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Capacity Development for Protected Area Management in Serbia – Needs and Opportunities

Abstract: In the times of global environmental, social and economic challenges affecting all the sectors of human activities, protected areas are perceived as potential models of sustainability. At the same time, however, there is still growing pressure on natural resources, as well as the complexity of its management. In Serbia there is a lack of research in this field, as well as of education initiatives to systematically develop protected area management capacities. Protected area staff profesionalization and stakeholders' empowerment did not find its adequate place neither in national policy nor in practice. In this paper we discuss needs and opportunities for analyzing these capacities, in order to find the best way to improve effectiveness of protected area management in Serbia. Specific national situation in the field is described in the context of international trends and developments. Based on that, some potential steps are recommended, and necessity to develop strategic approach to education in the field especially emphasized.

Key words: protected area management effectiveness, capacity development, education, sustainability.

Overview

During the second half of XX century, number of protected areas (PA) in the World has increased significantly. In first decade of XXI century, there is large network of more than 120 000 nationally designated nature PA worldwide, covering around 11% of the Earth territory. (UNEP-WCMC, 2008)

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Despite the highly recognized importance of PA in terms of its' ecological, economic and social value, they are constantly under the local/national and global threats – from pollution, infrastructure development, overexploiting – to biodiversity loss, climate change and poverty.

Challenging the Planet's ability to sustain, global changes affect different regions and countries respond in accordance with their capacities and circumstances. Especially in years of global economic crisis, in countries with less developed economies there is generally lower capacity to respond to the challenges, including the requirement to effectively manage such a complex systems as PAs are. Experts in the field all around the World are worried nowadays that PA systems are growing far faster than capacity to protect and manage them.

There is a growing awareness that improvement of capabilities of all actors of protected area management and governance is crucial. However, it is still more reflected in international agreements and conclusions of conferences, than in national regulations, policy and financial instruments and system, or strategic education approach.

Protected Area management

Following the definition provided by the World Conservation Union (IUCN), protected area (PA) is “/.../ a clearly defined geographical space recognized, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values“ (UNEP-WCMC, 2008).

Widely recognized as a strong mechanism for conserving species and ecosystems and preserving of biodiversity, protected area is currently also considered as a rich source for local development – providing goods and services, such as watersheds, fertile soil as well as opportunities for initiating various forms of sustainable tourism. Beside those, its social dimension is strongly emphasized in many aspects – from its' special cultural and spiritual value for local communities and indigenous people, to its socio economic functions, related to impacts on community livelihood.

Within an effort to standardize approach to PA *management*, World Conservation Union (IUCN) experts developed categorization system, as the standard used by most of the countries nowadays. This classification refers to the management objectives, and doesn't tell much about relationships and responsibilities. Therefore, the term *governance* is more and more in focus of studies of protected areas, addressing who makes decisions and how decision makers are held accountable. (Lockwood, et al., 2006)

Modifying the approach from one focused on “neutral” management to governance categories, changes the view on the factors and actors of successful development of protected area. There is a growing trend to look at the connectivity in terms of regions promoting biodiversity, but at the same time strengthening the links between surrounding communities, their social and economic life – with the life of protected area.

Protected Area management effectiveness

complex nature of protected areas with their ecological, socio – economic and cultural function, varieties of management and governance solutions in different countries, make them at the same time very delicate and challenging potential models of sustainability, and rich learning sources in many ways. In order to reach its sustainability and high education value for the people all around the World, it is necessary to improve the effectiveness of their management.

These trends are widely present in international conservation community nowadays, reflected in globally accepted documents and agreements. One of them is Program of Work on Protected Areas, adopted in 2004, by the Conference of Parties to the CBD, aiming at comprising at least 30% of nationally protected areas at the territory of all the parties with the management effectiveness assessment, by 2010.

It encouraged number of initiatives, such as Global study of management effectiveness, implemented between 2005-2007, by IUCN World Commission on Protected Area. Their methodological framework, comprising context, planning, inputs, processes, outputs and outcomes as main elements of assessment (Hockings, Solton and Dudley, 2000), have been implemented in performing Global study which analyzed information from over 6300 PA in more than 100 countries. With certain modification, this methodology was used as the basis for various research studies organized by other international organizations, such as WWF International (RAPAM assessment tool), World Bank, UNEP, GEF and UNDP (Tracking Tool), etc.

These studies brought numerous findings useful for improvement of PA managers; its results show that the strongest correlation exists between awareness rising and education programs organized by the PA and effectiveness of its’ management. High correlations are also found between financial and human resource inputs and effectiveness. These assessments and its findings are meant to serve as the source for learning about things that should be improved and capacities to be strengthen on the way to management and governance effectiveness.

Protected Area management and governance capacity

since capacity development is growing issue in current research and practice in most of the fields, there are different approaches and definitions in use. For example, within the UNDP Capacity Assessment Framework, capacity development is defined as “the process through which individuals, organizations and societies obtain, strengthen and maintain the capabilities to set and achieve their own development objectives over time” (UNDP, 2008: 3).

Looking at the capacity development for PA management, similar definitions can be found: “Developing capacity is about facilitating and encouraging a process of transformation or change by which individuals, organizations and societies develop their abilities, both individually and collectively, to perform functions, solve problems, and set and achieve their own goals” (Lockwood, et al., 2006: 165).

Both definitions state that capacity development is process, that it is undergoing at three levels – individual, organization and society – and that it leads to improved capability to perform in more autonomous and effective way.

In this context, we shall look at the capacity for PA as ability to plan, perform, act and reflect on it. It implies that individuals are aware of the goals and needs, being capable of setting and implementing them, but also that they are able and open to learn, formalize and share the knowledge and experience within and between organizations.

In some definitions, capacities are considered as skills, abilities and aptitudes, while in others it is perceived as the role, position and/or potential for some action or a function (Merriam – Webster’s online Dictionary).

In majority of nature conservation studies and projects, the focus is on individual capacities, no matter how much authors agree that other levels are important as well. In some cases, the meaning of capacity development is reduced to training initiatives and programs. Being powerful method of capacity development on both individual and organizational level, training is only part of available mechanisms and tools that can be used.

Looking at the capacities for PA management and governance from adult education point of view, we do believe that training should be supported by other development mechanisms. Beside the knowledge and skills gained within training programs, all the actors should be supported by their co-actors, organizations and societies in order to change and constantly improve their views, understanding and ability to implement and share what they have gained through education and communication process. We believe that this wider process of learning is the core of capacity development process – but can’t be effective if not strategically designed and supported by financial, policy, legal, political, cultural and institutional mechanisms available within countries. Growing individual and organiza-

tional capacities and creating the climate of learning is prerequisite for maintaining and improving of capabilities. Without that, sustainability of management organizations and protected areas is seriously under the question.

Before all the other steps, the most basic one is to find out what capacities exist in reality. Again, many different approaches are being applied in this process. Most often, training and learning programs were designed based on basic training needs assessments, experts' views or donors' expectations. It resulted in partial, ad hoc and project driven training programs as part of capacity development in PA management/governance field, without deep understanding of differences between protected areas, its governance, and countries.

Recent trends show that competence approach is taking more and more credits among researchers and practitioners in the field. Understanding competences as complex set of knowledge, skills, and practical experience in performing activities within their job/profession, authors are trying to recognize and recommend standards, as a framework to be used by different sites/systems/countries depending on their own characteristics. Analyzing jobs and activities at one and existing training offers at another side, it is possible to identify gaps as a starting point in further development of training curricula, job descriptions, policy decisions, and, generally, in creating more effective management strategies.

Protected area management in Serbia

The national system of protected areas in Serbia is composed of: national parks (NPs), nature reserves, nature parks, landscapes and natural monuments. Several protected areas in Serbia have international designation: Golija-Studenica Biosphere Reserve, and nine Ramsar sites: Ludas Lake, Obedska bara, Stari Begej – Carska bara, Slano Kopovo, Peštersko polje and Labudovo okno, Gornje Podunavlje, Zasavica and Vlasina. There are 38 Important Bird Areas as well as 10 Green Belt and Transboundary Areas.

Currently, 6.2% of the Serbian territory is legally protected covering nearly 600.000 ha.

All national parks in Serbia are managed by public enterprises (PE) established by the Act of National Parks ("Official Journal of the Republic of Serbia" no. 39/93, Articles 22 and 23). Other protected areas categories are mostly managed by PE "Serbia Forests" while for the rest different public or business entities and, in few cases, nongovernmental organizations, are responsible.

Table 1: Protected areas network in Serbia*

Protected area category	Number of areas
National Parks	5
Nature Parks	16
Landscapes	15
Nature Reserves	70
Nature Monuments	284
TOTAL	428

*Source: Ministry of Environment and Special Planning of Republic of Serbia

Area can be proposed for designation by national authorities, legal or physical entities at national, regional or local level. The area is officially designated based on the experts' study prepared by the Institute for the Protection of Nature of Serbia, and decision can be made by National Assembly (for National Parks), National, Provincial or Local Government (depending of the significance of the area).

Management categories of PA in Serbia are harmonized with the IUCN classification and standards.

Capacities for Protected Area management and governance

At national level, the main authority in charge is Ministry of Environmental Protection and Spatial Planning of Republic of Serbia (MESP), while the main experts' institution is the Institute for the Protection of Nature of Serbia. All the protected areas at National level are reporting to the National Ministry, while those designated at the Provincial (Vojvodina) and Local level, are reporting to adequate authorities at those particular levels.

The Law on Environmental Protection and the Nature Protection Law are the main legislative documents in the field. The National Environmental Strategy is elaborated along with the National Environmental Action Plan (NEAP) for the mid-term period (2007-2016). The National Strategy on Biodiversity Protection and Action Plan are in progress, coordinated by UNDP Serbia and supported by GEF. Laws and regulations in this field are as most of the others, in the process of harmonization with EU legal framework.

PA may be financed from the national Budget, Fund for Environmental Protection, taxes for using the PA resources, income from their own activities, projects and other donations. In most cases, the percentage of costs covered by public funds is approximately 5-10% of the total operational costs. The PA

budget of the MESP covers at best partly the operational costs and it shows a decreasing trend. Therefore, most of the PAs in Serbia suffer from inadequate funding and are pushed to find their own way in providing finances. Shortage of funds is directly affecting development of all other capacities within PA management organization.

This especially applies to nongovernmental organizations and small public enterprises managing PAs in Serbia. The only advantage of some NGOs in these terms is their capacity for preparing and conducting projects, knowledge of the donor community's strategies and expectations, as well as flexibility in work. Besides that, NGOs and units within some other enterprises are usually protected from political changes in appointing top management of PA organizations, which is especially influencing National Park directors.

Lack of funding, strategic planning and continuity in work, as well as appropriate system's support, affect opportunities for planning the improvement of PA management at organizational and individual level. Initiatives to meet these needs are fragmented and occasional, or project based. Years of economic sanctions towards Serbia affected opportunities to use donor funds, which made the situation even more complex.

Management effectiveness of Protected Areas in Serbia

First analysis of Management effectiveness of PAs in Serbia has been performed in February 2009, within the workshop organized by the Ministry and supported by WWF Mediterranean. Representatives of three National Parks and 13 other PA categories management bodies were there to self evaluate effectiveness of their performance, within facilitated process of using Rapid Assessment and Prioritization of Protected Area Management (RAPPAM) questionnaire.

As mentioned above, WWF's RAPPAM draws on an evaluation framework developed by the World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) of World Conservation Union (IUCN). In last years, RAPPAM assessments have been performed in number of countries, including our neighbouring Bulgaria, Romania, Croatia and Montenegro. The questionnaire is slightly modified in accordance with Serbian local characteristics, and questions related to evaluation of the context, biological, socio economic values and vulnerability were excluded.

Among the main actual pressures perceived by the participants, there is water resources management, unsolved property and legal issues as well as land use change. Water resource management is also high on the scale of foreseen threats along with the tourism and recreation development. (Pišćević and Orlović-Lovren, 2009)

Evaluation concerning planning, investments and processes of management, according to PA representatives, reflects the opinion that the strengths are in planning, legal security and infrastructure, while the weakest points are financial and human resources – including the attractiveness of PA jobs, opportunities for professional improvement and training. The level of cooperation with local communities is relatively low in majority of areas, especially in terms of common planning and decision making. Results of scientific studies are often not accessible and in some cases not appropriate to needs of the area. (Ibid.)

It is interesting to compare these briefly reviewed results of the assessment with those performed in some of neighbouring countries. In Romania, for instance, there is high similarity in most of the weaknesses perceived by PA representatives, such as :lack of medium and long term strategy for the national system of protected areas, low level of available resources, long term financial instability, staff hiring conditions, lack of specific training, etc. (Stanciu and Steindlegger, 2006)

Similar results were gained from the assessment in Croatia, in terms of human resources, where number of employees, employment conditions and retaining of high quality staff are perceived as weak points. Unlike in Serbia and Romania, there is satisfaction found among PA representatives with the financing of PAs in last five years, as well as perceived stability in long term financing. (Croatia, 2009)

Conclusion

Modern approach to PA management comprises both scientific and socio – economic dimensions. There is a growing evidence that communication skills and continuous improvement of knowledge and knowhow are crucial for protected area management effectiveness. One of the most important dimension of sustainability is cooperation with local community and common development. One of the prerequisites of development is continuous learning and ability to implement it.

In Serbia there is lack of understanding and practicing of this concept of PA management. Financial resources are insufficient, and criteria for budget funds' distribution not always clear and transparent. There are unharmonized regulations in fields relevant for this activity. Protected areas are not adequately open to community and thus not supported by them. There is high demand for qualified staff and better working conditions. Only sporadic training programs

are organized for PA staff and learning opportunities within organizations for management are not being strategically developed.

Obviously, there are serious gaps between existing and desired capacities to manage PAs effectively in Serbia. In order to overcome it, it is necessary to better understand it. Thorough analysis of individual and organization capacities is needed, as well as improvement of the financial and social support to PA managers. Training needs and competences analysis on the way of increasing capacities are necessary starting steps in this process.

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Razvoj kapaciteta za upravljanje zaštićenim prirodnim područjima – potrebe i mogućnosti

Apstrakt: U vreme globalnih ekoloških, socijalnih i ekonomskih izazova koji utiču na sve oblasti ljudskog delovanja, zaštićena prirodna područja se opažaju kao potencijalni modeli održivosti. Istovremeno, međutim, raste pritisak na prirodne resurse, kao i kompleksnost upravljanja njima. U Srbiji nedostaju istraživanja ovih problema, kao i obrazovne inicijative za sistematski razvoj kapaciteta za upravljanje zaštićenim prirodnim područjima. Profesionalizacija osoblja zaštićenih prirodnih područja i podrška snaženju zainteresovanih strana još uvek ne zauzimaju adekvatan prostor u nacionalnoj politici niti praksi. U radu se razmatraju potrebe i mogućnosti analize ovih kapaciteta, kako bi se pronašao najbolji put za unapređenje efektivnosti upravljanja zaštićenim prirodnim područjima u Srbiji. Dat je kratak prikaz specifičnosti nacionalnih prilika u ovoj oblasti, u kontekstu međunarodnih trendova i dešavanja. Polazeći od toga, predloženi su mogući koraci, uz poseban naglasak na neophodnost razvoja strateškog pristupa obrazovanju u ovom domenu.

Ključne reči: efektivnost upravljanja zaštićenim prirodnim područjem, razvoj kapaciteta, obrazovanje, održivost.

² Mr Violeta Orlović-Lovren radi za Development Alternatives Inc., na programu Planiranja i reagovanja u vanrednim situacijama i jačanje ekonomske sigurnosti. Ima višedecenijsko iskustvo u radu u javnom i civilnom sektoru, na projektima u oblasti andragogije, zaštite životne sredine i institucionalnog jačanja. Doktorand je na Katedri za andragogiju Filozofskog fakulteta Univerziteta u Beogradu.