

Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas: The Case of Divjakë-Karavasta National Park

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Abstract

Divjakë-Karavasta National Park is located in the western part of Albania, between the cities of Divjakë and Fier, covering an area of approximately 22,389 hectares. The park is one of the most important biodiversity hotspots in Albania and is part of the Ramsar Convention for the protection of wetlands. Its rich biodiversity, natural landscapes, and the tranquility the area offers are valuable resources with great potential for various forms of tourism such as ecotourism, rural tourism, scientific tourism, and more. Tourism is a rapidly growing sector in the park, especially during the summer season, when thousands of local and foreign visitors explore the area's natural beauty and rich biodiversity. The park's center is located near Divjakë Beach, approximately 1.2 km southwest of the park entrance, and most services are concentrated there. Divjakë Beach is a 15 km long stretch of white sand bordered by a pine forest, making it a popular beach destination for thousands of tourists and day visitors, mainly from south-central Albania. Considering this wide range of values and with the goal of promoting long-term sustainable tourism, the development of quality accommodation infrastructure, diversification of services, and their integration can create real potential for growth in the tourism sector. This development allows the implementation of a broad range of activities that incorporate nature, ecology, local culture, and tradition. Through field data analysis, interviews with local stakeholders, and review of policy documents on protected area management, a clear overview of the current situation and opportunities for improvement is presented. However, interventions such as road construction or upgrades can have significant environmental consequences, particularly for forest ecosystems. Negative impacts include habitat fragmentation, soil degradation through erosion, disruption of ecological corridors for wildlife, spread of invasive species, and increased pollution (acoustic, atmospheric, and hydrological). Investments in environmentally friendly infrastructure, educating the local population on sustainable natural resource management, and promoting responsible tourism help create a balance between economic development and biodiversity conservation.

In conclusion, it is recommended to develop and implement a sustainable tourism management plan that balances the conservation of natural values with economic development, turning Divjakë-Karavasta National Park into a successful model of coexistence between people and nature.

Keywords: sustainable tourism, protected area, tourism infrastructure, biodiversity, etc