



2014-2016

Karaburun-Sazan SEAMED project

Communications strategy 2014-2016

Karaburun-Sazan SEAMED project

Context

In Albania, the SEA-Med project aims to support the development of a sustainable tourism management plan for the Karaburun-Sazan National Marine Park, the one and newest MPA in Albania, and the surrounding area. It also aims the advancement of more sustainable practices within the tourism sector of Vlora region, specifically the Orikum municipality and the intensification of local, nature-based, tourism offers associated to the Karaburun-Sazan National Marine Park and Llogara through a step by step multi stakeholder engagement.

The first MPA in Albania

Karaburun–Sazan Marine National Park is a marine protected area (MPA) adopted on the 28th of April 2010 by the Council of Ministers. The MPA which covers 12,570.82 ha is an area of diverse marine and costal habitats, rich biodiversity and species of special importance and critical status. It is the habitat of Posidonia meadows (*Posidonia oceanica*), red coral (*Corallium rubrum*), date mussel (*Litophaga litophaga*), different fish species, random visitors of marine turtles (*Caretta caretta*), monk seals (*Monachus monachus*), short baked dolphin (*Delphinus delphis*) and diverse natural sites (*beaches, cliffs, lagoon, mountain, island, caves*) that today are preserved in a wild natural status.

In early 1992, began in Albania a long-term transition from totalitarianism towards democracy and from a centralized command economy to one based on a private market. During this period, the Albanian economy has grown with a strong development of the seaside municipalities and communes.

Within the most recent Albanian Government Development Programme (2009-2013) tourism is considered as one of the three priority economic sectors that can ensure rapid and stable economic development in Albania, alongside agro-industry and exports. In Albania, over the past few years, the tourist number has steadily increased to 2.3 million in 2011, with an increase of the average incomes generated by 11-14 % (government data).

Towards a sustainable tourism development

So far, tourism development along the stretch of the coast from Vlora to Orikum has been unplanned and mostly geared towards a “sand-sea-sun” model. An estimated accommodation capacity exists in the region, but most of the hotels are built without following international standards. In Orikum, informal accommodations are usually offered during the summer season. No official and reliable record of tourism data exists in Albania.

The natural sites of the MPA have benefited from limited human activity by being a military zone since dictator regime and till August 2013; today it is partially under the Ministry of Defense with still limited access to the area. During the last seven years till

2013 there was a moratorium on boats. Inside the MPA there are currently no constructions and no touristic activity is developed, but unavoidable human activities such as illegal fishing and collection of marine invertebrates, fish farming, solid waste, maritime traffic and ships anchoring near the MPA have taken place. Recently some tourism activities are being developed.

In this context, environmental NGOs in Albania can play an important role in engaging national, local authorities and the private sector and making them accountable for biodiversity protection and communities' welfare. Over the last few years, INCA has been particularly active in federating nature conservation NGOs into a network with the aim to support sustainable tourism development in the Vlora region.

As a key component of the project, a communications strategy has been developed and is presented below following a specific communications workshop held in Vlora in April 2014.

I - Key information about the project

1. Goal

1. Raise the capacity of an empowered Albanian community capable to contribute and benefit from the participatory planning and management of economic activities in the Vlora region and provide it with the tools and opportunities to successfully achieve the integration of nature conservation with coastal tourism development.
2. Support the development of a sustainable tourism management plan for Karaburun Sazan National Marine Park and the surrounding area, the advancement of more sustainable practices within the tourism sector in the Vlora region and Orikum municipality.

2. Objectives

1. By 2017, development of a sustainable tourism plan (including monitoring, a communications and education plan and marketing/outreach plan – produced through a step-by-step, multi-stakeholders approach for Karaburun-Sazan Marine National Park (Albania).
2. By 2017, at least one nature-based tourism initiative implemented to promote community development.
3. By 2017, public understanding (at country level) of the benefits of MPAs and their potential for sustainable tourism enhanced, decision-makers engagement and investments in MPAS improved.
4. A conservation community has the knowledge, skills and capacity and is actively engaged in the development of the management plan.

3. Key activities per objective

Objective 1 > development of the sustainable tourism management

Act1: Steering committee meeting every 6 month

Act2: Development of the management plan by end 2014

Act3: Approval of the management plan by successive institutional bodies

Act4: Development of the sustainable tourism plan by end 2016

Objective 2 > Nature-based initiative

Act1: Assessment on nature based activities by end of April 2014

Act2: Assessment on certification in Albania by end of April 2014

Act3: Steering committee (both management plan et tourism plan) in June 2014

Act4: Survey with Tourism sector over summer 2014

Act5: Survey with Tourists/MPA & resources' knowledge, expectations, satisfaction/services offered by the existing tourism sector over summer 2014

Act6: Evaluation of summer surveys – Autumn 2014

Act 7: Launch of Competition with potential actors – Winter/Spring 2015

Act8: Pilot phase with 2 to 3 potential nature based activities (small grants for testing) – Summer 2015

Act9: Large grant for the selected nature-based activity – Summer 2016

Objective 3 > raising public understanding and engaging decision-makers

Act 1: Development of a COMS strategy

- Communications workshop in Vlora

- Development of COMS by end May

- Implementation until end of project

Act2: Organization of media work and press work

- Local radio programmes in Jan 2014

Objective 4 > raising the knowledge of the conservation community and engaging them in the management plan development

Act 1: Trainings and Exchanges visits to Tavolara...

Act2: Promote and facilitate the establishment of a CSOs network in Albania

Act3: Producing information tools on the MPA and its benefits.