



# Branding of protected areas and National Parks: A case study of Montenegro

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## Abstract

Protected areas with their beauty, richness and diversity represent the core value and one of the most important natural values of every country. Protected areas represent not only important instruments for preserving biodiversity, but they also contain enormous potential for social and economic development. However, these potentials are not yet sufficiently recognized. Nowadays, the key issue in managing protected natural areas is to define and choose the most favorable natural resource management strategy that will at the same time satisfy all development criteria. In that sense, the marketing issue is one of the most crucial ones, having in mind the fact that protected areas represent very specific tourist destinations that have to be adequately preserved, protected, valorized and promoted. This paper focuses on the results of the research that was carried out in Montenegro in order to improve the process in the branding of national parks and protected areas in Montenegro and to promote and valorize them in an appropriate manner based on the critically important principles of sustainable development. Any sustainable tourism development guidelines and management practices should also be applicable to all forms of tourism and in a wide variety of destinations, including mass tourism and the various niche tourism segments. Sustainability is critical as it denotes the environmental, economic, and socio-cultural facets of tourism development, and thus it is vital that a suitable balance must be established amongst its various dimensions so as to assure its enduring sustainability. This implies that optimum use be made of environmental resources that constitute a significant components in tourism development, and which preserve indispensable ecological processes which support the conservation of natural heritage and wide ranges of biodiversity.

**Keywords:** Montenegro, national parks, protected areas, branding, tourism.

## Introduction

The governments of countries with protected areas are faced with making strategic decisions regarding the enhancing of added value of these areas (Martinic, 2010). Having in mind the fact that Montenegro has five national parks which are spread over 7,85% of the territory of Montenegro, as well as many protected areas that are not adequately protected, preserved, valorized and promoted, as well as the vision of Montenegro to become high quality whole-year



destination based on the balanced development of the North and the South (Montenegro Tourism's Development Strategy to 2020), it is clear why in the future, national parks and protected areas should be one of the main pillars of future tourist and economic development.

The future development of tourism of national parks and protected areas based on sustainable development, could be one of the key instruments to drive a more balanced tourist development of the country, promotion of the unique beauty of the north and central parts of Montenegro, a reduction of migrations from the North, as well as one of the mechanisms for the improvement of the socio-economic status of local people.

The aim of this paper is thus to hopefully improve the process of branding of national parks and protected areas in Montenegro and to promote and valorize them in appropriate ways based on the principles of sustainable development. The process of branding will represent the initial step in creation of a marketing-management strategy of future development of these areas.

### **Branding of national parks and protected areas in Montenegro**

The diversity of geological formations, landscape, climate and land, as well as the position of Montenegro on the Balkan Peninsula and the Adriatic, have created the conditions for the formation of biological diversity with very high values that place the country in the biological hotspots of both European and global biodiversity. The number of species per unit area (or Simpson's diversification index) in Montenegro is 0.837 (1 is the highest possible value), which is the highest recorded in all European countries. Montenegro has internationally recognized areas: two Ramsar areas and two UNESCO areas.

The Ramsar areas are Tivat Solila, a special flora and fauna reserve located in the coastal belt of the Tivat Bay between the Odoljenštica and Koločun rivers, and the Montenegrin part of the Skadar Lake (2006). The UNESCO areas are the natural area of the Durmitor National Park (1980) and the natural and cultural-historical area of Kotor (1979). The national network of protected natural areas covers 124,964 ha or more than 9% of the land surface of Montenegro. Five national parks were declared: Durmitor, (1952., 39.000 ha), Skadar Lake (1983., area 40.000 ha), Lovćen (1952., 5.650 ha) (Biogradska gora, 1952, area 5.650 ha) and Prokletije (2009, area 16,630). Montenegro is making concerted efforts to achieve the goal of the National Strategy for Sustainable Development and international recommendations of 10% of the protected territory, which include nature monuments, general and special reserves and areas of special occasional characteristics.

The World Congress of Parks, held every ten years, is a barometer for global policy development towards protected areas. At the last two congresses, there has been significant progress towards the integration of social and economic objectives in the management of protected areas. At the Congress in 1992, new categories of protected areas were introduced to the IUCN, including V and VI, which allow the use of resources (Locke & Dearden, 2005)

All marketing activities at the level of the tourist destination tend to promote the main elements of the destination itself in order to attract potential tourists as well to valorize all products and services during their stay so as to meet their expectations and create loyal, satisfied customers (Gasic, Ivanovic, Stojiljkovic & Peric, 2014). According to statistics from the end of the last century, hundreds of millions of tourists visited protected areas and national parks within the USA and Canada (Hall & Page, 2002). Today, protected areas are used not only to preserve biodiversity but also, among other goals, to protect landscapes and cultural assets. Moreover, protected areas



are even promoted as solutions to democratic issues, poverty and globalization (Mackelworth & Jovanovic, 2011).

Like all other brands, those for protected areas include not only tangible, but intangible elements as well. The tangible elements include the brand, logo, colors, design and visuals used for the presentation (Kotler & Keller, 2008). On the other side, intangible or emotional elements include all the experiences of the visitors relating to the the brand itself. The comprehensive positive brand stimulates affirmative thoughts, beliefs and associations and the visitors feels a better connection with a particular place or area, and as a consequence he or she behaves in a way that is appropriate for a protected area. Visitors tend to return and suggest the area to their families and friends.

A negative emotional reaction can cause undesirable effects or lead to the choice of another location to visit. Branding plays a key role in not only promotion, but in preservation and valorization of particular area. However, the practice in Montenegro and the inconsistent presentation of the brand of protected areas makes it difficult for visitors to become aware of the brand and its values. For example, the World Heritage brand is almost unknown in the territory of Montenegro and is very rarely used, and even when used it is often misrepresented. In many cases, visitors did not know that some particular location is World Heritage area before the visit, while even during their visit that information is not adequately interpreted and presented to visitors. Unfortunately, it is clear that most of the stakeholders in Montenegro rarely use maximum potential of brands, which limits the adequate promotion of national parks and protected areas on the market as well as their adequate valorization based on principles on visibility.

## **Methodology**

The research was, according to the original questionnaire designed for this purpose, and conducted during the period from May to October 2018. The methodological method used for the collection of data was a survey. The first phase was the production of a questionnaire to meet the needs of this paper. The questionnaire contained a total of ten questions. The questions asked about the recognition of the visual identity of National Parks symbols in Montenegro. The questionnaire contained open-ended questions in which respondents independently presented their opinions and their attitudes. Closed questions were also used in which respondents chose one of the offered answers.

The questionnaires were in each of the English, Russian, Montenegrin/Serbian/Croatian/Bosnian, and Albanian languages. Respondents comprised of both domestic and foreign tourists. Respondents were selected by means of a random sample method, the sample was stratified, and all interviewers were thoroughly familiar with the method of interviewing of tourists. Ethical aspects were considered and no person was obliged to participate and was not incetivised to do so.

## **Results**

The analysis carried out in the National Parks of Montenegro showed that more than 80% of visitors were not familiar with the park's logos.

**Table 1:** Recognition of logo National Parks of Montenegro

		Skadar Lake	Lovćen	Biogradska gora	Durmitor	Prokletije
<b>Are you familiar with logo of national park?</b>	<b>Yes</b>	20%	21%	10%	20%	0%
	<b>No</b>	80%	79%	90%	80%	100%

The survey started with the visual characteristics of logo of National Parks. This brand was created by the proclamation of parks of Durmitor and Biogradska Gora in 1952. With more than 60 years of publicity and millions of visitors a year, it should be one of the most attractive and recognizable logos with a great impact on tourists and the brand of protected areas in Montenegro, especially in terms of tourism (Figure 1).



**Figure 1:** Logo of National Park of Montenegro

When asked about logo of National Parks and their visual identity and associations connected with national parks and protected areas, visitors mostly answered that the level of association is quite low -2.28, while the visual identity is graded even worse (table 2). Visitors rating of visual identity of National Parks is describe at table 3.

Level of association with visual identity of National park	Extremely low	Low	Average	Good	Great	<b>Average mark (1-5)</b>
	36.84%	21.05%	26.32%	8.77%	7.02%	<b>2.28</b>

**Table 2 :** Level of association with visual identity of National park

Visual identity	I don't like it at all		I like it	I am indifferent	I like it	I adore it	Average mark (1-5)
NP Skadar Lake	8.20%		4.92%	34.43%	34.43%	18.03%	<b>3.49</b>
NP Lovcen	20.00%		38.33%	23.33%	15.00%	3.33%	<b>2.43</b>
NP Biogradska gora	20.00%		46.67%	25.00%	6.67%	1.67%	<b>2.23</b>
NP Prokletije	8.47%		8.47%	32.20%	33.90%	16.95%	<b>3.42</b>
NP Durmitor	45.00%		31.67%	16.67%	0.00%	6.67%	<b>1.92</b>

**Table 3:** Visitors rating of visual identity of National Parks

Regarding to other logos, the results are provided on figure 2 and figure 3.



**Figure 2:** Logos of NP Skadar Lake, NP Lovcen, NP and NP Biogradska Gora



**Figure 3:** Logos of NP Prokletije i NP Durmitor

## Discussion

Not having the ambition to deal with issues regarding design, is generally something that is obvious even for people who are not experts in this field and the fact is that there is a huge disbalance between characteristics of logos that belong to the same group of National Parks:

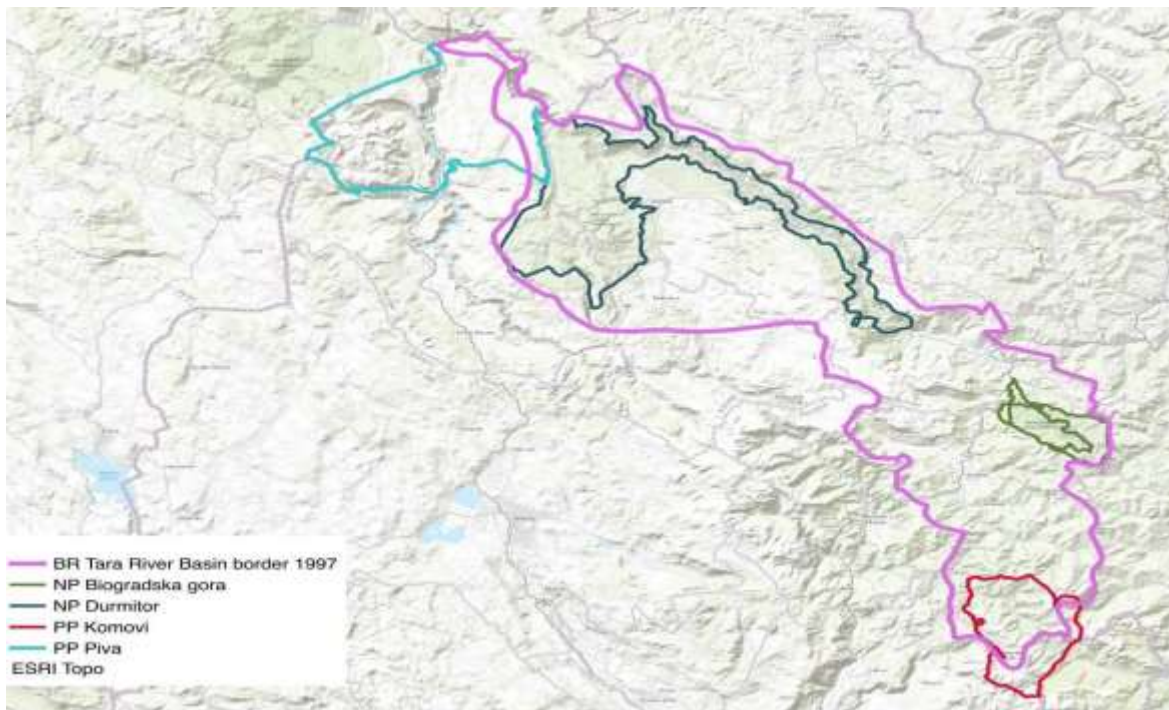
- Typographic disharmony - differences in prints and styles;
- Incompatibility of the letter - older design solutions apply a Cyrillic alphabet, and the latter use Latin;
- Visual imbalances - the lack of a common elements in these logos- they are visually completely different in shape, symbols, characteristics, colours etc. and its almost impossible

to conclude that they represent the same category.

Although some of the logos use interesting elements which can communicate with visitors like pelicans or bears, their presentation is not realized in a proper way. Except that, the fact that in some of the logos too many elements are used which looks confusing, while usage of even more than five colours on the same logo is not in line with professional principles of design and looks somewhat annoying. Something that should also be considered is the possibility of the branding of the Tara River Basin which has the status of a Biosphere Reserve of Biosphere since 1977. It is a part of the National Park and has a World Heritage status which is assigned only to those locations and areas that meet the criteria defined by the World Heritage Convention.

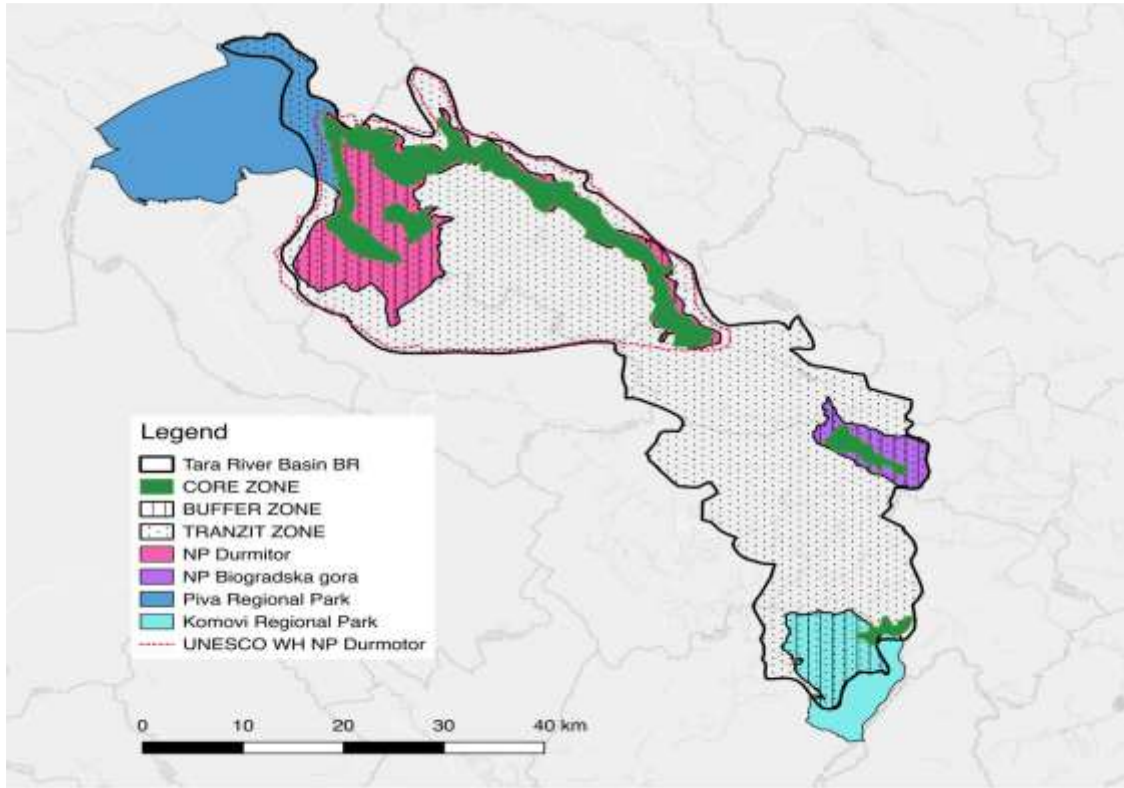
Something that is clearly a fact is that Tara River Basin is not treated as a special tourist destination in Montenegro, and therefore it is not promoted in such a way. This is obviously a wrong approach, taking into account that Tara is not only part of the Durmitor National Park, or only a part of some of the six municipalities whose territory occupies, but it is one of the most beautiful and most valuable areas in Montenegro. With one of the deepest and most beautiful canyons of the world, the Tara River Basin is a brand that should be created and promoted independently over the forthcoming years and it is an excellent basis for creating a recognizable solution that would enable global recognizability of a pristine part of the world. It is extremely optimistic that the framework for valorization and promotion of the Tara River Basin as a tourist destination has already been defined by national tourism strategies. According to the Montenegrin Tourism Development Strategy until 2020, the existing brand of "Wild Beauty" will be the focus of future marketing efforts, as an umbrella brand for individual brands of locations and regions. Taking into account the area covered by the Tara basin, it can be treated as a unique protected area of international importance, which is also recognized by its status as a Biosphere Reserve (MAB) since 1977.

In Figure 4 it is possible an area with the status of nature reserve and world heritage is presented:



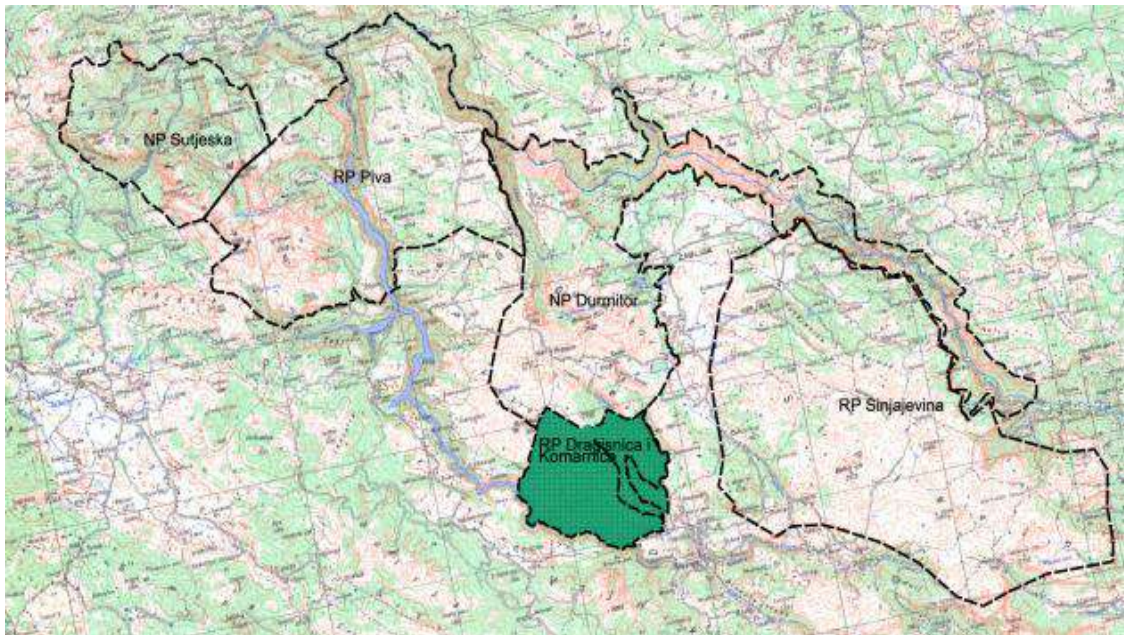
**Figure 4:** An area with a status of a nature reserve and a world heritage site

In Figure 5. Zoning within the area in accordance with the UNESCO guidelines is presented:



**Figure 5:** Zoning within the area in accordance with the UNESCO guidelines

At the same time, significant enlargements of protected areas in this area are planned for the next two years:



**Figure 6:** Plan for extending protected areas in the upcoming period



These illustrations and plans also lead to the conclusion that Tara River Basin should be branded and promoted as separate unique area.

## Conclusion

The achievement of the expected results relating to the the protection of both natural and cultural aspects is directly related to the level of awareness, understanding, support and coordination between stakeholders in terms of the various benefits provided by protected areas. Strategic management of branded protected areas based on principles of sustainability can significantly improve preservation, protection, promotion and valorization of both the natural and cultural heritage in national parks and protected areas and it represents the necessary precondition for their successful positioning in the global tourism market.

By using branding strategies that develop brand awareness, explaining the meaning of the brand and its importance, managers can not only engage visitors' emotions and encourage positive behaviors, but also improve the management of protected areas and provide their sustainable development . A visual identity guide for national parks and protected areas can be a very useful tool for managers in order to preserve, protect, promote and valorize them on the market.

In addition, it is equally necessary to work on the development and implementation of national strategic acts and plans in order to strengthen the brand of national parks and all protected areas. All the activities should be coordinated at all levels of international, regional, national and local and all stakeholders including institutions, the National Tourism Organization, local tourist organisations, visitors, local inhabitants etc., should be included in their realization in order to reach strategic goals and position Montenegro as high quality tourism destination whose development is based on the preservation, protection and valorization of national parks and protected areas and this is also in accordance with principles of sustainable development.

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