least one of the Protected Areas?

The answers show that 94% of the participants answered with "YES" that they will visit at least one protected area during the summer holidays, and only 6% of them answered with "NO". The result shows that protected areas are tourist destinations for citizens.

28. A mendoni që gjatë pushimeve tuaj këtë verë te vizitoni të paktë një nga Zonat e Mbrojtura? (0 point)

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Picture no. 22

4. Discussion and Conclusion

Albania has an area of 18 protected area territory, classified according to IUCN criteria. There are 6 categories of protected areas in Albania. (LAW No. 81/2017 ON PROTECTED AREAS, Article 14). Protected areas due to natural and cultural values influence the development of tourism in Albania.

Albanian society recognizes the concept of Protected Areas and sees them as a potential for tourism development (referred to question 3, 22, 23, 24). The data show that the citizens' perception of the protected areas is that they have problems with their management and are

damaged. Legislation for the protection of Protected Areas is not implemented and in some of them the management plan is missing (referred to question 17).

However, citizens believe that Protected Areas will influence the development of sustainable tourism. They provide a wide range of social, environmental and economic benefits to people (refer to answers to question 23).

Citizens are aware that each of us must protect and visit protected areas. They have planned to visit a tourist destination that has a protected area in the next vacation. (Referring to the answers to questions 27, 24)

Protected areas will help in the development of sustainable tourism in Albania if the relevant legislation is implemented there, the prohibition of constructions without permission and the exercise of illegal activities, their continuous monitoring. Special importance will be given to investments in tourist infrastructure, identification of natural and cultural potentials in protected areas that influence the growth of tourism.

Protected areas represent natural and cultural spaces and potentials in which different types of tourism can be developed, such as:

- Mountain tourism - Mount Korabi-Gjallica and Koretnik, the Albanian Alps, etc.
- Rural tourism - in all the villages where the Protected Areas, etc. lie.
- Sloë Tourism - in combat parks and natural parks
- Cultural tourism - the rich life of residents living in protected areas such as the ethnogeographic area of Luma, Gora, etc.
- Archaeological tourism - Butrint National Park, etc.
- Architectural Tourism - Towers, etc.
- Dark tourism - clones, pyramids, barbed wire, bunkers, etc.
- Gastronomic tourism - cuisine such as fli, çorba, fried pancakes, glikot, etc.
- Ethnographic tourism - the color of traditional Albanian clothing such as Xjubleta, Veshja e Quqe e Gora, etc.
- Historical tourism - important events such as the "Battle of the River", the figure of Ali Pasha Tepelena, etc.

Some of the tourist activities that can be developed are: sports in the framework of adventure tourism such as mountaineering, parachuting, rafting (in Jezerce, Korab, Tomor, Llogara, Osum canyons; hiking in a park (Korab-Koretnik) and cycling (on the paths created in natural parks), fishing (Lake Ohrid, Shkodra) cultural activities such as local holidays, pagan holidays (Dita e Gjallica, Dita e Verës), religious holidays (Sultan Nevruzi); sometimes opportunities are created near protected areas and for the development of local businesses in the form of agritourism or handicrafts.

Activities which affect not only the development of tourism, but also preserve the principles of the development of protected areas. This mutual connection affects the strengthening of cooperation relations between the institutions responsible for tourism, the environment, protected areas and local actors in the function of long-term tourism and tourism development.

Recommendation

Although the citizens' perception of the role of protected areas in sustainable tourism development in Albania is positive. There is still work to be done to fully understand the role of protected areas in tourism development. In this framework, at the end of the paper, we recommend:

- 1- To promote the possibility of developing sustainable tourism in the protected areas, in accordance with the relevant legislation.
- 2- To create new tourist products with a focus on the promotion of protected areas
- 3- Specialize people who will work as guides and publish special catalogs for the protected areas in order to promote them also in the function of tourism development.

4- The law of protected areas should be applied and penalties should be given to people who violate this law.

5- Greater importance is given to investments in protected areas in harmony with the environment and to be monitored at all times.

6- To be added to the orientation boards that encourage tourist movement to protected areas.

7- To implement the management plans of the protected areas by orienting them and in function of the touristic development

8- To invest in infrastructure to increase the accessibility for tourism purposes of every protected area.

9- The Regional Administration of Protected Areas should add tourism experts to their structures.

10- Organize marketing campaigns to make protected areas more popular with people.

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