

STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT AND MANAGEMENT TOOLS FOR NATIONAL PARKS IN SERBIA

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Abstract: *The management of the national parks Tara, Fruška Gora, Djerdap and Kopaonik and the activities of the managers in Serbia are affairs of the public interest. The manner of their strategic management is defined by the legal framework in the field of nature protection and it implies the adoption and the implementation of documents, such as the nature protection strategy, management plans and spatial plans for the special purpose areas. The paper particularly emphasizes the importance of adopting management plans for national parks, as basic documents for their management, as well as their harmonization with the spatial plans for the special purpose areas, as specific instruments for the management of these areas. It points out the importance of establishing governing bodies, such as a professional alliance and a council of users of national parks, which would improve their management and incorporate the interests of local people and users of space. In accordance with the above, this paper aims to point out the importance of strategic management and strategic documents in the field of protection and management of national parks in Serbia and give suggestions for their improvement.*

Keywords: *National park, Strategic management, Management plan, Spatial plan for the special purpose area, Serbia.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In theoretical terms, strategic management is a continuous process that analyses the characteristics of the current situation, identifies strategic goals, visions, missions, application of appropriate strategies, etc. (Hijji, 2014). It is an interactive process between its individual phases such as: planning, implementation, evaluation and control. Therefore, it is necessary to distinguish concepts, such as strategy, planning, strategic planning and strategic management. Thus, strategic management is a broader concept than strategic planning, and strategic planning is a broader concept than strategy (Mosurović Ružičić, 2018). When it comes to strategy, there are several definitions, and one of them is the most important for this paper, that strategy is like a plan and it represents the initial phase in strategic planning (Mintzberg, 1994).

Strategic management of the national parks in Serbia is implemented based on the Nature Protection Strategy of the Republic of Serbia, which determines long-term goals and measures for the conservation of biological and geological diversity and the manner of their implementation. The strategy is adopted by the Government for a period of at least ten years (Zakon o zaštiti prirode, 2009-2018). This strategy has not been adopted so far. The national park is proclaimed by the Law on National Parks (2015-2018), and protection and sustainable use are implemented according to the management plan for ten years. Thus, the management plan is another document and management tool of importance for the strategic management of national parks, and it contains measures, prohibitions and restrictions of works and activities in accordance with the prescribed protection

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regimes. The Government of the Republic of Serbia gives the consent on the national park management plan. National parks are managed by public companies, determined by the Law on National Parks, taking into account the needs of local residents and other users of these areas. The national park expert council is an expert and consultative body that monitors and analyses programs and projects in the field of nature protection and sustainable use of natural resources, including the national park management plan. The members of the expert council are designated persons who, through their professional and scientific work, monitor and analyze the field of nature protection and sustainable use of natural resources, and one member is a representative of the manager.

According to the Law on Nature Protection (2009-2018), the organization, use, arrangement of space and construction of facilities in the protected area is performed based on the spatial plan for the special purpose area, which is the third document and management tool important for strategic management of these areas. More precisely, this planning document is a specific instrument for the management of national parks, adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, respectively the Assembly of the Autonomous Province for the territory of the Autonomous Province. The spatial plan for the special purpose area, with the national park protection regimes of I, II and III degree and the management plan must not be in conflict (*Zakon o nacionalnim parkovima*, 2015-2018). In accordance with the above, the aim of this paper is to point out the importance of strategic management and strategic documents adopted in the field of protection and management of national parks in Serbia and give suggestions for their improvement.

2. METHODOLOGY

The national parks Tara, Djerdap, Fruška Gora and Kopaonik are analyzed in this paper. The management plans for these parks for the next ten years (draft versions) were made in 2020, and the spatial plans for these special purpose areas are adopted or are being developed. Specifically, for the Tara and Fruška Gora national parks, spatial plans for the national park special purpose areas have been adopted (for the Tara national park in 2020 and for the Fruška Gora national park in 2019), while for the Kopaonik and Djerdap national parks these planning documents are under development. This research is based on the analysis of strategic documents and management tools, such as management plans and spatial plans of the special purpose areas for these parks, given that the Nature Protection Strategy has not been adopted so far. The paper analyzes their mutual harmonization in terms of adjustment of protection measures and regimes, the existence of appropriate governing bodies such as professional association and council of users, as well as forms of cooperation of managers with the local population and other users of space, in order to sustainably manage these areas. Based on the results of the analysis, proposals for further improvement of strategic management of national parks in Serbia are given in the paper.

3. STUDY AREA

Tara National Park is one of five national parks in Serbia, which is under protection by the Law on National Parks (2015-2018). It is located in the far west of the Republic of Serbia on the border with Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a total area of 24.991,82 ha. It acquired the status of a national park in 1981 and is managed by the “Public Company Tara National Park” from Bajina Bašta. Djerdap National Park is the largest national park under protection by law in Serbia, with a total area of 63.786,48 ha, located in the northeastern part of the Republic of Serbia, on the border with Romania. It acquired the status of a national park in 1974 and was declared as a UNESCO Geopark and Ramsar site in 2020. It is managed by the “Public Company Djerdap National Park”

from Donji Milanovac. Fruška Gora National Park is located in the north of the Republic of Serbia in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina with a total area of 26.672 ha. It acquired the status in 1960 as first national park in Serbia. It is managed by the “Public Company National Park Fruška Gora” from Sremska Kamenica. The Kopaonik National Park is located in the southern part of the Republic of Serbia with a total area of 11.969,04 ha. It acquired the status of a national park in 1981. It is managed by the “Public Company Kopaonik National Park” based in Kopaonik. All four national parks are part of the ecological network of the Republic of Serbia (Dobričić et al, 2017).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1. Harmonization of strategic documents

The harmonization of the national park management plan and the spatial plan for the special purpose area of the national park implies, among other things, that the zones and protection regimes are harmonized in both documents. This is primarily due to the fact that the Law on National Parks from 2015 stipulates that measures and regimes for the protection of the national park are determined by the management plan, and the management plan and the spatial plan for the special purpose area cannot be in conflict. These facts indicate certain disagreements in the dynamics of preparing strategic documents, which need to be overcome in different ways (Dobričić & Maksić, 2017).

Thus, in the case of the Tara National Park, the management plan and the spatial plan for the special purpose area were harmonized in terms of protection measures and regimes during the procedure of preparation of the Spatial Plan for the Special Purpose Area of the Tara National Park (2020). The Spatial Plan for the Fruška Gora Special Purpose Area (2019) was adopted for the Fruška Gora National Park, based on the protection measures of the national park defined in 2011 by the Proposal for establishing protection of natural values. This proposal was formulated in the process of preparation of the Law on Fruška Gora National Park, which was not adopted. The adoption of the national park management plan is planned after the adoption of the Spatial Plan of the Special Purpose Area of Fruška Gora (2019).

The preparation of the Spatial Plan for the Special Purpose Area of the Djerdap National Park has only just begun in 2020 (Odluka o izradi Prostornog plana područja posebne namene Nacionalnog parka Djerdap, 2020), with the same problem of the lack of strategic documents, that is a management plan, for defining protection measures and regimes. This spatial plan for the special purpose area requires the parallel development of the management plan for this area and the definition of measures and protection regimes necessary for the management of this area. Regarding the Kopaonik National Park, amendments are currently being made to the Spatial Plan for the Special Purpose Area of the Kopaonik National Park (Odluka o izradi izmena i dopuna Prostornog plana područja posebne namene Nacionalnog parka Kopaonik, 2019). The development of a management plan and changes to the spatial plan for the special purpose area will be harmonized in parallel, during the procedure of developing the spatial plan for the special purpose area.

4.2. Management bodies

The analysis of the management plans for the Djerdap, Fruška Gora, Kopaonik and Tara national parks, all four done for the period 2020-2029 (draft versions), has shown that all plans emphasized the importance of forming councils of users in order to improve the management

of these areas. However, as stated in the management plans, the Fruška Gora and Kopaonik national parks are still planning the formation of these bodies, while the Tara and Djerdap national parks formed their councils of users in 2018.

Thus, in order to ensure the interests of the local population and users of Djerdap National Park, a Council of users with 11 members was formed. Each is a representative of the following: the municipalities of Majdanpek and Kladovo; local communities of Donji Milanovac; TOO Majdanpek; Preschool “Marija Munćan” Majdanpek; tourist areas “Fortress Golubac City” Golubac and “Museum Lepenski Vir” Donji Milanovac; economy from the area of the National Park, hunting association “Djerdap” Donji Milanovac; NGO “Lazarus” Donji Milanovac; and the institution “Library Center for Culture” Kladovo.

In the Tara National Park, a Council of users with 14 members was formed. Each is a representative of the following: the municipality of Bajina Bašta; local communities from the area of the national park - president of MZ Rastište; hunting association “Soko” Bajina Bašta; farmers, economy, local crafts and tourist organizations from the area of the National Park; citizens’ associations in the field of improving the goals and tasks of the National Park - Mountaineering Club “Tara”; Ministry of Defense and the Serbian Army - VU “Tara”; institutions for tourism and sports - STC “Bajina Bašta”; Institution “Culture” Bajina Bašta; Serbian Orthodox Church, Rača Monastery; public company “EPS Branch of Drina-Lim Hydroelectric Power Plant”, Bajina Bašta; and the local population, organic food producers. Both councils of users were formed in order to ensure the interests of the local population and the users of the national park. As stated in their management plans, the formation of councils of users is expected for the Fruška Gora and Kopaonik national parks in the following period.

4.3. Forms of cooperation

According to the Management Plan of the Tara National Park (Javno preduzeće “Nacionalni park Tara”, 2020), in addition to activities on education, awareness raising and promotion of the national park, following activities with the local population are planned: possibilities of organic production through educational programs, ecotourism and other development projects in the national park; development of projects for the protection of the geographical origin of products and the branding of products such as honey, dairy products, etc., as well as products of traditional crafts (carpets, flasks, etc.). Support to non-governmental organizations in organizing recreational events, as well as support of the project “Friendship on Drina” is planned, through cooperation with travel agencies which deal in recreational tourism. Cooperation and exchange of experiences will take place directly between the national parks and other protected assets, as well as through the activities of the Association of National Parks and Protected Areas of Serbia. Cooperation between national parks and protected assets will be performed within the “Dinarida Parks Association”. Activities on the project “Protected Areas for Nature and People” implemented by WWF - World Wide Fund for Nature will be continued. Good example of cooperation and exchange of experiences with other national parks is the sister park between Tara National Park and Black Canyon National Park, Colorado, USA.

The cooperation of the Fruška Gora national park with the local community will take place through various projects, aimed at the sustainable development of the area, the development of ecotourism, branding of local products and educational programs. It is planned to open a store of branded local products at the Information Center. Due to the large area of forests under the

linden tree, beekeeping and the recognized brand “Fruška Gora linden honey” is of particular importance in the Fruška Gora national park. Further cooperation is needed with the World Wide Fund for Nature - WWF, International Union for Conservation of Nature - IUCN, Regional Environmental Center for Central and Eastern Europe - REC. International cooperation with other European national parks takes place through the EUROPARC Federation, and at the regional level through the Dinarides Parks Association (Public company “Nacionalni park Fruška Gora”, 2020).

A special activity of the Djerdap National Park will take place with the local population through educational programs on the possibilities of ecotourism and other development projects in the park, the development of projects to protect the geographical origin of products and branding products from this area, such as cheese, dairy products, fruit and more (Public company “Djerdap National Park”, 2020). In the past period, honey was branded from the area of Djerdap. Cooperation with Young Researchers of Serbia, WWF and voluntary fire brigades from the territory of the national park will continue. Cooperation and exchange of experiences will take place directly between the national parks and other protected assets, as well as through the activities of the Association of National Parks and Protected Areas of Serbia. Cooperation between parks and protected assets will also be carried out within the Dinarides Parks Association. The projects from international cooperation, ConnectGREEN and DaRe to Connect will be implemented. The partnership in these two projects will implement GIS in the Djerdap National Park.

The directions of development and sustainable use of the Kopaonik National Park, in cooperation with the local population can be based on organized collection, plantation cultivation, processing of medicinal, edible and spicy indigenous plants, collection and processing of mushrooms, export of unique local handicrafts and products, quality mountain honey, brook trout farming, with the proposed Kopaonik lamb being the top brand in the area. (Public company “Kopaonik National Park”, 2020). It is planned to encourage agricultural production, especially healthy and organic food. Cooperation with other national parks and protected areas within the Association of National Parks and Protected Areas of Serbia will continue.

5. FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

In order to improve strategic management and management tools for national park management in Serbia, the subject of future research may be examples of good management practice in the world. Thus a good example of honey branding and production practice is Przemkowskie Heathland in Poland. Local beekeepers have actively been involved in preserving this area by preventing its healing, while honey production, certified by the European Union, received the label of a regional product. This example shows that products in the protected areas can guarantee their high quality and therefore higher prices (Biereznoj & Tripolszky, 2007). Therefore, further identification of traditional activities and crafts, encouragement of local production and ensuring placement of these products is of special importance (Dobričić & Josimović, 2018). Further research should be focused on the analysis of the possibility of applying the results obtained by assessment values of protected areas of Serbia conducted by the World Wide Fund for Nature-WWF Adria (Sekulić et al, 2018), including Tara, Fruška Gora, Djerdap and Kopaonik national parks, all in order to improve management of these areas and the development of management plans and spatial plans for national parks special purpose areas in Serbia.

6. CONCLUSION

Strategic management of the Tara, Fruška Gora, Djerdap and Kopaonik national parks in Serbia is implemented based on management plans and spatial plans for the special purpose areas that are adopted for ten years. These documents (management tools) are also the most important for these areas, bearing in mind that the Nature Protection Strategy has not yet been adopted. The mutual harmonization of these documents is especially important. By the analysis of the documents for national parks which have been prepared so far, it can be concluded that no national park has adopted a management plan for the next ten years. Regarding the spatial plans for the special purpose areas, which are also made as long-term planning documents, the spatial plans for the special purpose areas for the Tara and Fruška Gora national parks have been adopted so far (2020 and 2019), while for the Djerdap and Kopaonik national parks are still being developed. The lack of adopted strategic documents makes it difficult to manage national parks, as well as the development of spatial plans for the special purpose areas, given that they must be mutually harmonized in terms of protection measures and regimes. A special problem is the fact that, according to the Law on National Parks from 2015, it is envisaged that national park management plans define protection measures and regimes. Therefore, it is necessary to adopt the missing documents required for strategic management of national parks in the forthcoming period, and above all the Nature Protection Strategy, management plans for all national parks and spatial plans for the special purpose areas for Djerdap and Kopaonik national parks.

The establishment of the council of users is an obligation provided by the Law on National Parks from 2015 and it is concluded that, in the previous period, they were established only for the Tara and Djerdap national parks. Given that these bodies are key for including the interests of the local population and other users of space, it is necessary to continue with the formation of the council of users for the Fruška Gora and Kopaonik national parks in the forthcoming period. In addition, there is a need for greater use of examples of good world practice, cooperation with other national parks, as well as improving strategic management through the use of the obtained results of valuation of protected areas in Serbia conducted by the World Wide Fund for Nature-WWF (Sekulić et al, 2018). In accordance with the above, the conclusion is that the legal framework in the field of nature protection provides a good basis for sustainable management of national parks in Serbia. The activities implemented so far have given good results in improving this area and should be continued in the future.

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