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## **PROTECTED NATURAL RESOURCES: MEDIA REPRESENTATIONS OF NATIONAL PARKS**

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**Abstract:** This paper attempts to set trends of reporting about national parks as exquisite units of national importance through the research of online editions of dominant media in Serbia. Since 2009 the entire set of "green laws" was adopted, the great progress has been made in this area, and the research will refer to the next year of 2010 so it can be detected how much is the public informed by the means of communication about ambient, ecologic, aesthetic and recreational potentials of the national parks in Serbia.

**Key words:** protected natural resources, national parks, Serbia, media representations

### **Introduction**

The spirit of a modern man is in a great deal marked by the emersion of media of mass communication, especially the Internet. Direct personal experience is not sufficient for the individual to form the more complete image of reality. For that reason media by its intersession in the process of communication become creative centres which in much expand the boundaries of knowledge. Media do not reflect the reality, but they represent it, and representation creates meaning. That is the process of "signifying practice". That is the process of producing the meaning and devising the reality (Hall, 1998). It is the active process of selection, highlighting, structuring and shaping of media messages. It would take a lot of time to evaluate media representations by personal experience and it would have been a painstaking job. That is why our attitudes towards individual social subjects, activities, aspects and problems are by the great influence of the media.

In the same way media interfere in the creation of our experience of natural environment and geographic space. The geographic space is very important cohesive factor of every social group, because the identity was in a good deal

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based on the space we live in. For that reason, natural environment cannot be neutral system, and the media have the main role in creating the image of that environment. Nowadays, that is especially important, when it is, in the public discourse of many countries in the world, even more discussed about conservation of the nature, ecologic disasters, extinction of certain animal and plant species, organic production of food. It showed that, with national parks being the spaces with natural ecosystems of a great value concerning conservation and complexity of biogeographic criterion, it is necessary for the public to be acquainted with all the strategies, plans and promotion of its protection. The media have the main role in that.

The first national park was founded in 1872 in the USA, the Yellowstone. In Europe, the first national park was founded in 1909 in Sweden. In Serbia, the first national park Fruška Gora was founded in 1960. Today there are five national parks and this work will try to establish which ideas about them media in Serbia create.

### **Background and research context**

Serbia, in the transition between centuries, came through great changes: disintegration of Yugoslavia, wars, the break of socialism, the new democratic processes and transition all led to certain conflicts of social subsystems (political, cultural, economic, media). The transition showed as very long and difficult process which leaves both positive and negative consequences. In some periods, due to permanent political tension, economic uncertainty and social uncertainty, Serbia did not pay enough attention to its conservation. However, the approximation to European Union and the official determination of the officials in Serbia after the 10/5 2000 for the process of merging and integration, demanded greater strategy, planning and legal care about natural environment. Apart from that, nothing much has been done for the several years.

Since the process of joining EU has three key elements (harmonisation of legislation, the development of administrative and institutional capacities, economic instruments), it is important to establish how much did Serbia approach the EU in domain of protection and conservation of natural resources. The protection of natural environment is one of the essential European values, and in most of the modern constitutions, the right for healthy environment is set as one of the basic human rights. The legislation of EU implies the existence, of laws, directives and regulations, and the members of EU are in obligation to adjust national legislations to provide realizations of plans and goals. The first European Environmental Action Programme (EAP) was adopted in 1973. Six

programmes have been adopted so far. The 6<sup>th</sup> Environmental Action Programme (2001-2010) suggests, among others, the strategy “of empowering people as private citizens and helping them to change behaviour“ (EU Environmental), which means that the important role of well informed citizens who are actively involved in the making of the decisions about the protection of environment has been recognized. Media can bring a great contribution to it.

In Serbia, 30% of laws that should be adjusted with the laws of EU refer to the environmental area. According to evaluation of European Commission, the greatest progress of Serbia in the approaching EU in the sector of environment has been made in 2009: “Good progress can be reported in the area of the environment, notably with the adoption of a large package of laws and the ratification of several international conventions“ (Serbia 2009 Progress Report). Sixteen laws have been adopted that year (from which some have waited since 2002) which refer to environment and conservation of nature among which are the Law on Waste Management, Law on Fish Stocks, Law on Protection of Air, Law on Protection from Noise in the Environment and Law on Nature Protection. In the latter one, the nature is defined as the part of environment, but also as a welfare from the public interest for Republic of Serbia, which has the particular protection set by law. “Natural values are natural resources as renewable or non-renewable geological, hydrological and biological value which, directly or indirectly, can be used or applied, and have real or potential economic value and natural welfare as the parts of nature which deserve a special protection” (The Law on Nature Protection, 2009).

Since 2009 the entire set of “green laws“ was adopted, the great progress has been made in this area, and the research will refer to the next year of 2010 so it can be detected how much is the public informed by the means of media about national parks being very important protected natural resources.

By the Law on Nature Protection, protected areas, protected species and mobile protected natural documents belong to the protected natural resources. In the section of protected areas, several categories are established: narrow nature reserve, special nature reserve, national park, natural monument, protected habitat, the area of exquisite distinction and the nature park.

There are total 428 protected natural resources in Serbia; 5 national parks, 16 nature parks, 15 areas of exquisite distinction, 70 nature reserves, 284 natural monuments which makes 6,2% of the territory of the Republic of Serbia. Also,

215 plant species and 427 animal species were put under protection.<sup>2</sup> The main subjects in the conservation of the nature are: Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, Provincial Secretariat for the Protection of the Environment and Sustainable Development, Agency for Environmental Protection, Fund for the Protection of the Environment and Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia which runs the central register of protected natural welfare.

By declaration of the International Union for Conservation of Nature, national parks belong to the second category of protected areas and are defined as "large natural or near natural areas set aside to protect large-scale ecological processes, along with the complement of species and ecosystems characteristic of the area, which also provide a foundation for environmentally and culturally compatible spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational and visitor opportunities" (IUCN). Similar to this, The Law on Nature Protection in the article 30 defines national park as "area with a large number of different natural ecosystems of the national importance, esteemed characteristics of the area and cultural heritage in which man lives in harmony with nature, all meant for conservation of the existing natural values, and for satisfying the scientific, educational, spiritual, aesthetic, cultural, touristic, health-recreational needs and other activities according to the grounds of the protection of the nature and sustainable development" (The Law on Nature, Protection). The Parliament of Serbia made a decision about declaration of national parks.

There are five national parks in Serbia. All the parks are public enterprises and members of IUCN and EUROPARC foundations. The area they assume is 158,958 ha.

The oldest national park in Serbia is Fruška Gora, founded in 1960. It includes massif Fruška Gora that spreads on the southern border of Pannonian Plain, by the very coast of the Danube. The park is famous for its geological structure and composition of rocks from almost all geological periods, and represents the real example of geological past of this area.

National park Kopaonik has been protected in 1981 and it spreads on the highest and the most conserved parts of mountain Kopaonik, which rises in the central part of southern Serbia. Kopaonik is marked by high degree of geobiological diversity. More than 1600 species of plants were found here, among which there

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<sup>2</sup> The data are from 2009, and are showed in the publication released by Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning: *Methodology of fast assessment and prioritization of managing protected areas*.

are three Kopaonik's endemics: Kopaonička spruce (*Sempervivumkopaonikensis*), Kopaonička violet (*Viola kopaonikensis*) and Pančićeve watercress (*Cardaminepancicii*). The ecological diversity led to diversity of animal world.

National park Tara was also founded in 1981 and covers the greatest part of the mountain Tara, which is on the ultimate west of Serbia, to the river Drina. Tara is especially famous of its vast, thick, autochthone coniferous forests which makes it the mountain with the most forests in Serbia and Europe. From than 1000 plant species, about 20 are of endemic character. Pančićeve omorika (*Piceaomorica*) is among them, and represents the relict of tertiaries and Balkan endemic which survived the great Ice Age.

National park Šar-planina is founded in 1993 and represents the high southern rim of Serbia on the border with Macedonia. The main reef of this mountain has many tops with heights above 2500 m. The strength of ice from the ancient ice age in its different forms made deep traces in the relief of this mountain. Šar-planina is distinguished by great diversity of living world and the presence of great number of relic and endemic species. There are 1800 plant species living on Šar-planina. The most important are numerous tertiary and glacial relics.

The Đerdap National Park, declared 1974, stretches in the northeastward Serbia, on the boundary with Romania. The main natural phenomenon is a grandiose Iron Gate, the longest and the biggest bay breakthrough in Europe. Due to the great length and depth, the most diverse forms of relief and sheltered habitats with specific microclimates, Iron Gate is one of the most important refugium of Europe's ancient flora and fauna. The area of the Park is inhabited by over 1 100 plant species, where are especially being distinguished tertiary relics. Here was found the famous Neolithic settlement Lepenski Vir<sup>3</sup>.

The process of protection of the national parks includes the implementation of strategic, preventive and integrated approach through the establishment of economic and environmental goals in order to carry out the sectoral politics, and they should lead to the sustainable development. The main task of protecting national parks is an implementation of the obligations defined by law and national policy. That goal is not only important in national and regional framework, but in the global sense since the environmental policy rapidly

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<sup>3</sup> More details about national parks in Serbia can be found at the site of Institute for Nature Conservation of Serbia: <http://www.natureprotection.org.rs>

developing. The main instruments in the management and protection of national parks are the standards, planning, organization, finance and information.

In this paper we are interested in how the public is informed through the media about the environmental, ecological, aesthetic and recreational resources of the national parks.

### **Methodological framework**

In this study will be used the method of content analysis. This method in objective way describes the content of some communicating process, so in that way has been avoided subjective assessment of what was showed. It will be applied quantitative and qualitative content analysis. Quantitative content analysis involves measuring the semantic unit in the studied material, and qualitative content analysis involves a holistic approach, intensive monitoring, detailed study and understanding of the meaning of individual events in the context. Berelson (1952) defined five basic goals content analysis: to describe substance characteristics of message content; to describe form characteristics of message content; to make inferences to producers of content; to make inferences to audiences of content; to predict the effects of content on audiences.

In accordance with that, in this study content analysis refers to the separation and measurement articles in the online editions of daily newspapers and television. Why were selected online editions over articles in print newspapers and features on television?

In the informative and communicative world, the future of the Internet is guaranteed while traditional media are already going through huge changes. According to predictions of the most of the scientists, the internet will to incorporate within it all traditional media. The researches from 2010 shows that every other household in Serbia has a computer, internet access (39 %), and this is more than 2.2 % comparing to 2009. The number of those who use the Internet every day increased for 250 000 users<sup>4</sup>.

Recently has increased the number of traditional media - press, radio, TV - that its contents represent through the internet editions for free. "If the number of newspapers and websites would be compared with the "rs" domain (it has been

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<sup>4</sup> For more information about using the Internet in Serbia in 2010 visit the website: <http://www.economy.rs/elektronsko-poslovanje/6538/it-vesti/Broj-korisnika-Interneta-u-Srbiji-povecao-se-za-250-000.html>

registered about 58 000), then there is the fact that in Serbia exists 60 times more web pages than the medias" (Cvejić, 2010). More and more users stopped buying printed editions, and spend its time reading news from online editions. Actually, the Internet tends to become a major source of information. A quarter of Internet users in Serbia uses the Internet to watch web television, while about 42 percent of them on the Internet read daily press. "In comparison to 2008 the number of sold copies of a daily newspapers fall by almost 13 percent, also was recorded a decline of weekly and bi-weekly editions for about 21 percent" (Cvejić, 2010). Listed data show an unstoppable growth in the number of the Internet users in Serbia, as well as the replacement of the print summaries of online content that is more accessible and free.

Because of these reasons, the study covers the dominant media in Serbia. The term "dominant" means that the selected media achieved a huge ratings or sale of circulation and that they have most visited Web sites and huge impact on public opinion. Those are the sites of print media: Blic, Večernje novosti, Politika, Danas, Press and television sites RTS, B92, Pink, RTV and Studio B.

The above media were selected due to the differences in editorial concepts which represent the overall offers in the market. Politika have been chosen as the oldest influential daily newspaper in the Balkans, Večernje novosti as a mixture of seriously- tabloid access through a slogan "fast, short, clear", Danas as an influential daily newspaper with very modest circulation, Blic as a semi-tabloid fairly high-volume of circulation , and Press as the tabloid of the latest generation. RTS had been selected as a media and public service of the Serbia citizens, Pink as the most watched commercial television, RTV as a regional district television, Studio B as a capital service television, and B92 as the first media company that has launched a blog on its website and introduced a converged content strategy (fundamental news for all three platforms - TV, radio programs, and news on the site - is written only once).

According to the data from 2010, of independent world ranking service web site, Alexa.com, the most visited Serbian website is Blic, then B92 and Press, and further ranking goes like this : RTS, Večernje novosti, Politika, Danas, RTV and in the end Pink and Studio B. Among all sites, both domestic and foreign, Blic takes the fifth and B92 the seventh place, which is very high on this ranking list for the most popular websites.

The sample for this research was formed viewing every day from 1 January 2010 concluding with 31 December 2010. The unit of analysis was the article. All headings were examined. Altogether was processed 71 articles. This is a very

small number of articles published in one year and already points to the marginalization of the issue on national parks in Serbia.

### Basic research findings

This study shows that analysis of online editions takes very little space on issues related to the national parks. The largest number of articles published the most visited site Blic (22.5%), and then equally RTV, Danas and B92 (16.9%) therewith the B92 takes the most articles from other sites.

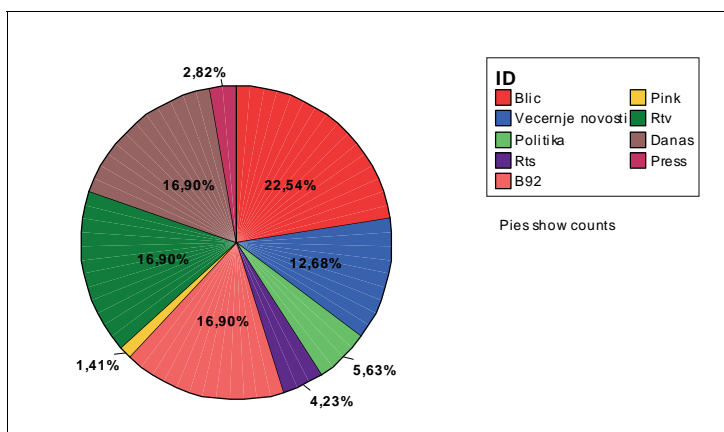


Figure 1. Online editions

A disturbing fact is that Politika, which has a long tradition and which for decades, represented a unique institution for culture and civic thoughts in Serbia, spend very little time on issues of national parks (5.63%). The reason can be found in the confusion of media transition, which is favorable for the expansion of the tabloids. They began to take a significant place in the media system which influenced the editorial policy of serious newspapers, and they started to undergo tabloid character. Politika, which has long strived to cultivate the good and socially responsible journalism, is in a difficult position. New commercial terms and unregulated media legislative framework were favorable for the tabloid journalism. Politika is supposed to preserve the tradition, and has been burdened by low financial, professional and technological resources. Responsibility of the serious daily newspapers, and by our opinion Politika still belongs to it, is huge, because they have to influence on public opinion in that direction which is the best for the promotion and affirmation of the natural resources. National parks represent the true national treasure and it must not be forgotten by journalists, contributors and editors of online editions from the



oldest daily newspaper in the Balkans since the Internet offers many possibilities than the traditional print edition.

More problematic is the fact that RTS, as public service of Serbia citizens, which is being financed through a mandatory fee, publish just (4.23%) articles with topics of national parks. RTS is a public national service funded by the citizens of Serbia. The task of the RTS is "to inform, to educate and to entertain", because it represents the "institution that has a special role in social, cultural and political life of Serbia," by which "contributes to a better quality of every individual's life and to a society as a whole" (Meer RTS). Unless the RTS, as a national public broadcasting corporation, does not recognize national parks as areas of great natural value, then it is difficult to expect from other commercial media to affirm national geography and protection of nature in Serbia. Another problem largely represents factographic genres (91.5%).

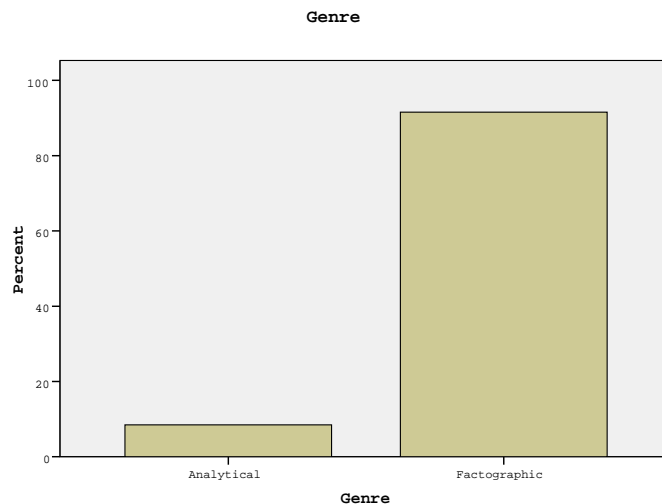


Figure 2. Analytical and factographic genre

Which one of the journalistic genres would be chosen by the journalists and contributors to online editions affects redaction's and editor's interests, as well as space in a specific field. The analytical expression of genres that include deeper analysis and argumentation (reviews, essays, columns, analysis, interview profile) or fictional genres (feuilleton, reports) are not largely represented (8.5%). Factographic genres (news, reports, and classic interview question-answer) are being used more often. This results in a reduction of space in which would be analyzed the projects and events, which significantly affect

the completeness and quality of topics presentation on the protection of national parks.

Also, the length of the article is very important for the affirmation of natural and cultural values of the national parks because it allows journalists to present several aspects that explain the context and to analyze some additional elements which are important for understanding the whole story. However, in the short articles (43.7%) and articles of the medium length (43.7%) which mostly appear in the analyzed newspapers, it is almost impossible to further explain, analyze and comment an event. This suggests that there are no established media strategies in presenting the national parks and interpretation of all problems relating to their protection.

Table 1. Size of article

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Large	9	12.7	12.7	12.7
	Medium	31	43.7	43.7	56.4
	Small	31	43.7	43.7	100
	Total	71	100	100	

Another fact points to the marginalization of the issue on national parks. In fact, these small numbers of texts that are usually short or medium length have not always the national parks as the main theme. It goes as side interpretation of other topics. Relationship of prominent mention and passing mention is almost 50%.

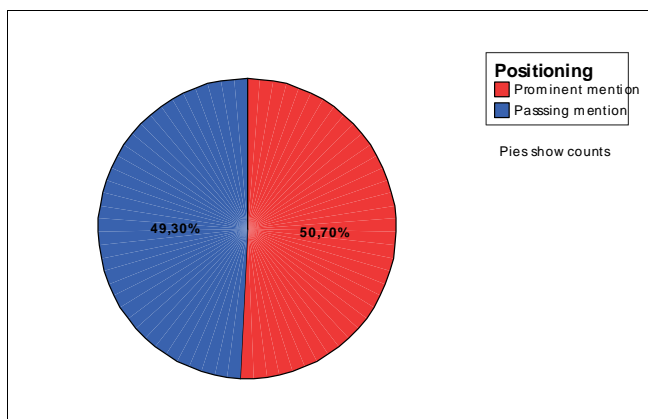


Figure 3. Prominent or passing mention

As for sources of information they are most related to official institutions (35.21%), journalists (28.17%) and than to the press agencies (25.35%). There are only few articles that use multiple sources (8.45%) which are one of the basic conditions of professional journalism.

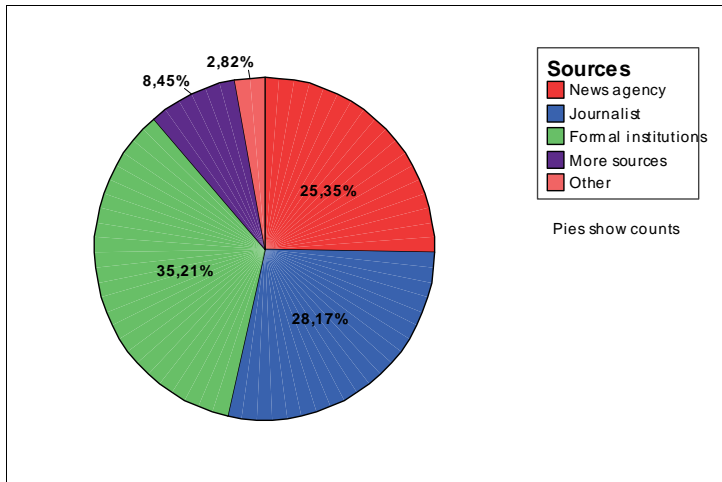


Figure 4. Sources

Topics which are mentioned in the articles are mostly ecological problems (11.3%), legislative problems (26.8%), protection of national parks (21.1%) and tourism (26.8%). However, the texts from different sites broadcast the same news, and there is no deeper analysis or start of new topic and the new approaches. There are 21% of the articles without published photographs and 19.7% of photos that do not follow the content of articles.

All lined facts show that the issues of preserving national parks are being neglected, that the media do not access to their processing professionally enough and that that the public can not be in time and well informed about the values of national parks.

## Conclusion

This study points to several conclusions:

- The evident success in a set of legislation from the environment in 2009 didn't encouraged the media to more responsible and more professional treatment about the national parks theme.

- Although the national parks make an excellent natural integrity of national importance, and have a great tourism potential, the media still did not recognize their value.
- The establishment of the media agenda is based on the choice of the commercial and profitable topics.

The results of this research can be a good basis for making more long term, more thorough and more comprehensive research on the role of media in the representation of national parks and environmental protection. The scientific contribution is primarily in the fact that this is the first study on forms of representation of the national parks theme.

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