

Protected Areas of Albania: Challenges of a Developing Country

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Merit Dollma has over 12 years of experience working for the protection and management of natural and cultural heritage. During her year at the RCC, she will be working for her book “Protected Areas of Albania: Challenges of a Developing Country,” in which she makes evident the high geodiversity and biodiversity of Albania as valuable natural assets for tourism development of the country.

The book will address the value of Albania’s protected areas and obstacles to the management of such areas in a typical transition country—one in which political, economic, and environmental changes face challenges in the free market economy and in meeting the standards for integration into the EU. The first chapter of the book will focus on the geodiversity and biodiversity of Albania’s protected areas. In addition to their map representation, this chapter provides an overview of the geology and the geomorphology of the protected areas, their rich flora and fauna, the most attractive landscapes, those sites with the highest touristic potential, and tourist frequentation, etc.

The current state of the management of the protected areas in Albania—ranging from world heritage sites to regionally and locally significant ones—and the main pressures that influence their condition will be dealt with in the second chapter. The history of the management of protected areas, legislation, responsible institutions, and the issues of corruption and law enforcement will form the core of this chapter.

A number of environmental issues have been identified in the protected areas of Albania: habitat loss and fragmentation; damage and degradation of ecosystems; disturbance and maltreatment of wildlife; loss of species or the threat of extinction; and the overexploitation of natural resources, such as sand and gravel mining of beaches and river beds, or deforestation for fuel and timber. These topics will be addressed through an analysis of case studies where these problems are most evident. This chapter addresses the following issues: Who profits from these protected areas? What role does the local community play in the management of protected areas? Conflicting uses of protected areas: tourism or power plants?

Some of the protected areas are also transboundary areas that need common management with neighboring countries. The book will provide some examples of transboundary protected areas whose opportunities, challenges, and benefits illustrate the potential for collaboration between countries sharing this common natural heritage. A comparison of the management of these transboundary areas in the past and present will show the impact of negative/positive policies of neighboring countries on the management and use of these common areas.