

INITIAL ASSESSMENT OF PROTECTED AREAS IN ALBANIA

Using the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool



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Initial assessment of protected areas in Albania using the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool:

Summary of key findings

Although a small country, Albania is very rich in biological diversity. The tremendous diversity of ecosystems and habitats supports about 3,200 species of vascular plants, 2,350 species of non-vascular plants and 15,600 species of animals, many of which are threatened at the global or European level. In recognition of Albania's significant contribution to European and global biodiversity, the European Union supports the realization of the project NaturAL.

Protected areas are the cornerstones of nature conservation and often the most reliable way to conserve the biodiversity of ecosystems. Albania has recently made significant progress in expanding the network of protected areas from 5.2% of the country's territory in 2005 to 16% in 2014. Despite this remarkable process, investments in protected areas – in particular infrastructure, equipment and technical capacities of protected area staff – are insufficient.

This report summarises the key findings of an assessment of 51 protected areas in Albania using the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT). The assessment was prepared under the project NaturAL “Strengthening national capacity in nature protection - preparation for Natura 2000 network.”

The METT has two main sections: datasheets that record basic information about each site and rank generic threats which protected areas can face, and a detailed Assessment Form comprised of 30 questions. The assessment was carried out by 12 Regional Administrations for Protected Areas (RAPAs) with support from the National Agency for Protected Areas (NAPA).

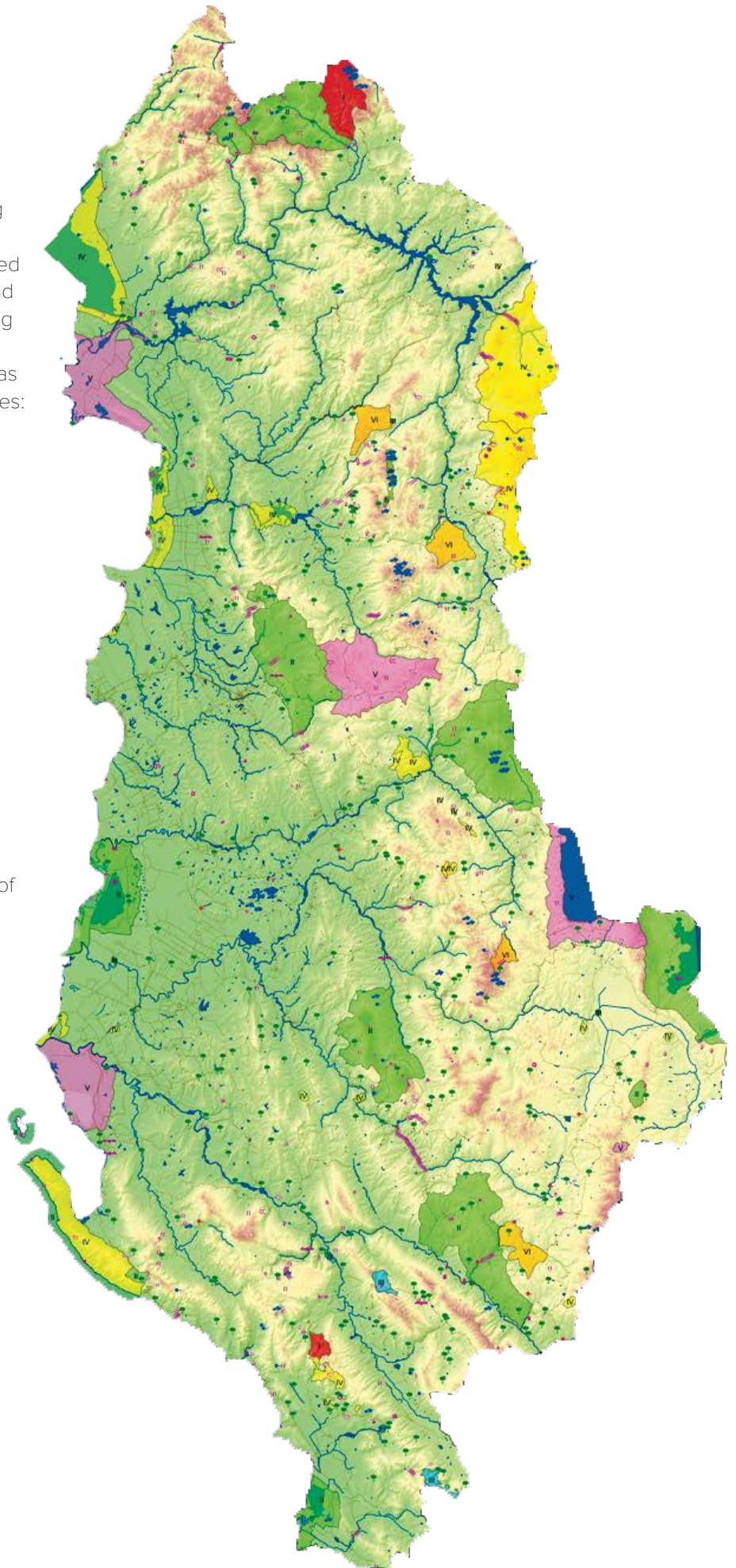
About Albania's protected areas

Albania has 799 protected areas covering about 16% (4,600 km²) of its territory. The vast majority of them have been designated in the category nature monument (750) and are mostly quite small in size. The following map of the Protected Areas Network of Albania represents only 56 protected areas in the six national protected area categories:

- Strict Nature Reserve
- National Park
- Monument of Nature
- Managed Nature Reserve
- Protected Landscape
- Resource Protection Area

The National Agency of Protected Areas (NAPA) is the responsible institution for managing the national system of protected areas in Albania, whereas day-to-day management of protected areas is delegated to 12 Regional Administrations of Protected Areas (RAPAs) as part of NAPA.

Figure 1 Protected Areas Network of Albania



Approach and methodology

The assessment follows the IUCN Framework for assessing Protected Area Management Effectiveness (IUCN PAME Framework). The IUCN PAME Framework

is based on the principle that good protected area management should follow a cyclical process with six stages, as shown in Figure 2.

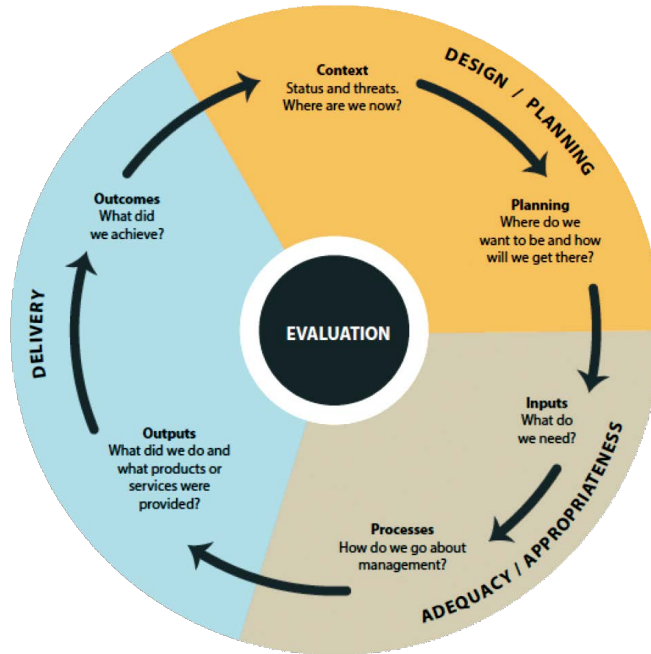


Figure 2 IUCN Framework for assessing Protected Area Management Effectiveness

The Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT), developed by WWF and the World Bank, was used as a tool for rapid qualitative assessment based on a scorecard questionnaire. It includes all six elements of the IUCN PAME Framework, but the emphasis is mostly on **context, planning, inputs and process**.

Analysis of protected areas threats

The assessment was conducted using a list of 52 threats to protected areas developed by Conservation Measures Partnership Taxonomy of Direct Threats. The assessors assigned a level of significance to all threats, choosing from four options. These were subsequently quantified as shown in the table below.

Threat Level	Score
Not applicable	0
Low	1
Medium	2
High	3

Figure 3 (see the opposite page) illustrates the results from the analysis of protected areas facing a high-level threat. It is clear that Logging and wood harvesting (threat code 5.3) and Fire and fire suppression (threat code 7.1) rank noticeably higher than any other threats. Assessors identified Fire and fire suppression as the most common threat. In 12 protected areas it was estimated to be of high significance, in 16 cases to be of medium significance, and in 21 protected areas to be of low significance. Logging and wood harvesting was identified as the most serious threat that causes degradation of the natural values in protected areas. It was estimated to be of high significance in 14 protected areas, in 12 cases to be of medium significance, and to be of low significance in 18 protected areas.

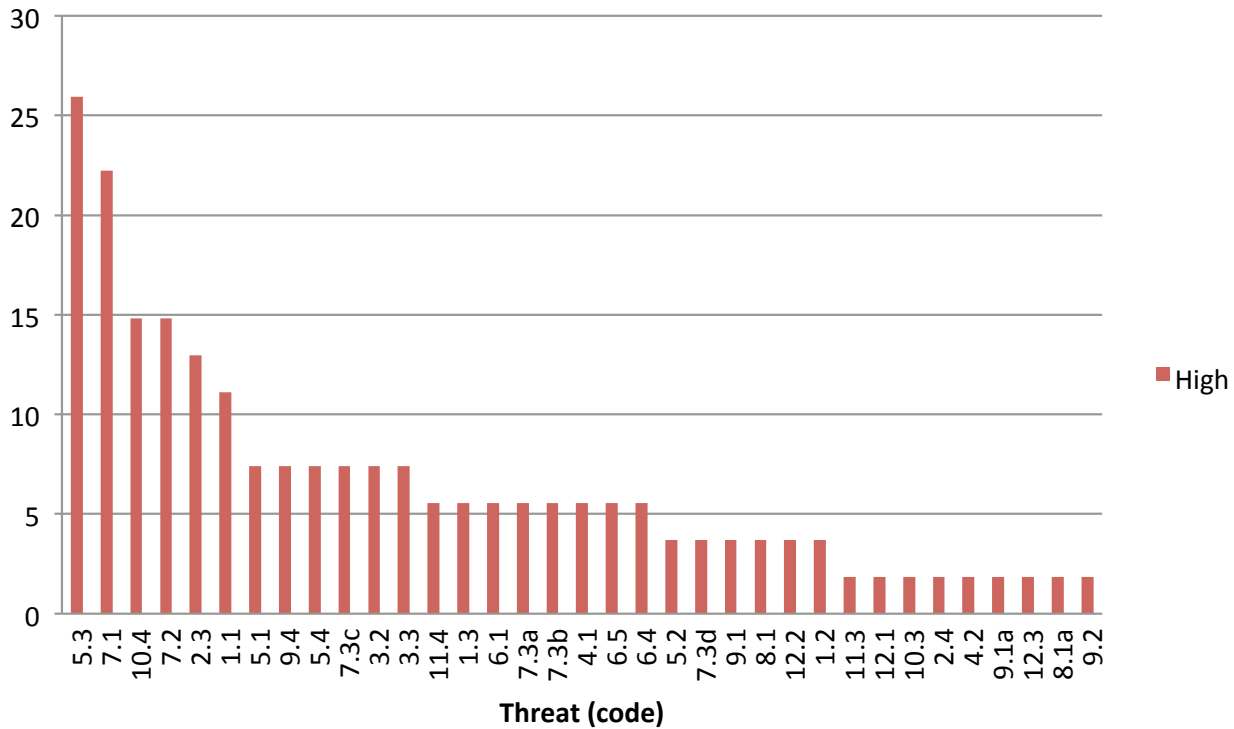


Figure 3 Ranking of the threats expressed as % of protected areas in which they have been identified as a high-level threat

- | | |
|--|---|
| 5.3 Logging and wood harvesting | 7.3b Isolation from other natural habitat (e.g. deforestation, dams without effective aquatic wildlife passages) |
| 7.1 Fire and fire suppression (including arson) | 1.2 Commercial and industrial areas |
| 10.4 Erosion and siltation/ deposition (e.g. shoreline or riverbed changes) | 12.2 Natural deterioration of important cultural site values |
| 7.2 Dams, hydrological modification and water management/use | 5.2 Gathering terrestrial plants or plant products (non-timber) |
| 2.3 Livestock farming and grazing | 7.3d Loss of keystone species (e.g. top predators, pollinators etc.) |
| 1.1 Housing and settlement | 8.1 Invasive non-native/alien plants (weeds) |
| 3.2 Mining and quarrying | 9.1 Household sewage and urban waste water |
| 3.3 Energy generation, including from hydropower dams | 10.3 Avalanches/landslides |
| 5.1 Hunting, killing and collecting terrestrial animals (including killing of animals as a result of human/wildlife conflict) | 11.3 Temperature extremes |
| 5.4 Fishing, killing and harvesting aquatic resources | 12.1 Loss of cultural links, traditional knowledge and/or management practices |
| 7.3c Other 'edge effects' on park values | 12.3 Destruction of cultural heritage buildings, gardens, sites etc. |
| 9.4 Garbage and solid waste | 2.4 Marine and freshwater aquaculture |
| 1.3 Tourism and recreation infrastructure | 4.2 Utility and service lines (e.g. electricity cables, telephone lines) |
| 11.4 Storms and flooding | 8.1a Invasive non-native/alien animals |
| 4.1 Roads and railroads (include road-killed animals) | 9.1a Sewage and waste water from protected area facilities (e.g. toilets, hotels, etc.) |
| 6.1 Recreational activities and tourism | 9.2 Industrial, mining and military effluents and discharges (e.g. poor water quality discharge from dams, e.g. unnatural temperatures, deoxygenated, other pollution) |
| 6.4 Activities of protected area managers (e.g. construction or vehicle use, artificial watering points and dams) | |
| 6.5 Deliberate vandalism, destructive activities or threats to protected area staff and visitors | |
| 7.3a Increased fragmentation within protected area | |

The following threats were identified as high-level threats in at least 10% of assessed protected areas: Dams, hydrological modification and water management/use (code 7.2); Erosion and siltation/deposition (e.g. shoreline or riverbed changes, code 10.4); Livestock farming and grazing (code 2.3); and Housing and settlement (code 1.1).

In general, threats related to the use of biological resources are present in the vast majority of protected areas in Albania. This includes threats from consumptive use of 'wild' biological resources such as deliberate and unintentional harvesting effects, as well as persecution or control of specific species, including hunting and killing of animals.

Analysis of Assessment Form results

The Assessment Form is comprised of 30 questions (see page 10) accompanied by a set of four possible choices, helping the assessors to assign a score to each question ranging between 0 (poor) to 3 (excellent).

The analysis of the results revealed that the highest percentage of poor answers was given to the question about “Fees” (see question N° 29 in Figure 4 below). This implies that in 44 protected areas (86.3%) there is no collection of fees. Poor results were also reported for questions about “Current budget” (question N° 15), “Security of budget” (question N° 16), “Management of Budget (question N° 17), “Equipment” (question N° 18) and “Maintenance of equipment” (question N° 19). The highest percentage of excellent scores was reported on the question of “Legal status” (question N° 1; 100%). The second highest percentage of excellent scores was reported for the question about “Condition of values” (question N° 30).

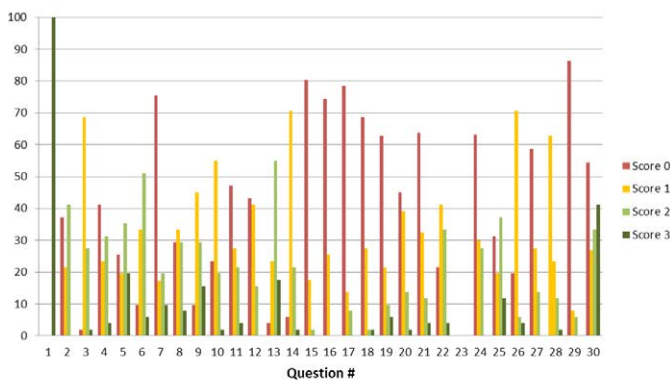


Figure 4 Number of scores per question (% of the maximum scores)

The analysis of the average scores by the IUCN PAME Framework shows that poor scores prevail in all of the six elements but the first one – “Context” – which is related only to the question of “Legal status.” These results are shown in Figure 5.

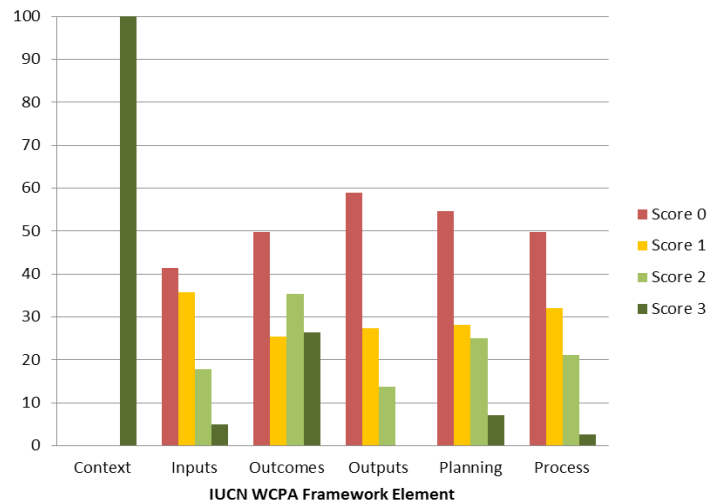


Figure 5 Distribution of scores per IUCN PAME Framework element (% of the maximum scores)

The results of this analysis can be further disaggregated by management category, as shown in Figure 6. According to the analysis, national parks show better average results on all six IUCN PAME Framework elements than other categories.

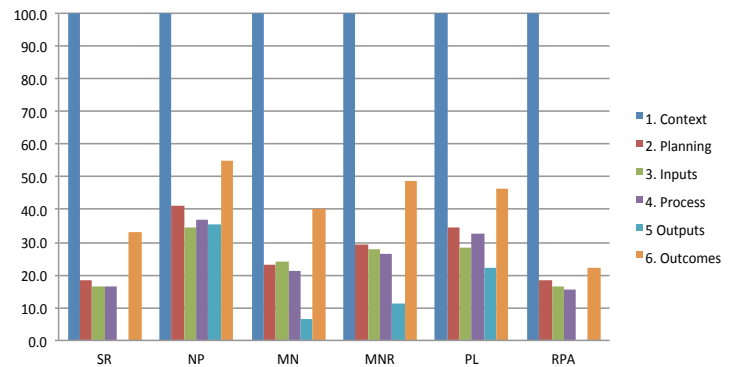


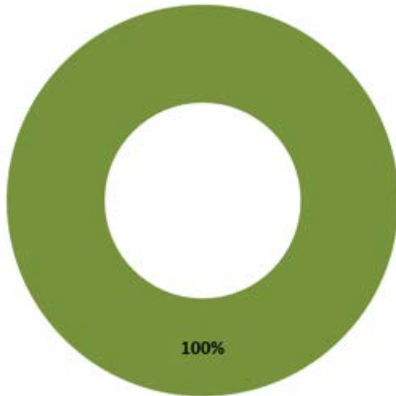
Figure 6 Distribution of scores per IUCN PAME Framework element disaggregated by protected area category (% of the maximum scores)

A closer look at the six IUCN PAME Framework elements

For the purpose of our analysis the scores (number of points) assigned to the sites were summed up for each of the six elements of the IUCN PAME Framework and represented as a percentage of the maximum possible score for the relevant element. Each score is linked to one of four possible management effectiveness ‘categories’ indicated by the colour scheme shown below. Categories 1 and 2 refer to Ineffective and Weak Effectiveness, and categories 3 and 4 refer to Effective and Highly Effective management.

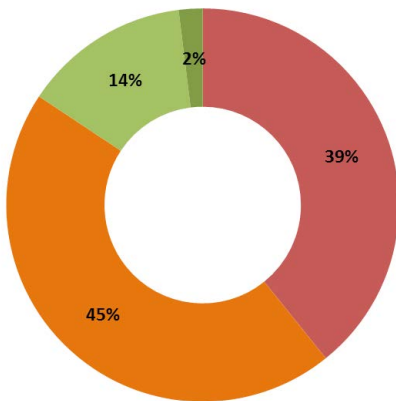
0%<25%	Category 1	Ineffective
25%<50%	Category 2	↓
50%<75%	Category 3	
>75%	Category 4	Highly Effective

Context



“Context” is the first element of the IUCN PAME Framework and provides the relevant background information needed to plan and implement management. In the Assessment Form it is covered only by a question on the legal status of the site. All assessed protected areas were legally established.

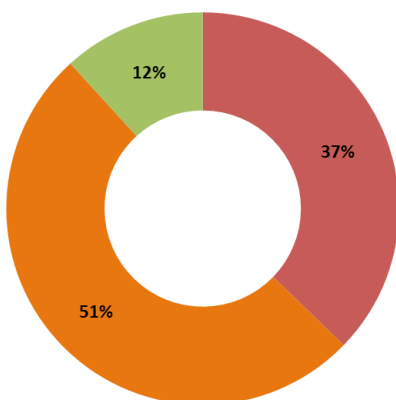
Planning



“Planning” concerns design features of a protected area – the physical, legal and institutional. The assessors reported Ineffective or Weak Effectiveness for 43 protect areas (84.3%) in terms of “Planning.” About half of the protected areas lack management plans and only 5 protected areas (9.8%) are implementing the existing management plans to a limited extent. More than half of the assessed protected areas are considered to have an appropriate design in terms of size and shape. The majority of protected areas (30; 58.8%) lack regulations, or in case they exist, their enforcement is considered to be weak. The assessors stressed the need for banning hunting and introduction of alien species in protected areas, and regulations to control land use.

Management zoning, as the principle mechanism for management, needs to be revised and officially approved in all PAs

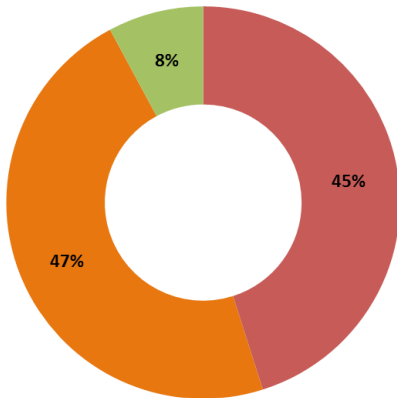
Inputs



“Inputs” concerns the linkage between the level of resources available and management effectiveness. The assessors reported Ineffective or Weak effectiveness for 44 protect areas (88.2%) in terms of “Inputs.” Poor results are notably reported with respect to the available budget (80.4%), security of budget (74.5%), availability of equipment (68.6%) and collection of fees (86.3%). The assessors mentioned the following issues in connection to the required inputs: low level of professionalism and the need for tailored training of staff to address their specific tasks. In some cases there is a lack of basic facilities and equipment, such as telephone lines, internet and printers.

Management infrastructure, staff equipment and facilities are inadequate and inappropriate

Process

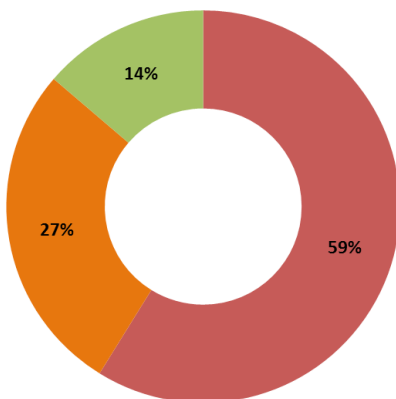


“Process” concerns the implementation of management actions according to accepted processes. The assessors reported Ineffective or Weak Effectiveness for 47 protect areas (92.2%) in terms of “Process.” Poor results are notably reported with respect to management of budget (78.4%), maintenance of equipment (62.7%), education and awareness (48.1%), involvement of local communities (63.2%) and cooperation with commercial tourism operators (62.7%).

The assessors mentioned the lack of human resources in terms of number and skills, equipment, and infrastructure for control of illegal or inadequate human activities in the protected areas. The assessors noted that experts conducting research and scientific studies do not inform and engage protected area staff and that they are not addressing their management priorities and needs. In other protected areas, research has not been conducted for long periods of time and there is a lack of basic information needed for their effective management.

Staff training and skills are low relative to the management needs of the sites

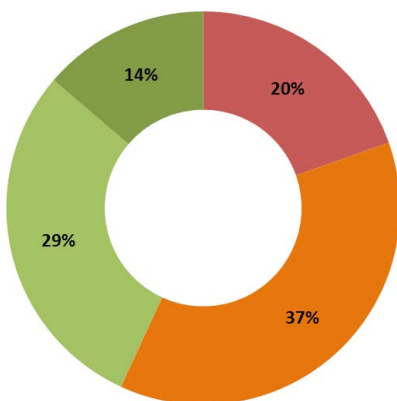
Outputs



“Outputs” refers to results of management actions, provision of services and products. “Outputs” is directly addressed only by question No 27 (see p. 10) concerning visitor facilities. The assessors reported Ineffective or Weak Effectiveness for 44 protect areas (86.3%) regarding this step, indicating that either no work plan existed or that few activities are being implemented.

Management plans identify education and awareness actions, but they need further elaboration to be operational

Outcomes



“Outcomes” concerns biodiversity, social, cultural and economic outcomes of protected area management. Assessors reported Ineffective or Weak Effectiveness for 29 protected areas (57.3%) in terms of “Outcomes.” On the other hand, the condition of natural and cultural values was reported as being excellent in 21 protected areas, which accounts for 41.2% of all protected areas. Apart from the question of “Legal status” this is the highest rank of all questions.

Protected areas provide significant benefits to local communities, such as firewood, grazing of domestic animals, and medicinal plants

Conclusion

Wildfires were reported as the most common threat to protected areas in Albania, whereas logging and wood harvesting as the most serious threat that causes degradation of the natural values in protected areas. In general, the threats related to the use of biological resources in protected areas were present in the vast majority of protected areas in Albania. The highest percentage of poor effectiveness was observed with respect to financial management and availability and security of budget, and availability and maintenance of equipment. The highest percentage of excellent scores was reported on the legal status of protected areas and condition of values.

The analysis of the average scores by the IUCN PAME Framework elements clearly shows that poor scores prevail in all six elements but Context. The results also indicate that national parks show better average results than other protected area categories on all six elements.

Comments and explanations in the Assessment Form reveal the need for new regulation on hunting, introduction of alien species and land use in protected areas, and stressed the difficulties in the enforcement of existing regulations. With respect to the inputs needed for an effective management of protected areas, the

assessors emphasized insufficient levels of knowledge and skills, and the lack of professional training for staff tailored to address their specific needs and the problems they face in the protected areas in their jurisdiction. It was revealed that many protected areas in Albania lack basic management infrastructure such as facilities, vehicles, monitoring equipment, telephone lines, access to the internet, computers and basic office equipment.

Despite the significant gaps in terms of inputs, the income generated by some protected areas (e.g. from entrance fees, permits for resource use and other use) is transferred to the government without any repayment to the protected areas which generate the income. Assessors frequently complained that they are often not informed about or involved in research activities at the sites, and that researchers do not address their management priorities and needs. In some protected areas, research has not been conducted for a long time and the managers lack basic information needed for their effective management.

The regular use of the METT is recommended to help protected area managers reflect on ongoing challenges and also improve communication and cooperation with stakeholders.

Questions of the Assessment Form

1. Does the protected area have legal status (or in the case of private reserves is covered by a covenant or similar)?
2. Are appropriate regulations in place to control land use and activities (e.g. hunting)?
3. Can staff (i.e. those with responsibility for managing the site) enforce protected area rules well enough?
4. Is management undertaken according to agreed objectives?
5. Is the protected area the right size and shape to protect species, habitats, ecological processes and water catchments of key conservation concern?
6. Is the boundary known and demarcated?
7. Is there a management plan and is it being implemented?
8. Is there a regular work plan and is it being implemented?
9. Do you have enough information to manage the area?
10. Are systems in place to control access/resource use in the protected area?
11. Is there a programme of management oriented survey and research work?
12. Is active resource management being undertaken?
13. Are there enough people employed to manage the protected area?
14. Are staff adequately trained to fulfil management objectives?
15. Is the current budget sufficient?
16. Is the budget secure?
17. Is the budget managed to meet critical management needs?
18. Is equipment sufficient for management needs?
19. Is equipment adequately maintained?
20. Is there a planned education programme linked to the objectives and needs?
21. Does land and water use planning recognise the protected area and aid the achievement of objectives?
22. Is there co-operation with adjacent land and water users?
23. Do indigenous and traditional peoples resident or regularly using the protected area have input to management decisions?
24. Do local communities resident or near the protected area have input to management decisions?
25. Is the protected area providing economic benefits to local communities, e.g. income, employment, payment for environmental services?
26. Are management activities monitored against performance?
27. Are visitor facilities adequate?
28. Do commercial tour operators contribute to protected area management?
29. If fees (i.e. entry fees or fines) are applied, do they help protected area management?
30. What is the condition of the important values of the protected area as compared to when it was first designated?

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