

## Chapter 10

### Building support for protected areas: the case of the Butrint National Park

*Alex Koutsouris, Emanuele Santi, and Auron Tare*

#### Introduction

The Butrint National Park is a major natural and archaeological resource for Albania, as well as the major tourism asset for the whole southern region. Its establishment and preservation of the park is a good example of how conservation efforts can be enhanced by communications activities, ranging from international advocacy and lobbying to event management and work with communities. This paper describes the main communications actions which led to its establishment (1977-2000), its consolidation (2001-2003) and its current challenges, looking at the main lessons learned and at the most effective communication strategies and approaches, which can help ensure sustainable future development of the Butrint area.

#### **The Butrint National Park (BNP)**

Butrint National Park is a protected area of twenty-nine square kilometres, situated in the south of Albania near the Greek border, approximately nineteen kilometres from the city of Saranda and six kilometres from the town of Ksamil. It comprises a diverse landscape of lakes, lagoons, open plain, hills and mountains, and encompasses an archaeological site of exceptional value with ruins dating from the late Bronze Age (12th century BC), through the Greek, Roman, Byzantine, Venetian and Turkish periods, up to the 18th-19th centuries AD.

Today the Park represents a unique blend of cultural and natural landscapes illustrating the relationship between man and nature for over three millennia. Butrint has been attracting archaeologists for many decades and has been open to visitors as an archaeological park since the early 1970's. In 1992 it was designated a World Heritage Site, further expanded in 1999, and proclaimed a National Park by the Albanian government in March 2000.

The natural landscape of the Park area is extraordinarily intact. The Butrint wetland complex shelters 33 animal species of Global Conservation Concern with 14 globally endangered species. Almost 70% of Albania's amphibians and reptile species are found in this area, as well as the highest number of bird species ever recorded on an Albanian site, and considerable diversity of mammals and endemic and sub-endemic plants of National Conservation Concern. In 2003, the area from the Cuka Channel to the Greek border, encompassing Butrint National Park and the Stillo Peninsula (considered the 'greater / larger park area'), was designated a Wetland of International Importance under the Ramsar Convention.

## **Building support for the establishment of Butrint National Park (1997-2000)**

Tracing the history of the development of Butrint National Park is no easy task, as the site has experienced long periods of attention as well as abandonment. However, 1997 can be defined as a key year for the Park's development and the beginning of a long and exciting period of support building efforts, leading to its ultimate establishment as a National Park. With 20-25 000 thousand visitors in 1996, Butrint was already showing potential as a destination for tourists staying in Corfu, but in 1997 civil unrest, social upheaval and lawlessness broke out in Albania following the collapse of the financial pyramid scheme scams that were widespread in the country. This had negative consequences not only on the then-fledgling tourist industry of Butrint, but also on the archaeological treasures it housed. The site, particularly its museum, was looted during civil unrest in early 1997. The unfortunate event received worldwide publicity, especially within archaeological and related scientific circles.

In October 1997, a joint UNESCO (United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization) - ICOMOS (International Council on Monuments and Sites) - Butrint Foundation assessment mission was undertaken at the Butrint site. The mission found that: the site museum had been looted and its content - an unspecified number of archaeological objects - disappeared; the ancient theatre and related buildings were flooded; the site was not properly secured with either fences or permanent surveillance; the management and planning arrangements for Butrint had been deficient for several years.

More specifically it was found that the Butrint site was in an extremely insecure and threatened position because of the following:

- no clear definition of responsibilities and collaboration arrangements among Government agencies and institutions were in place;
- no adequate human and financial resources had been made available for the site;
- no management plan existed;
- development, demographic and environmental pressures on the immediate surroundings of Butrint were increasing;
- no regional or local plans were in place or in preparation.

Subsequently, it was recommended that a programme of corrective action be developed, including immediate actions to improve the conditions and security of the site, as well as a series of actions for the middle and long term aimed at establishing adequate management arrangements, developing a management plan and incorporating Butrint in regional and local planning. In particular the UNESCO mission proposed that:

- the management authority for Butrint be given to one agency, with responsibility for providing co-ordination and co-operation among institutions, both at the national and the local/regional levels, and with an office as close as possible to the site, staffed with adequate human and financial resources;
- priority be given to the preparation of a management plan for Butrint, providing the framework for inter-institutional co-ordination and planning, to be incorporated in regional and local development schemes;
- a review of the boundaries of the World Heritage designated area be carried out and a surrounding buffer zone be clearly established.

For the achievement of such targets (and many others related to archaeological issues beyond the scope of this paper) it was proposed that the World Heritage Committee and UNESCO should establish a long-term collaboration with the Albanian Government on the implementation of a programme of corrective action, and that this should be closely co-ordinated with other international organizations and agencies, such as the World Bank and

the European Union. It was also recommended that a partnership be established with the Butrint Foundation - a UK-based charity researching and planning a variety of subjects related to Butrint.

The report, and especially the fact that Butrint was inscribed on the List of World Heritage Sites in Danger, was given wide publicity and exerted strong pressure on the Albanian government (UNESCO: WHC-97/CONF.208/INF.15; ATA 97-12-05).

By this time, Butrint had already acquired fame as a symbol of Albanian heritage and unique archaeological site in scientific circles, among key decision-makers and society at large. Nevertheless, in order to generate support for the above targets and proposals - especially for the establishment of protected areas - strategic communication approaches had to be deployed. Efforts focused on strengthening support among high level policy-makers at the national level, as well as international organizations and foundations, with a simple message based on the tremendous value of the site for both Albanian and international cultural heritage. For the domestic audience, this message had to be closely tied to national pride.

Using communication to broaden the high-level involvement of key national and international actors, the main players supporting the establishment of the Butrint National Park were the Ministry of Culture and the Butrint Foundation, backed by the Albanian Prime Minister and UNESCO, along with the World Bank which became 'full-heartedly' involved around 1999.

A considerable challenge was isolating and overcoming resistance from the Institute of Archaeology, the Institute of Monuments, the Ministry of Tourism (due to their own view on the development of tourism in South Albania), as well as from national and international developers.

In addition to lobbying by top-echelons, efforts consisted of the organization and facilitation of key events and high-level meetings, such as:

- a workshop on the future of Butrint, held in Saranda with the Butrint Foundation, in cooperation with the Albanian Ministry of Culture and the local authorities. Here the Prime Minister and the Minister of Culture had the chance to discuss Butrint with the Butrint Foundation, a representative of the World Bank and representatives of the district council and the Saranda municipality;
- a meeting between the President of the Republic and the representatives of the Butrint Foundation and the UK ambassador to Albania;
- further discussions between the World Bank and the Minister of Culture, on an intervention proposal.

As a result of these efforts, by the end of 1998 intergovernmental conflicts had been overcome and the Albanian Ministry of Culture and the Butrint Foundation signed a five-year agreement on the protection of the archaeological park of Butrint. Responsibilities for the Park were given to the Ministry of Culture. The Butrint management office was established by a government decree at the beginning of 1999. This office was charged with the task of implementing a programme aimed at creating a new structure with trained people carrying out several functions (assisted by the International Ranger Federation), protecting the park from illegal interferences and damage, and applying outreach programs targeting both pupils in schools all over the country and the area's general population. The legal establishment of the Park arrived a year later, in 2000.

As a relatively independent stakeholder and the most visible communication medium, the press had an important, autonomous role in the establishment of the Butrint National Park. Generally speaking, journalists were pro-Park - mainly due to either their personal contacts with the Park Director (who actively pursued their support) and/or his invitations to visit

the site - and news concerning Butrint was in the media even in difficult times (such as the years 1997 - 1999), enhancing public awareness though not (noticeably) stimulating people's involvement. At this stage the local populations were not involved. The local authorities were aware of developments, however, during these early stages even they were little involved, mainly due to prevailing economic and political instabilities in the country which were draining attention and resources.

In sum, amidst difficult circumstances (collapse of the pyramids, the Kosovo crisis etc.) and in view of the great dangers facing the 'wider' area of archaeological importance in addition to the Butrint site itself, the establishment of the Butrint National Park was made possible through:

- lobbying top-echelons;
- pressure exerted by the UNESCO-ICOMOS report;
- the presence of an already sensitised scientific community and Albanian intellectuals;
- establishment of a management office;
- support of the press.

Therefore, the communication strategy (though not articulated as such) was confined to/ based on high level public relations, exerting strong pressure on the Albanian government.

### **Building support for the consolidation of the Butrint National Park (2001-2003)**

The establishment of the Butrint National Park and Management Office secured the important archaeological site(s). Consolidation of the Park was next on the agenda, with the first actions of the Office concerned with the preservation and upgrading of the Park itself.

National and international level objectives were to enhance the fame of the Park and further attract the attention of the national and international audiences and, thus, of supporters, partners, donors and tourists. At the local level, the objectives were to protect the Park from the illegal and environmentally damaging practices, as well as to create a favourable attitude towards the Park on the part of the local communities.

During this period, three papers were researched and produced:

- a Development Study (by UEA, using an Institutional Development Facility grant from the World Bank to the Ministry of Culture and the Butrint National Park (Martin, 2002);
- a Masterplan for the Park (within the same framework) (Buchanan, 2001);
- a Development of Eco and Cultural Tourism Study (Ravindra, 2002).

The purpose of the Development Study was to provide a comprehensive and detailed assessment as well as development recommendations for the future infrastructure of the Park, aiming to promote high quality cultural and nature tourism, while maintaining local ownership of the management of the Park and preserving the site.

One of the initial aims of the Park management was to show the local population the management's determination to implement their mandate and enforce the law, demonstrating the political commitment of the government and the strong leadership of the Office. Actions concerned the prohibition of illegal actions within the Park area, such as habitat destruction, building/construction, dynamite fishing and export of endangered species, as well as unsustainable landscape management and agricultural practices (logging and hunting, post-harvest burning of the fields as well as of reeds etc.). Prohibiting such actions in the Park

signified/conveyed the strong will of the Park management and changed the 'free-rider' attitude and illegal behaviour of the local population.

In order to mitigate potential bad-will resulting from Park law enforcement, the Park Management simultaneously facilitated the construction of a number of public works and financed a few others in an attempt to demonstrate their concern for the local communities.

Accordingly, the Park also sought to provide the local population with employment opportunities. All members of staff (rangers, guides and workers, in all sixteen people) were from the local communities, and during the summer in 2003 an additional sixty people got a four-month contract with Butrint. The Park is, therefore, becoming (through the expansion and development of its activities) an all-important source of income for the local communities. Given the dependence of the area on small-scale, nearly-subsistence agriculture, and the high rates of under-employment, the provision of employment opportunities strengthens the positive attitudes of the local population towards Butrint.

Despite the above, one of the major constraints to all Office activities was the lack of staff. The Office was unable to build a sufficiently large and strong team, both due to the lack of funds and the fact that most experts were either working in Tirana or had migrated (mainly to Greece) to earn a living. This, in turn, did not allow for the attraction of more projects by the Office, and generally restricted its activities - including communication. Nevertheless, throughout this period significant communication activities were carried out, primarily concerned with building public relations.

An effort to improve relations with local communities was the organization of ad hoc meetings with the local population. Organized by the Park Director, the meetings addressed topics and plans relating to the Park, promoting environmentally friendly practices, and attempting to convince the local people that the Park does not threaten their livelihoods, insisting upon its positive future role.

Whilst continuing to lobby the government, events were organized by the Butrint National Park (partially funded by the Institutional Development Facility - World Bank), giving the Park a leading role in Albanian cultural activities and improving public relations. Such events included Magic Flute concerts focusing on maintaining local folk and music traditions (started in 2000), the 'Butrint 2000' International Theatre Festival (also started in 2000), a series of art exhibits and school programmes. In parallel, various activities at the local level (for example art competitions) were organized, in order to promote the Park among the local youth and increase awareness and appreciation of and for the site, in both cultural heritage and ecological terms. During these events worldwide personalities and national political figures visited the site upon invitation.

These cultural events and VIP visits promoted the Butrint National Park at national and international levels through press coverage. Interest was significantly boosted, and the fame of Butrint expanded in scientific, cultural and tourism terms, helped by the discovery of an ivory chess piece, excavated at the Byzantine palace, which is more than 500 years older than any previously discovered; the discovery of a 2 000-year-old statue believed to depict Athena/Minerva, along with a bronze finger; the return of three heads from Greece, stolen in 1977. Excavations and restoration work continues in the archaeological sites while new interest also arises.

During this period, the Butrint Office's communication strategy was based on the provision of information to the press - both Albanian and international - through: press releases on the events organised in the Park, with information and photos sent to a large number of journalists as well as key people in various decision-making positions and people who have shown considerable interest in Butrint; organised media tours for a number of invited journalists both from Albania and abroad (April-May). This activity has been developed over the last couple of years.

At the local level, both the press and radio held very favourable attitudes towards the Butrint National Park. The "Saranda FM 100" radio continues to be a supporter of the Park and the development of soft tourism in the Saranda district. Among others, the radio is currently holding a special programme called 'Projections' dealing with eco-tourism values and environmental conservation. Support of the local radio is of great importance given that radio is, after meetings with local people in the communities, the most influential communication channel in the area.

Mainly dealing with local issues, Butrint was/is among the main topics of the supportive local and regional press. They continue to play a crucial role in providing information on all the events taking place in the Park, presenting it as a cultural centre, archaeological site and the centre of the communities surrounding the Park. The press also deal with topics such as the relationship between the Park and the communities; tourism, agro-tourism and business development; the problems of tourism development (strategy) and so on. The local press, having more-or-less rejected the option of mass tourism, is in favour of the Butrint National Park, supporting efforts for the development of alternative tourism schemes that will benefit the local communities. Such support is invaluable since the audience includes the most well educated and influential people in the area and nation-wide.

Also encouraged by the Office was the development of documentaries, self-financed by the media and presented by RTL and ITN, as well as various Albanian TV stations. A film concerning the so-called 'Minerva' statue was presented during the concert of traditional instruments in Butrint (Shekulli, 27 February 2003). Additionally, in 2003 two CDs were produced, in co-operation with the Ministry of Culture, presenting the live recordings of the flute and the polyphonic concerts that took place in Butrint. Two Butrint site guides and an album were issued (in both Albanian and English). The Office also circulated reports and strategy documents among decision-making bodies and key-persons.

Despite outreach efforts, a percentage of the local population seems to lack sufficient information about the Park and its development role and plans. Moreover, not all the local authorities favour the existence of the Park (or specifically the Park Management Office) due to their own political interest related to tourism and/or construction development. It has to be mentioned that in Albania there is still corruption, land speculation and strong pressures are exerted on local authorities on the part of national and international developers, thus local authorities often, on the one hand, attempt to revise existing land use studies while, on the other, issue small-scale permissions for constructions.

In summary, during the consolidation period, the fame of the Butrint National Park was considerably boosted, resulting in increasing visitor numbers. The Management Office was instrumental in such developments, through press contacts (with the press continuing to play an autonomous role in supporting the Park), other contacts and the organisation of various events, especially cultural ones, including international level and VIP visits to the Park. Lobbying by the Butrint Foundation and the Park Office had a particular influence on the government, especially in terms of the attraction of donors and new projects. In parallel, scientific publications and reports (i.e. those of UNESCO and the Butrint Foundation) were still of major importance in mobilising international support for the Park. A new supporter on the international scene was the RAMSAR Convention Bureau.

On the down-side, whilst local communities were provided with information, invitation to dialogue and consultation remained very limited (below). Although local communities demonstrated increasingly positive attitudes, they were still not forthcoming in getting involved and taking advantage of developments. Moreover, despite the strong recommendation of the UNESCO-ICOMOS report, no concrete communications plan was elaborated. This was mainly due to priority concern for the protection and promotion of the Park, as well as the serious human resources deficit of the management office. Given this human resources situation, it was not possible to proceed with the building of local partnerships or to delegate power to local populations through the employment of

animators, the establishment of community networks/fora or the promotion of community co-operatives and of environment friendly enterprises. The challenge of the Butrint National Park to contribute to the sustainable development of stakeholder communities is still at stake.

### **Building sustainability: current challenges facing the Butrint National Park (2003 - Present)**

For the moment, there do not seem to be any major threats to the Butrint National Park ("the Park is saved"). It is the most impressive attraction in a region rich in natural and archaeological assets and has recently attracted more than 45 000 visitors per year. Last summer's increasing numbers encouraged faith in the potential of the park to generate significant operational income through Park fees. However, the Park's fragility, weak institutional structure and management team are serious concerns, and Butrint still has a long way to go in terms of inducing economic development in the area. Greatest potential lies in using the Park as a catalyst for sustainable tourism and new income generation in the southern part of the country, linking to other sites in the development of regional cultural/archaeological and eco-tourism trails.

An important point to be made here is that, while tourism in the city of Saranda takes the characteristics of mass tourism, for the area under consideration, ecotourism has to be the leading notion for tourism development. Here we define ecotourism as tourism to natural areas with an educational component, conserving the environment and sustaining the well-being of local people (Ravindra, 2002). Community-based approaches (see below) well suit the larger Park area, yet a more 'radical' approach might be advocated, namely Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT), due to the current socio-economic situation in the area (domination of nearly-subsistence agriculture, high levels of underemployment and extended poverty). Pro-Poor Tourism overlaps with both ecotourism and Community-Based Tourism (CBT), but is not synonymous with either. Pro-Poor Tourism aims to deliver net benefits to the poor as a goal in itself, with environmental concerns being one part of the picture. Involving more than simply a community focus - it requires mechanisms to unlock opportunities for the poor at all levels and scales of operation.

Currently, a number of projects are proposed to run beside, and in line with, environmental targets and small-scale interventions addressing the improvement of the infrastructure of the Park site vis-à-vis increased tourist flows. These projects are expected to enhance Butrint National Park's role in local development. Within them, the role of strategic / development communication emerges as a priority.

#### ***Project 1: Conservation and low intensity traditional habitat management in the Butrint Wetland complex (Ramsar site)***

This World Bank - Global Environmental Facility project specifically focuses on conservation and low-intensity traditional habitat management in the Butrint wetland complex (Ramsar site). The project aims to:

- enhance local economic development;
- introduce sustainable (non-destructive) resource use to the larger Park area;
- establish integrated landscape management approaches;
- encouraging compatible, low impact ecotourism;
- increase public awareness and participation in protected area management;
- disseminate knowledge on piloting innovative management approaches through the publishing of survey results, case studies, and different habitat management practices.

***Project 2: Provision of assistance for the development of community-based tourism (CBT) in the larger Park area***

A second project, funded by the World Bank and the Italian Development Cooperation, concerns the provision of assistance for the development of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) in the larger Butrint National Park area and the marketing of its features. The project will address, among other issues:

- institutional development of the Butrint National Park office;
- participatory analysis and planning with the people of the villages surrounding the Park, regarding the development of ecological and niche market tourism;
- building links and partnerships with relevant actors at both national and international levels;
- community organisation and training (i.e. formation of community associations that improve the coordination and likelihood of success);
- facilitation of local marketing for community based tourism activities and products. This marketing component is in place to address the issue of the limited impact of tourism in the area.

The project aims to:

- develop and implement a communications and international marketing strategy aimed at raising interest in Butrint National Park and its surroundings as archaeological and eco-tourism destinations;
- provide technical assistance and guidance to the Park Management on international tourism marketing;
- assist the Park, the local authorities and tourism business in the creation of a common platform for tourism marketing and strategy focused on ecological and archaeological tourism;
- utilise not only the archaeological and natural assets of the larger Park area, but the local tradition and culture as well.

## **Developing and implementing a strategic communication plan**

The prerequisites for the design and implementation of a strategic communication plan are in place and this should be carried out in the years to come. Public awareness, capacity building and participation are key-elements of the forthcoming projects, along with capacity building and staffing of the Butrint Office, and network building. The above-mentioned projects, funded by the World Bank, provide Butrint with a unique opportunity to establish strong relationships with local stakeholders (local populations and local authorities) and play an important role in rural development. To some extent this compensates for the missing element in the Park's activities thus far which have not been based on a sound strategic communication plan. Building on the Office's experience in establishing high-level relationships, as well as its influence on the press, the new endeavours will address most stakeholders and invite new ones, as the Park works towards contributing to the sustainable development of the larger Butrint National Park area.

## **Lessons learned**

Examination of the events in the archaeological site of Butrint and the larger Park area (1997 until the summer of 2003) resulted in the following conclusions and lessons learned concerning the employment of communication activities:

1. The communication approach, based on creating international and governmental pressure, was essential to build support to a sufficient level. Taking a top down

approach in the establishment of a natural or archaeological park, without proper involvement of local communities, can prove to be a major mistake; however, in times when sites are being destroyed, turmoil dominates in the country, when there is land speculation and corruption among local authorities and when local populations show an aggressive behaviour towards land and natural resources due to extreme poverty, it is difficult to conceive of a bottom-up approach. Nevertheless, a more balanced approach may be feasible, if sought after.

2. Local communities need to be encouraged to see parks as opportunities for social and economic development and not only as a series of prohibitions and limitations to pre-existing economic activities (free ranging, farming, hunting, fishing, wood collection, etc.). These opportunities need to be supported by measures to enhance economic benefit.
3. Improved communication with communities facilitates conservation and protection efforts. Positive gestures, including the improvement of infrastructure and especially the provision of employment opportunities, contribute to community and Park relations; Contributing to improving the standard of living of the local communities/ stakeholders is crucial and an area which the Butrint National Park needs to address. The strategy for this should focus on the diversification of the rural economy, mainly through alternative tourism, and should include the participation of stakeholders in strategy design, implementation and evaluation. Within a communications strategy framework, the animation and empowerment of stakeholders is a necessity and a challenge.
4. A well organised relationship with the press has successfully contributed to the establishment of the Park and has consolidated Butrint as an emblem of Albanian culture and society, creating interest on the part of the international community.
5. Art is a conduit to transmit cultural values across the borders of Albania.
6. Efficient management and Park publicity (as a unique world heritage monument and an international cultural centre) increases the number of visitors and revenue, laying foundations for park sustainability. With increasing tourist figures, it is estimated that the Park will be able to cover almost all its operational costs.
7. Achieving higher visibility and recognition of the national and international significance of the Park at central and local levels has secured the integrity of the Park's natural and cultural assets.
8. Institutional coordination - supported by good communication - is important.
9. Increasing management capacity enables efforts to increase interest in the Park from the international donor community, and presents more opportunities for realizing the potential of Butrint's uniqueness.

### Conclusion

Once established, the Butrint National Park Office had to deal concurrently with multiple issues including: the protection of the archaeology, ecology and biodiversity of the site; the control of land use; the management of increasing numbers of visitors; infrastructure development; income generation and fund raising for the necessary Park expenses; and fostering local understanding of the concept of protected areas to ensure the sustainable management of the Park.

The Institutional Development Facility programme had significant impact on both institutional development and public awareness in improving, protecting and preserving the natural aspect, character and ecology of the Butrint site. As a result, nowadays there is improved planning, coordination and management capacity of the local Butrint bureau as well as improved inter-institutional coordination at the national level on issues affecting the Butrint area. The Butrint National Park Board is a functional inter-institutional body that made possible the strengthening of its national and international role as a site of specific interest for a range of conservation efforts and cultural events. The Park Office has gained

support and recognition from local authorities and government institutions, and is very active in raising support from the international donor community.

Forthcoming projects, funded by the World Bank, will further strengthen the human resources of the Butrint Office, putting in place a concrete strategic communication plan that will support capacity building and establish participatory processes with stakeholders (especially local populations), to become actively involved (plan, implement and evaluate) in the sustainable development of the larger Park area.

### Notes

1. The Development Study addresses: visitors; cultural and natural resources; existing infrastructure; development proposals; conservation of the built heritage; habitat restoration and management; institutional capacity and priorities for action. It identifies the following necessary communication activities:
  - the need to "establish community forums to discuss development proposals";
  - "a public information campaign (is) required to break the notion that Butrint stops at the modern gate, in order to prevent accidental destruction of remains through inappropriate farming techniques and development proposals";
  - the local people's "skills associated with agriculture, fishing and tourism... need to be harnessed and developed by the Park to meet the requirements for sustainable landscape management and high-quality visitor services";
  - "Public awareness and environmental information campaigns are required to ensure that the local community understands and participates in the development of the Park".Accordingly the following objectives are outlined:
  - draw up management agreements with local land users and fishermen for the sustainable use of natural resources;
  - set up an environmental education programme for local communities, to help prevent illegal activities;
  - develop community-based projects that promote the values of the Park;
  - create a Park forum to exchange ideas with the local communities.
2. The Masterplan addresses issues of the physical environment of the Park infrastructure without any specific attention paid to issues of participation and communication. However, it does mention the need to "involve the community in planning and operation of the Park" and "ensure that they understand principles and goals of the Park management", stating "ensure local participation", place "emphasis on local consultation and participation" and suggests "extensive educational information" be provided.

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