

Determining Factors Influencing Local Communities' Perceptions of Ecosystem Services in Divjakë-Karavasta National Park, Albania

Zenepe Dafku¹, Pascal Chevalier², Philippe Le Grusse³

¹Universite Paul Valery Montpellier 3, CIHEAM IAMM, Agricultural University of Tirana

²Universite Paul Valery Montpellier 3

³CIHEAM IAMM

Email: zdafku@ubt.edu.al

Ecosystem services are integral to environmental preservation and the promotion of sustainable development. These services rely heavily on the perceptions of local residents to enhance ecosystem functionality. Our research is dedicated to exploring the perspectives of local communities regarding the preservation of ecosystem services and their contribution to the sustainable management of Divjakë-Karavasta National Park. Ecosystem services, as classified by the Millennium Ecosystem Assessment in 2005, encompass four types: provisioning, cultural, regulating, and supporting. These services are essential for the well-being and livelihoods of neighboring communities. Divjakë-Karavasta National Park is a rich source of ecosystem services and plays a significant role, not only locally but also at regional, national, and international levels. To ensure the continuity of ecosystem services and promote sustainable development, it is crucial to establish a strong connection with and garner a broad perspective from the local community. Our study involves conducting surveys with 201 respondents to assess local perceptions, knowledge, and attitudes related to ecosystem services within the national park. Furthermore, our research focuses on how these perceptions affect community involvement in park management, conservation initiatives, and the sustainable utilization of natural resources. Our primary findings indicate that proximity to the park and local economic activities significantly influence the perception of ecosystem services. These findings contribute to an elaborate relationship between local communities and the natural environment in this protected area, offering valuable insights for community engagement, sustainable development, and the preservation of the park's natural resources.

Keywords: ecosystem services, perception of the local community, preservation, proximity, Divjakë-Karavasta National Park



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