

## INTEGRATING NATURE PROTECTED AREAS IN THEIR WIDER TERRITORIES. A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR ROMANIA

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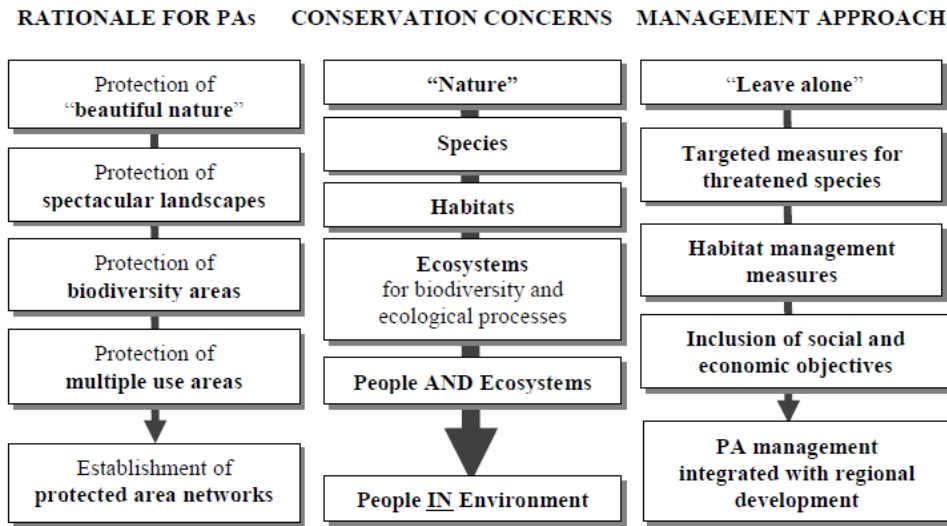
**Abstract.** The approach towards the management of nature protected areas has undergone consistent changes in time, being currently based on a comprehensive vision, which aims for the functional integration of conservation with social-economic development, both vertically and horizontally. The new paradigm of protected areas is backed up by theoretical, pragmatic and normative arguments. The paper presents the theoretical background of this relatively new approach and explores the main determinants for the development of an integrative management of nature protected areas in Romania.

**Keywords:** *protected areas, integrative management, CBD-PoWPA, Romania*

### **1. Changing approaches to the management of protected areas**

In more than one century, the concept of protected area (PA) changed gradually, together with its rationale, instruments and approaches. The different approaches reflect the changing perceptions on and relations with nature, which followed the social-economic and the political evolution of our society since the last part of the XIX<sup>th</sup> century.

At the end of XIX<sup>th</sup> century, conservation measures were meant to defend *the beauty of nature and the natural landscapes* (Fig. 1), for ethical and esthetical reasons, by being totally restrictive for the human interventions. The approach changed gradually, leading to a more scientifically-based ecological conservation, aiming to protect the disappearing species and habitats, as elements and, later than, as functional components of their ecosystems and geosystems. Starting from the '60s the conservation movement passed through a *stage of so-called internationalization*, marked by the development of a conceptual and methodological framework, widely promoted through the international conventions. This phase is followed by a *democratization phase* (focusing on aspects like social equity and public participation, especially from the '70s) and an *ecologisation phase*, which focuses on PA networks, integrated conservation and social-economic development (M. Jungmeier, 2009, Ch. Imboden, 2009).



Source: Alina Ioniță, after Ch. Imboden, 2007

Fig. 1 – Changing approaches to the management of nature protected areas

By taking into account the full complexity of natural and social-economic systems, together with their inseparable ecological, social, economic and cultural interactions, the whole PA management approach became more comprehensive, changing the focus from species to ecosystems, changing the leading paradigms from "leave alone"/"fines and fences" or "fortress conservation" to "co-management" and "community conservation", based on the more inclusive "people in environment" approach (Fig. 1). Thus, it has, more recently, been acknowledged that the "survival of protected areas depends ultimately on the support of local people, rather than on fences, fines and even armed forces" (Sinha P.C., 1998). Stakeholder involvement is currently fundamental to the worldwide conservation policy, being regarded as an instrument for the effective integration of nature protected areas in their territorial context.

## 2. Rationale and arguments for the integrative approach

Protected areas are, most often, fragmented by territorial administrative limits, which assign responsibilities to different decision-makers and separate often competing and divergent interests of economically, socially and politically heterogeneous human communities, often spanning over wide territories. The establishment of formal and, most of the times, invisible borders for some territories, with the aim of protecting them, can't simply nullify the already existing links with the surrounding areas, where the actions of the human society are determined and driven by changing needs. The so called "local communities", situated inside or in the vicinity of a PAs, are also defined by their different interests that are interfering with the PA.

Taking into consideration these interests in a comprehensive approach should result in a regional integrated planning.

The PA management process consists in delivering the appropriate feed-back to the social-economic interactions inside and outside a PA in accordance with the conservation aims. Shaping and permanently adjusting the appropriate management measures can only be done by following the dynamic of the natural and social-economic processes. The social and economic dimension of conservation should be considered by the PA management process as seriously as any other management activity (e.g. habitat mapping, monitoring of protected species, internal zoning and PA design), from the earliest phase of “pre-management”, before the PA is established and throughout the whole management planning and implementation process.

In order to be effective, the management of protected areas can't be undertaken in isolation, it needs to keep up with the changes that occur in their wider territorial context, to adapt and to adjust in accordance with the changing values, demands and relations. The modern management of PAs is underpinned by the premise that “*by integrating the environmental and socio-economic dimension in a balanced fashion, protected areas are indispensable as tools to promote nature conservation and make it a reality*” (Amend et al., 2003). The benefits of this approach are seen as twofold: *effective conservation of natural systems* (through effectively designed and managed systems of PAs and reducing threats) and *support for a sustainable regional development*.

It is generally acknowledged, at least in theory and in the political discourse, that PAs have a potential of enhancing the three dimensional development as these “*carry a big load of aims and arguments that mirror economic but also social and cultural developments*” (Getzner, Jungmeier, 2005). The integrative approach comes as a strategic feed-back to both *the potential of PAs for enhancing sustainable development* and *the increasing human threats*, by promoting the idea that, if appropriately managed, PAs can simultaneously contribute to the conservation of biodiversity and natural landscapes, while supporting the sustainable regional development.

The integration is first of all contributing to an effective conservation. In the same time, the integrative approach has social-economic and political benefits such as: *providing solutions to mitigate the negative social-economic impact of conservation, enabling the dialogue and the partnership* between different stakeholders holding responsibility and decision-making authority in different fields of activity, at different territorial levels, *providing a more viable and robust management framework* by the integration of different interests that is enabling an effective implementation and *supporting sustainable financing*.

In the same time, the integrative approach is underpinned by normative and political arguments. Although the CBD and its Programme of Work on Protected Areas (PoWPA) don't have a binding role, their adoption by 188 countries worldwide represent an important step further towards the integration of their principles, objectives and aims in the national policies and normative frameworks. The integration of protected areas into sectoral plans and strategies is considered as crucial “*if protected areas are to become relevant and seen as essential elements of each*

*country's effort to achieve sustainable development*" (Secretariat of the CBD, 2009). Seeing the integrative approach as needful for securing representative and effectively managed PA systems, the PoWPA set the ambitious aim "*to integrate protected areas into broader land and seascapes and sectors so as to maintain ecological structure and function*" by 2015 (PoWPA, Target 1.2.), which urges for considerable efforts at national and local level.

From point of view of the CBD, the integrative approach helps making conservation a reality by: *improving connectivity and reducing habitat fragmentation* (through an improved PA design, creating linkages between PAs and a better management of habitats and species inside PAs), *improving the management of biodiversity outside PAs* (by pursuing to integrate, through education, awareness and partnerships the ecologically friendly practices in the use of natural resources), *enhancing the provision of ecosystem services at large scales*, etc (Secretariat of the CBD, 2009).

### **3. Pre-conditions and limitations for an effective integration**

In order to make protected areas bring their potential contribution to territorial sustainable development, the three dimensions of sustainability (social, economic and ecologic) need to be taken into account by the authorities in charge with the planning and management of nature protected areas and their surrounding territory, at different scales.

From the point of view of the CBD, the integration of protected areas should involve first of all *the establishment of a coherent network of PAs at national level*, based on the ecosystem approach, including ecological corridors which ensure the maintenance of viable ecological processes and functions and further integrated in a wider international network through trans-boundary partnerships. In the same time, an *integration of PA design and management planning in the wider national land-use and natural resource law and policy* can substantially contribute to maximizing benefits from and mitigating threats to protected areas, thus being essential to the successful achievement of PA's role.

If we consider *the enabling conditions*, ensuring the successful implementation and the feasibility of this approach is strongly dependent on *factors* like: the existence of a legislative framework and the rule of law, the existence of decentralized, powerful PA management institutions, the existence and well functioning of inter-institutional arrangements between the different development sectors and the integration of local needs and interests in planning and decision-making through stakeholder involvement.

The decisions regarding the integration of PAs in their territorial context are not possible to be made by PA practitioners or responsible authorities themselves. Thus, the integrative vision, the approach the objectives and the tools need to be integrated in a *legislative framework* with clear provisions concerning the needed share of authority and responsibility, the functional inter-institutional partnerships at all territorial levels, the mechanisms, etc. Such provisions have to be clearly integrated not only in the legislation concerning the management of PAs but also in the other sectoral laws and policies. The existence of an appropriate legislative framework and

mechanisms ensuring its enforcement is a condition *sine qua non* for the implementation of an integrative approach.

In order to respond to the local needs and to take into account more effectively the interactions that are mainly manifesting at local level, according to one of the CBD ecosystem approach principles, “management should be decentralized to the lowest appropriate level” (Secretariat of the CBD, 2009). The decentralization means not only creating institutions at local level and delegating authority and responsibility but also empowering them and making them efficient. In any governance system, the administrations of PAs are seen as a needed “initiator and coordinator of efforts to make planning more organized and participatory” (Stoll-Kleemann S., Welp M., 2008), which increases the complexity of their mission and their responsibility.

Balancing the social-economic interests with the conservation ones involve a permanent negotiation process. The mere existence of institutions and inter-sectoral partnerships is not sufficient for insuring the management effectiveness for protected areas. Financial and resource allocation functional mechanism are needed in order to ensure the empowerment of PA management governing bodies which are meant to achieve the complex management aims of PAs (including education, public awareness, supporting development of local communities), to initiate and develop effective participative process, to negotiate, to balance contradicting aims and to avoid, mitigate or solve conflicts. The participative management approach represents a tool for the integrative management of protected areas. The effectiveness of this tool depends on the existence of non-institutional administrative structures such as multi-stakeholder bodies engaged in a collaborative or fully joint management together with the governmental institutions. The existence of Consultative/Advisory management Councils/Boards has the aim of representing stakeholders’ interests, views, bringing valuable inputs for management planning, decision-making and implementation of management measures.

“The principle of participation appears to be an institutional means to mitigate problems of global change, reconciling local people with conservationists, and conservation with development” (Galvin M., Haller T., ed. 2008). Participative approaches are “increasingly recognized as an important element of management, planning and decision-making” (Stoll-Kleemann S., Welp M., 2008) due to the fact that these are enhancing acceptance of commonly taken decisions and are integrating knowledge, expertise and the resources specific to each stakeholder involved. Knowing the stakeholders and the possible threats associated to their diverse interests, their involvement through participative processes can function as an open negotiation process, which, if appropriately organized, can prevent conflicts, can determine the setting of more realistic, targeted and efficient long-term management objectives while having the great potential of engaging the resources that the stakeholders have.

The PAs and the area around them, where the local communities live should be regarded as a “zone of competing and cooperating social and political actors making demand on the available natural resources” (Cline-Cole, 2001 cited by Secretariat of the CBD, 2009). A more careful look to the social and economic context of a territory designated as a PA could allow, from the very beginning, even before the legal establishment, shaping a more effective management.

In an initial pre-management planning phase, a preliminary identification of the existing links between the natural and social systems can support the identification of interests and lead to the identification of main categories of stakeholders, favoring the anticipation of their behavior and possibly negative, threatening attitude towards the PA. This kind of evaluation could be done by taking into account *factors* like: the structure of land-use and land ownership inside a PA, the economy of the territory and its dependence of those kind of natural resources which are set aside by a PA, the demographic and economic trends in the local communities around PAs, the already existing pressure on the local natural resources, the economic benefits that the future protected territory offers and has the potential to offer to the local communities, etc. The analysis of social and economic indicators and a territorial analysis should be associated with sociologic methods like: stakeholder analysis, surveys, interviews, etc. This process, as the process of integrative social and economic assessment which has to be done in the management preparation should be “*based on published information and statistics, plus conversations and interviews with stakeholders*” (Secretariat of the CBD, 2009).

Ensuring the continuity of this approach over time, throughout the management cycle process (from the PA design stage further to the management planning and management phase) is also essential for the successful achievement of management objectives.

#### **4. Major challenges for the integrative management of nature protected areas in Romania**

The main aspects that are hindering the effective integration of PAs in their wider territorial context in Romania derive from the defective enabling context and from the manner in which their management planning was organized. At a national level, the most important factors are:

- *the legislative provisions*, setting normative obligations for the integration of PA management objectives in local and regional development plans and for the inter-institutional share of responsibilities;
- *the PA governance types*, the representation of non-conventional stakeholders in the management process and the effectiveness of participatory processes in integrating the social-economic dimension of the surrounding territories;
- *the authority, legitimacy and the capacity of PA administrative bodies*.

According to the IUCN classification of PA **governance types** (Dudley N, 2008), most of the PAs in Romania (except for the Natura 2000 sites) are *government/state managed*. The PA management authority and responsibility belongs to the Ministry of Environment and Forests (former Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development). At a sub-national territorial level, the situation differs for the different categories of PAs: national parks, nature parks and biosphere reserve have their own Administrations, which are directly subordinated to and budgeted by the Ministry, while for the other categories of PAs, the management responsibility can be assigned, on a contractual basis, to a custodian (any willing individual, institution or

organization that proves the human, technical and financial management capacity). The primary management objectives are decided by the state authorities in accordance with the IUCN categories, while the custodians and the administrations are elaborating the management plans, setting the operational objectives and holding the responsibility for their effective implementation.

The natural resources and the land inside and outside the PAs are managed by different institutions, the PA Administrations having given the responsibility to coordinate and control the actions of other stakeholders, in relation with the management objectives. The PAA (especially in national and nature parks) is not directly responsible for the management of any particular land use category. In the same time, there is an increasing fragmentation of land ownership due to the process of restitution, started after 1990 and not yet completed. Forms of *collaborative management/ governance* and *private governance* are also in place, but in a small number of cases.

**The law** includes provisions enabling the stakeholders to be involved in the management process, so that their interests are taken into account. The access to information and decision making is guaranteed for the good application of conservation measures. *“The establishment and management (of protected areas) will take into consideration the interests of the local communities, facilitating the participation of their representatives in the consultative councils for the application of the measures for protection, conservation and sustainable use of natural resources, encouraging the use of local traditional practices and knowledge in valuing these resources for the benefit of the local communities”* (OUG 57/2007, Art. 10). Clear provisions concerning participation and the integration of stakeholders’ interests exist in the law only for those PAs having their own administrative structures established (national parks, nature parks, biosphere reserves). Each PA Administration has its own **Consultative Council**, its members being designated by the PA Administration and approved by the Ministry. It has a consultative role, the final decisions at PA level being taken by the PA Administration, with the approval of the **Scientific Council** – a group of specialists meant to ensure the technical expertise for the management (Fig.2).

The consultative role assigned to these stakeholder bodies doesn’t give them the power to influence decision-making. In the same time, the capacity to argue and negotiate for certain (individual, group or public) interests depends not only on the knowledge and abilities of each stakeholder, but also on the capacity of each PA Administration (PAA) to identify the key stakeholders, to inform them and to convince them to join the debates in this context of weak empowerment, to balance their interests and to negotiate.

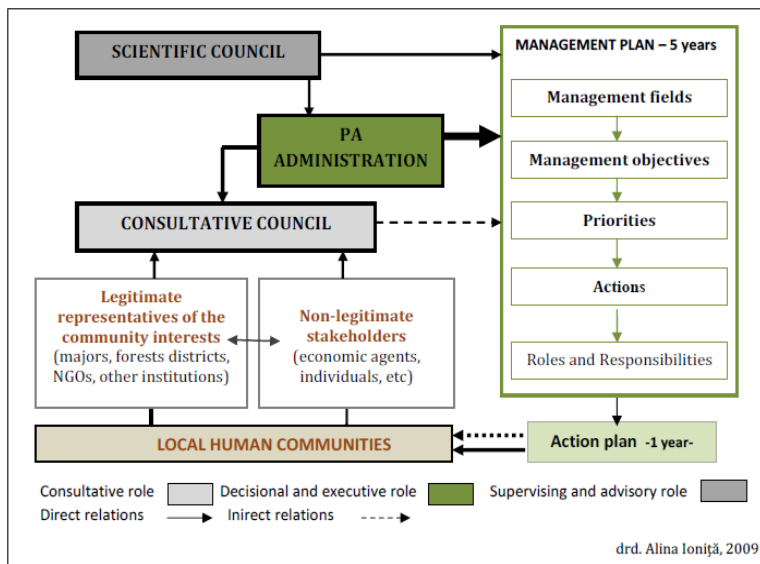


Figure 2 - Administrative structures, relations and the integration of stakeholders in the management of national and nature parks in Romania

The members of each Consultative Councils are usually:

- *national decision makers* (e.g. Ministry of Environment, Ministry of Agriculture, National Authority for tourism and their sub-national bodies, National Academy of Natural Sciences);
- *regional authorities and stakeholders* (e.g. County Councils, Prefecture, County Forest Administration, ONGs, Universities, county Mountain Rescue Units),
- *local decision makers and stakeholder*, such as:
  - *The Forest Districts* (which are managing the state forest, forest of private owners and local administrations and are subordinated to the National Forest Administration),
  - *Associations of Land Owners* (managing private or communal forest or pasture independently to the state owned structures),
  - *city/town halls or representatives of communal councils'* (which in many cases are owing forest and pastures in the PAs, and are also theoretically representing the interests and the needs of the local communities in the PA neighboring area),
  - some *representatives of the tourism sector* – some accommodations and tourism services providers, the local Mountain Rescue Units – responsible for maintaining the quality of the tourism paths and infrastructures like refuges in the mountains,
  - *local NGOs*.

The national park Administrations has the obligation to organize Consultative Councils at least once a year and anytime it is necessary.



The decisions on current management issues (based on the management plan and the annual Action plan for the implementation of the management plan) are taken by the PAA, the most important decisions having to be approved by the Scientific Council (Fig. 2). Local stakeholders are not directly involved in making decisions but they have the opportunity to express their opinion on major management issues, if brought into discussions by the PAA at the Consultative Councils.

**The management planning process** for the large PAs was undertaken by their Administrations, by following the guidelines developed by the Ministry in collaboration with external experts, NGOs and the key stakeholders. In most of the cases only institutional stakeholders were involved in the evaluation of threats and opportunities, in the establishment of goals, actions and responsibilities. During the management planning and implementation process in Romania, in most of the cases the meetings with the Consultative Councils were meant to debate and approve the Management Plans. The lack of knowledge on the issue of conservation on behalf of the stakeholders, together with the insufficient capacity of the PA Administrations to communicate their aims resulted in a significant rate of absence to the final consultative meetings. Sometimes the most important stakeholders, as the land owners or managers and the mayoralties were absent. In consequence, the consultation was rather formal and its effectiveness in integrating the territorial realities in the management plan and *planning together* is questionable.

Regarding **the capacity of PAAs** to play the role of a local authority, capable to initiate and coordinate the achievement of complex management objectives through local partnerships and dialogue, there is an obvious need to empower and capacitate them by improving the number and quality of human resources and by ensuring a sustainable financing. Most of the PAs in Romania are currently managed in a forestry regime, by the local or regional territorial offices of the National Forest Administration (NFA). The PAs (especially national and natural parks) can apply for funding in order to accomplish the management objectives and are free to initiate partnerships with other institutions or organizations. PAAs can also organize their own economic activities for supplementing their budgets but there is little capacity for most of them to earn a significant percentage of their income from such activities.

Although the current management plans include a social-economic and cultural assessment of the local communities, no structured stakeholder analysis was undertaken. The relationship between the local communities and the PAs are not systematically analyzed, and are not allowing, in most of the cases, for an adequate integration of the social and economic context (e.g. economic benefits, economic impacts and trends, etc).

The integration of PA management objectives in local and regional development plans is still inadequate, although their elaboration takes into account the specificity of the protection regime and multi-stakeholders working group are established. The PA managers are not constantly informed or consulted in development issues by the responsible authorities and there is not the case for a pro-active involvement. Local development plans, especially for the rural communities (which are representing a big majority of the "local communities") and their implementation is not, in most of the cases based on a permanent reference to statistical data characterizing the evolution of

social and economic phenomenon, which should be permanently monitored, but it is rather an “ad-hoc” planning, determined by the usually insufficient human and financial capacity of the local administrations.

## Conclusions

The integrative approach to the PA management is widely promoted as the best way to achieve both conservation and regional development goals. As it takes into account the whole complexity of interactions between the social-economic and natural systems, it offers multiple opportunities for a sustainable development and regional development. This integration calls for complex legislative and institutional arrangements, integrated assessments, inter-institutional partnerships and a participative governance process at all the territorial levels.

Although there are many opportunities for implementing this approach, already adopted at national level in Romania, there are some aspects which need to be improved in order to achieve the complex objectives in the practice of spatial planning. Spatial planning for the PA management and regional development are still representing two different directions aiming to achieve sometimes divergent objectives for the same territories. Strengthening the authority at local level and the capacity of the PAAs, integrating in the law more clear provisions regarding the mechanisms of integration and the obligation to undertake a social-economic analysis of the local communities, based on statistical data (master-plans for the PAs and the neighboring areas), promoting and developing forms of joint and collaborative governance for PAs and offering more clear legislative provisions with regard to inter-institutional partnerships for development planning at local level, transparency and stakeholder involvement (both in PA management and in development planning), strengthening the role and the capacity of the existing Consultative Councils, would support the effective integration of PAs in their wider territorial context, which would contribute to a sustainable regional development.

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