IDENTIFICATION OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TRANSBOUNDARY PROTECTED AREAS IN CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

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in the Field of Biological and Landscape Diversity

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Summary

In 1999 the Council of Europe held it's first Symposium of the Pan European Ecological Network on "Nature does not have any borders: towards transfrontier ecological networks". It was stated that nature conservation moves from site related conservation strategies to a general scale of the whole ecosystem structure. Beside some theoretical approaches and a few attempts to safeguard networks like corridors, which never came beyond recommendations on the continental level (Ecological Bricks, 1990; Biodiversity Conservation in Transboundary Protected Areas in Europe, 1996) this concept is still a theory, but worth to be considered in the European nature protection policy.

Safeguarding transborder protected areas in an ecological network system taking into account clusters of conservation areas might be an important step towards protecting natural heritage in Europe. It might be a challenge for the Council of Europe to promote this concept within the Pan-European Ecological Network.

Until now transboundary co-operation was widely seen as bilateral agreement between two neighbouring protected areas. But transborder co-operation between two neighbouring protected areas is just one aspect. Compared with large protected areas in other continents, these areas in Europe, especially in Central Europe, are rather small. To minimise the loss of biological diversity, especially for wide-ranging species, large protected areas and movement corridors are essential. Large protected biotic corridors can be provided by a process of linking existing national parks and nature reserves with strategically placed protected areas to provide stepping stones or biotic corridors. These would lead from traditional bilateral transborder co-operation to a large scale system of protected areas, fulfilling the demands of international nature protection concepts and conventions.

Whereas mountain and/or forest ecosystems are quite highly represented in Europe there is still a lack of marine and wetland protected areas. Peat bogs, floodplains, marine and river ecosystems still need an improvement in their protection. River ecosystems, protected just to the middle of the river, or floodplains, closed in by dikes, cannot fulfil their role in a functioning ecosystem and therefore the challenges of a modern conservation system. Apart from a few smaller areas, there is hardly any marine area protected in Eastern Europe.

The reasons to protect the protected areas listed below might differ to some extent. In general, the areas were selected by their size, their role in the maintenance of biodiversity and their role in a wide European protected area networks, like migrating routes, river corridors or stepping stones, but their role in the co-operation of people and nations too. Better understanding and co-habitation across borders might help to preserve peace or, at least, deepen understanding between people. And in future, it might help to prevent conflicts, altogether a very challenging task.

Cross-border co-operation no longer consists simply in an agreement between two protected areas. Experience has shown that to think in a broader context and in terms of networks is necessary. Cross-border co-operation can help provide larger protected areas with uniform management and thereby make a considerable contribution to the conservation of biodiversity. But networking or bilateral transborder co-operation need more than a political agreement, personal exchange or joint management. Differences in the economical situation, political tensions and traditional behaviour can hinder co-operation across borders.

Therefore it is important to involve the people who support – indeed must support – the protected area. The daily lives of the people living in and around protected areas are linked to a greater or lesser extent to the protected area and its purpose. Without this population it would not be possible to co-operate across borders. People in border regions often have a common history and a common culture, and frequently a common language, even if today they belong to different

nationalities. It is vital to convince this population of the need for cross-border co-operation – or the chances of success will remain slim as long as the population fails to identify with the protected area and regards it as no more than an administrative task.

In general there is still a lack in data and information in a broader context like protected areas clusters or networks. It might be the next important step to fill these information gaps to safeguard Europe's natural heritage.

Foreword

The following report reflects the transborder co-operation in countries of Central and Eastern Europe, including the transition countries in Eastern Europe, including Russia, The Baltic countries, Belarus and Ukraine. There might be more interest in the future to include other countries in the former USSR, bur recently there are not enough data available. But it is of course recommended to emphasise more interest on that part of Europe.

Aims

In 1999 the Council of Europe held its first Symposium of the Pan-European Ecological Network on "Nature does not have any borders: towards transfrontier ecological networks". It was stated that nature conservation moves from site related conservation strategies to a general scale of the whole ecosystem structure.[1] Beside some theoretical approaches and a few attempts to safeguard networks like corridors, which never came beyond recommendations on the continental level (Ecological Bricks, 1990; Biodiversity Conservation in Transboundary Protected Areas in Europe, 1996) this concept is still a theory, but worth to be considered in the European nature protection policy.

Especially some Central and Eastern European countries show a dense system of protected areas of different categories and levels of protection. However there are still heavy impacts and impediments along borders and political restrictions for a day-to-day co-operation of protected areas.

The report on the "Identification of the most important transboundary protected areas in Central and Eastern Europe" provides a list of the most important protected areas in Central and Eastern Europe, established on both sides of the border, explains the reason why the areas are protected and analyses why it would be wise to promote transfrontier co-operation in these protected transboundary areas.

Most (or nearly all) protected areas listed in the report co-operate more or less intensively on different levels. But there are deficiencies, which – in the author's opinion – should be eliminated. The list itself was created considering the opinions of experts, conservationists and protected area managers in different countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

Safeguarding transborder protected areas in an ecological network system taking into account clusters of conservation areas might be an important step towards protecting natural heritage in Europe. It might be a challenge for the Council of Europe to promote this concept within the Pan-European Ecological Network.

But the promotion of transborder co-operation in the light of the recommendations of the Paris Symposium might go a step further. The accident on the Tisza and Danube river in January 2000 might be a warning, but also a challenge, to pay attention to impacts caused by other countries and the mutual dependence of ecosystems. Especially marine and river ecosystems are extremely exposed to such disasters.

[1] PUNGETTI G. (1999)

Background

Several institutions have worked out guidelines and recommendations on transborder co-operation in the last years. These recommendations and terms are listed in this chapter.

The report itself refers to the following definition of Biological Diversity and Landscape Diversity:

Box 1 – Definition of Biodiversity

Biological Diversity:

The variability among living organisms from all sources including, *inter alia*, terrestrial, marine and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexes of which they are part; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems. (Convention on Biological Diversity, 1992, Art. 2).

Landscape Diversity:

The formal expression of the numerous relations existing in a given period between the individual or a society and a topographically defined territory, the appearance of which is the result of the action, over time, of natural and human factors and a combination of both (Council of Europe, 1996).

In the conclusions of the Council of Europe's International Symposium of the Pan-European Ecological Network (Paris, 1999) it is stated that the participants are convinced that, in order to achieve a coherent pan-European ecological approach:

- the setting up of networks of sites of great ecological value and in particular of protected areas at local, regional, national and international level is fundamental to the conservation of biological and landscape diversity;
- the level of conservation should be appropriate to the ecological needs and the administrative bodies of the countries concerned;
- co-operation, and when appropriate, links between the protected sites are necessary and should extend to all categories of protected sites;
- it would be desirable to formulate administrative and legal guidelines for transfrontier and inter-territorial co-operation between protected sites, according to the level of co-operation.

A research study on transborder co-operation sums up the general guidelines for Transboundary Protected Area Co-operation (Brunner, 1998)[2]:

- Borders of natural areas and ecosystems are not identical with political borders of countries or regions. Above all, natural borders such as mountain crests or the river course form landscape and ecological functional units. Border areas often lie in "the shadow of development" of urban concentrations where development pressures are few. For this reason, the border area represents to a great extent a valuable and an environmentally untouched landscape area.
- The conservation of the vast regions of the border area must be strengthened in order to safeguard this natural area on the long-term and to encourage natural development of the habitat to the largest extent possible. Likewise, high value must be placed on the sustainable use of natural resources in order to safeguard the living conditions of the population of the vast regions of border areas.
- In recognition of the fact that natural areas do not end at the border, in the future, importance should be given to co-operative work beyond borders.
- Today, by definition, transboundary protected areas fail because of the application of different basic legal conditions, different administrative structures in the neighbouring countries or simply

[2] English and French versions published by IUCN/WCPA Parks for Life (1999)

due to language problems. The inter-state competence of the administrations involved was in any case not restricted due to co-operation. For this reason, it is recommended that the expression "transboundary protected area co-operation" be used rather than the expression "transboundary protected areas".

- In line with transboundary co-operation, the understanding of the region's history, culture and language across the border should be encouraged.
- State sovereignty will not be restricted by transboundary co-operation.

At the Paris Symposium, Bennett (1999) stated that, "The need for guidelines on the development of the Pan-European Ecological Network stems from two key characteristics of the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy. In the first place the Strategy itself laid down only the main features of the Network – core areas, corridors, restoration areas and buffer zones – not the details of how it should be configured and realised. In the second place, the process of developing and establishing the Network is a co-operative venture between the 54 countries that are participating in the Strategy mechanism, not a top-down process; design and implementation is their joint responsibility. Translating a strategic concept into coherent and effective conservation actions on the ground therefore requires a common understanding of who should do what, how and when".

Working out guidelines requires the knowledge of the recent situation. This will be partly provided by the following report.

General remarks

Within a few years several institutions in Europe have dealt with the subject "Transboundary co-operation between protected areas in Europe". In 1997 the author undertook a research study to help evaluating recent transborder co-operation in Europe, published by the Austrian Federal Ministry for the Environment and IUCN/WCPA respectively. In November 1997, this matter was one of the main topics of the IUCN/WCPA Regional Working Session in Rügen (Germany) [3]. In 1997 and 1998, IUCN promoted the so-called Peace Park idea world wide in two conferences, held in South Africa and Italy.

The EUROPARC Federation of Nature and National Parks started with a workshop on transfrontier co-operation in 1998, in Hungary, and continued with the International Transboundary Youth Camp in Spain and Portugal and the annual conference in 1999 in Poland. An expert group will be established later in 2000. In 1999, Wetlands International organised a seminar in the Netherlands, concentrating on transborder wetlands and river ecosystems. Finally the Council of Europe held its 1st International Symposium of the Pan-European Ecological Network under the title: "Nature does not have any borders: towards transfrontier ecological networks" in Paris in 1999.

Until now transboundary co-operation was widely seen as a bilateral agreement between two neighbouring protected areas. There are some examples of written agreements or declarations like the Protocol of Cracow (1924), which led to transfrontier co-operation in the Pieniny area and in the Tatra Mountains (both Poland/Slovakia), the Charta of co-operation between Ordesa-Monte Perdido (Spain) and the French Pyrenees National Parks (renewed 1998) or the declaration on the co-operation between the Austrian National Park Thayatal and the Czech National Park Podyjí (signed in 1999) and others.

The quality of such co-operation differs. The research study on transboundary co-operation between protected areas (IUCN/WCPA, 1999) [4] has shown deficiencies. Collaboration is mainly based on private personal contacts but not on official agreements, co-operation in the management of natural resources is rather scarce. Joint management plans hardly exist or are not even proposed.

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[3] IUCN/WCPA (1998)

[4] German version: Brunner, R. (1998), *Parke für das Leben – Unterstützung für grenzüberschreitende Schutzgebiete in Europa* (= Schriftenreihe des Bundesministeriums für Umwelt, Jugend und Familie, Bd. 23). Wien

Moreover, transborder co-operation faces many restrictions. Whereas co-operation across borders is obvious nowadays in Western Europe, there are still impediments, which hardly allow any interchange of wildlife and none at all for visitors.

Transborder co-operation between two neighbouring protected areas is just one aspect. Compared with large protected areas in other continents, these areas in Europe, especially in Central Europe, are rather small. To minimise the loss of biological diversity, especially for wide-ranging species, large protected areas and movement corridors are essential. Large protected biotic corridors can be provided by a process of linking existing national parks and nature reserves with strategically placed protected areas to provide stepping stones or biotic corridors. These would lead from traditional bilateral transborder co-operation to a large scale system of protected areas, fulfilling the demands of international nature protection concepts and conventions (Cerovsky, 1996).

Whereas mountain and/or forest ecosystems are quite highly represented in Europe there is still a lack of marine and wetland protected areas. Peat bogs, floodplains, marine and river ecosystems still need an improvement in their protection. River ecosystems, protected just to the middle of the river, or floodplains, closed in by dikes, cannot fulfil their role in a functioning ecosystem and therefore the challenges of a modern conservation system. Apart from a few smaller areas, there is hardly any marine area protected in Eastern Europe.

Transborder co-operation in Europe

Overview

Nearly 200 protected areas (or proposed protected areas) form more than 80 transborder co-operations (or proposed ones) (IUCN/WCPA, 1999) and their number has been growing since. Transborder protected area co-operations are found in all types of management categories and all types of landscapes. Whereas mountain ranges form a natural barrier along a ridge, where ecosystems sometimes differ on both sides of the border, there are also river valleys or flat land areas, where no significant natural borderline divides the two neighbouring landscapes. In this case, co-operative management seems to be much more necessary or possibly effective than in mountainous nature reserves or cultural landscapes.

Most activities in the field of nature conservation are restricted to individual countries or regions. However, natural environments are not limited by borders. This is especially true in Europe with its many small countries and thus a proportionately high number of borders which are exactly those regions of great ecological diversity - mountain ranges, rivers, continental lakes, wetlands - which form borders. The conservation of such natural sites is necessary on both sides of the border, and includes, if possible, a harmonised conservation system.

In general the transborder protected area co-operation in Europe is far from being ideal. Despite some few good collaborations, good relations are very much depending on good, often private personal relations and contacts. The quality and intensity depends very much on the form of co-operation. But just 25 % of the transborder areas have their collaboration based on legal and official agreements. A vast majority is working on the basis of private or informal contacts.

And there are still impediments due to political or economical reasons like fences along borderlines, clearcuts in the border area, etc. Especially in eastern and south-eastern Europe official contacts are scarce, and the necessary transborder co-operation is mainly done by NGOs. Sometimes both sides hardly know what each other does.

The fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 changed the conditions for transboundary co-operation quite well. But recent socio-economic development also endangers some last refuges of threatened species. Only common attempts to protect large areas or corridors might lead to a sufficient result in nature

protection. A system of core zones, transition zones and special reserves might reduce the impacts on the local population and local economy, and might lead to an easier acceptance of a protected area system.

The Spanish-French Pyrenees mountains are a good example. The well known National Parks Les Pyrénées and Ordesa – Monte Perdido represent just a small part of the whole system of protected areas, which exists on both sides of the border. Nature parks, hunting reserves, riverine areas and transition zones complete the protection of these sensitive and diversified ecosystems. Such networks and corridors can make an important contribution towards guaranteeing biodiversity and the habitats of long-distance migrating species. In future, a greater emphasis must be put on such protected area systems.

Furthermore the maps of the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Poland or Hungary show a dense system of protected areas along their borders. The "Green belt of Fennoscandia", established along the Russian border with Finland and Norway can help reducing the heavy pressure on one of the last remaining oldgrown forest areas in Europe and the Balkan Green Belt might be a chance to protect another multi-functional system of protected areas of different types in south-eastern Europe.

Shortly after the fall of the Iron Curtain an initiative "Ecological Bricks" was created to safeguard areas of high natural value along the former border between East and West. For many years, the Iron Curtain, the rigid border between the world superpower blocs, was an impediment to economic development and a settlement policy along the borders throughout Europe. Development was concentrated on respective economic and social centres; meanwhile the areas on both sides of the East-West border located in the heart of Europe were relegated for decades to peripheral areas with few chances of development. Despite many support programmes (grants for border territories, border zone areas etc.) these regions lost a large proportion of their population due to migration.

The peripheral location, the low density of the habitat and the lack of development pressures created, at the same time, optimal preconditions for the preservation of the greatest possible ecological diversity in many areas.

In this regard, A. Festetics (1990)[5] writes:

> *"The valuable natural potential, left intact, and life-friendly, outweighs and offers the only chance to form a network of nature reserves at the European level... and this not only applies to the prohibited zone of former East Germany which, on average, is 1.346 km long and 5 km wide for a total surface of 673,000 ha."*

Identification of transborder co-operation of great importance in Europe

With the support of experts from all over Europe, listed in the acknowledgement, 16 transborder protected areas or protected area systems have been selected and qualified as important for nature protection, covering Central and Eastern Europe from Scandinavia to Greece as follows.

The list is an attempt to show the variety of nature and biodiversity in Europe. Many other areas could be mentioned, like the floodplain forests along the Danube, the Morava and Thaya rivers between Austria, Slovakia and Czech Republic or Aggtelek, the Hungarian - Slovakian karst area. Djerdap at the Danube (Yugoslavia - Romania) or Skadar Lake (Montenegro - Albania) would be worth to be mentioned.

But it was an intention not to overload the report. The selected examples should help to promote the ideas of transborder co-operation.

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[5] In : *Ökologische Bausteine* (Ecological Bricks), 1990, Munich

01. Green Belt of Fennoscandia [6](Norway/Finland/Russia)

From the Northern European boreal zone's point of view the border zone (broadly understood) between Finland and Russia is one of the most important ones. The last remnants of untouched boreal nature (most of all boreal forests) in Fennoscandia are situated along the border.

The Green Belt is a network of forests, mires and fell areas spanning across the borders of Finland, Russia and Norway; thus each own a part of it. The belt extends from the Gulf of Finland to the Arctic Ocean. By protecting this belt, the three countries hope to maintain biodiversity among Fennoscandian forest species.

Box 2 – Green Belt of Fennoscandia
Eva Kleinn, Thomas Tennhardt (English translation by R. Brunner)

UNESCO-World Natural Heritage – A chance for Russia's Nature

Before 1990 two Zapovedniks (Lapplandsky, Kostomukshsky) and several Zakasniks existed on the Russian side along the "Green Belt of Fennoscandia". On the Western side of the border in Finland there were three National Parks (Oulanka, Urho Kekkonen and Pasvik), several nature reserves and other protected areas. After the so-called "Perestroika" a new Zapovednik (Pasvik – Russian part) and the first National Park (Paanajärvi) were established in the Russian border area. Others should follow to create as many transborder protected areas as possible.

The Ministry for Environment in Karelia proposes the designation of five new National Parks. Until 2005 five percent of the total forest should be under protection by law. To ensure funds for this process, partnership programmes with other countries should be achieved. This idea failed so far, except support from Finland.

All these programmes are in contradiction with the forest economy. As there have been hardly any budgets for nature protection in Russia recently, nature protection seems to be the looser in this process.

As Finland might support the creation of the Kalevala National Park within the frame of such partnership programmes, there might be a positive influence on the government of Karelia to designate the original and larger variant.

Summary – The importance of the Green Belt of Fennoskandia lies in the large stretch and the cluster of different types of protected areas. The large entities of virgin forest can maintain the biodiversity in this area.

02. Baltic transborder protected areas co-operation

Nigula Bog – North-Vidzeme Biosphere Reserve (Estonia/Latvia)
Kursiu Nerja (Lithuania/Russia)

Nigula bog means 4,900 ha of wilderness, mainly peat bog and forest. Its value has been acknowledged for a long time. In fact the Nigula Nature Reserve is one of the oldest mire refuges in Estonia. Visitors to Nigula have often admired its outstanding biodiversity: wolves, lynxes, black-throated divers, golden eagles, black storks can all be found there in quite a small area. An essential reason for this is clear – Nigula is actually only one-quarter of the greater nature area that spreads equally to both sides of the Estonian-Latvian border and can be considered as a functional entity and deserving to be protected.

The Curonian Spit is one of the largest in the world. Its total length is nearly 100 km, 50 of them in Lithuania. The total area in Lithuania (including aquatic ecosystems) is protected as a National Park, Category II in the IUCN system.

[6] The numbers refer to the numbers in the map (appendix)

An action plan for the protection of coastal and Baltic Sea ecosystems has been developed. This is the basis for the protection of biodiversity and the control and regulation of the use of natural resources. Furthermore, the Curonian Spit is an important bird sanctuary. The Curonian Spit is a National Park on both sides of the border, recognised by IUCN as a National Park Category II.

Summary – The Baltic countries offer some rare ecosystems including peat bogs and one of a few marine ecosystems. The value of these protected areas can be strengthened by the enlargement or the establishment of new areas.

03. Bialowieza National Park (Poland/Belarus)

Białowieża National Park covers 10.500 ha, the core zone (4.747 ha) is under strict protection. Its main goal is the realisation of forestry which allows to maintain and safeguard biodiversity. The Belawezskaya Puscha National Park (total area : 96223 ha, strictly protected area : 15677ha) is the only one in Belarus. This National Park has a great capacity in the field of tourism development.

Regarding natural values, both parts of the Białowieża Forest are an ecological unit. Since 1952 in Poland, and since 1953 in Belarus, free roaming European bisons have lived there.

But even now the actual state of co-operation is far from the necessary minimum. Occasional incidents raise doubts as to whether there are any real guarantees for the future.

The Bialowieza National Park and its Belarus counterpart are just one highlight in a greater region with additional protected areas.

Summary – Areas along the border between transition countries and the former USSR are very sensitive. A high value of very natural ecosystems and a difficult economical situation have to be watched carefully.

04. Eastern Carpathians (Poland/Slovakia/Ukraine)

The East Carpathian Biosphere Reserve is ecologically very diversified and occupies a unique position within Slovakia and even in Central Europe. These characteristics are due to many biogeographical factors, its remoteness and restricted accessibility have permitted the preservation of original primeval forests. The Carpathian forests play an important role in water protection, and hence in the agriculture and industry of the Central European countries.

The international biosphere reserve is also an important element and an outstanding example of a trilateral transboundary co-operation under difficult political and economical circumstances.

Summary – This biosphere reserve is an excellent example of how countries in Eastern Europe can co-operate. But support is needed to develop this area. Ecotourism and sustainable agriculture can show the way.

05. Beskid (Poland/Slovakia)

The High Tatra National Park and the Pieniny National Parks (both in Poland and Slovakia) together with the Low Tatra and the Slovensky raj National Park (Slovakia) in the South and Gorce National Park in Poland as well as another proposed National Park form a cluster of conservation areas, which continue to the West in the form of different landscape protected areas. This area is an excellent example of how a protected area system can function.

Especially the two transborder National Parks are highlights for the tourism in this border area with remarkable impacts on nature. Due to the richness in species and habitats, the Tatras are nationally and internationally important for nature conservation. The Pieniny National Parks have a special geological and geomorphological feature, the cliffs. The most remarkable feature of the flora in the Pieniny mountains is its great ecological and geographical diversity.

Summary – One of the oldest protected areas in Central Europe form this interesting cluster of protected areas along the high peaks in the Tatra Mountains. But the heavy pressure of tourism is visible in parts of the landscape.

06. Sudeten Mountains – Saxonian-Bohemian Switzerland (Germany/Czech Republic/Poland)

Several protected areas are situated in a close neighbourhood, of which the transboundary co-operation between the Saxonian Switzerland National Park (D) and the newly established Bohemian Switzerland National Park is remarkable. The Saxonian Switzerland National Park (93 km^2) and Bohemian Switzerland are embedded in approx. 275km^2 of the large Saxonina Switzerland Protected Landscape Area and the Czech Labske piskovce Protected Landscape Area (approx. 97 km^2). For some time now, there has been a concept for the establishment of a Czech National Park in the Elbe-Sandstone mountains. However, the relevant parliamentary resolution has never materialised due to basic political conditions.

The concept of the Czech national park (established in January 2000) has already been co-ordinated with the existing German national park. The future administration of the national park can build on the good transboundary co-operation already in existence and bilateral planning. A part of the Labske piskovce protected landscape became a national park, the rest of the territory will remain a protected landscape area with a sustainable use and will continue to form a transition or buffer zone of the national park.

One should not loose sight of the fact that, despite the good personal co-operation between both directors of the National Parks and the Czech protected landscape area, there are still weaknesses in transboundary co-operation which can be reduced through the establishment of a Czech national park.

At a conference held in Chribska (Czech Republic[7]) the directors of both protected area administrations considered the following to be required urgently:

- Transboundary co-operation in the conservation of nature should not be dictated "top to down" by higher authorities, but rather be embedded in the protected areas themselves and developed gradually.
- There must be a political will and support for transboundary co-operation in the conservation of nature. Relevant agreements are necessary at governmental level.
- Transboundary co-operation is only feasible if partners of the same rank are involved. It implies a harmonisation of the categories of protected areas, their size, as well as a timetable for the establishment and development of transboundary protected areas.
- Transboundary co-operation requires communication in one language. That is why the knowledge of the language of the partner area must be encouraged.
- Transboundary co-operation must be concerned with the entire spectrum of tasks and must be implementation-oriented. Preparation and evaluation of joint work schedules are recommended.
- Co-operation should exceed the usual tasks and also concern personnel, technical and financial means. Transboundary areas should strive to obtain private assistance and international grants.
- Transboundary sustainable tourism should not necessarily lead to the opening of border-crossings in the core zone of the protected areas.
- Transboundary protected areas should not only be satisfied with uniting the natural area, but also both nations. The promotion of good friendly contacts is required of all staff in the transboundary protected areas.

As a result of Polish-Czech activities, the Bilateral Biosphere Reserve Karkonosze/Krkonoše – another important transborder protected area in this region – was created in 1992 by a decision of the International Committee MaB in Paris, embracing its domain within the area of National Parks on

[7] vide Cerovsky ed. (1996)

both sides of the Karkonosze Mts. The primary goal of creating the Biosphere Reserve in this area is the protection of unique natural ecosystems and setting up regulations on the use of natural resources for sustainable economic development by the population which lives at the foot of the Karkonosze Mountains.

In collaboration with the Czech Republic, a bilateral management plan for the Biosphere Reserve, developed with the local people, is being prepared. Forests damaged by pollution (mainly by sulphur dioxide) are being restored. Restoration and rehabilitation of other habitats are also being developed. Control on tourist development within the buffer zone has recently been tightened.

Four strategic goals have been set for the Biosphere Reserve:

- Conservation of cultural and natural diversity – support in establishing transfrontier biosphere reserve;
- Land management and approach to sustainable development – participation of the public;
- Research, monitoring, education and training – promoting co-operative programmes;
- Implementing the biosphere reserve concept – partnership arrangements for dealing with environmental development problems.

At least, the Stolowe Mountains National Park is situated in the Central Sudeten Mountains and covers an area of 63 km^2 of mountains enclosing the Klodzko Valley from the north-western side. The park was established in 1993, being the 19^{th} national park in Poland. The unique geological features and unusual profile of the mountains are the main aim of protection. Besides the Stolowe Mountains National Park (SMNP) and the Broumovsko Protected Landscape Area (CHKOB) four other Czech landscape parks and the Sächsische Schweiz National Park can be found in this region.

07. Oder / Odra Valley (Germany/Poland)

Protected floodplain ecosystems of an appropriate size are rare in Central Europe. The floodplain along the Oder became Germany's first floodplain National Park in 1995, whereas the landscape on the Polish side has been a Landscape Park since 1993. In the next decade, more than 50% should be strictly protected in the core zone. The floodplains play an important role as a natural floodplain protection and water clearing system.

Summary – Floodplain forests are one of the most interesting and important ecosystems in Central Europe. Just a few large floodplains were left after technical measurements along the large European rivers. The Oder valley is an example of how protected areas can be built up between western European countries and countries in transition.

08. Bavarian Forest – Sumava (Germany/Czech Republic)

The Bavarian Forest National Park, after its enlargement approximately 25.000 ha, together with its Czech counterpart National Park Sumava, is just a part of the total stretch of one of the largest forest stretches in Central Europe, with a total area of nearly 80.000 ha.

The area, for decades divided by the Iron Curtain, became an important retreat for lynx and capercailye. Parts of the Bohemian forest were declared a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve.

The co-operation between the Sumava and Bavarian Forest National Parks dates from the establishment of the Sumava National Park in 1991, immediately after the fall of the Iron Curtain at the end of 1989.

There is also a close co-operation with the Bavarian Forest Nature Park. Joint projects on hiking trails, cycle trails and the latest information project on lynx – "Me, a secret cat" – or the common panorama map representing unrestricted public usage of the Sumava Mountains are but a few examples.

Summary – This large forest stretch offers habitats for many threatened species. Due to its size it is important for the biodiversity in Central Europe.

09. Lake Neusiedl - Fertö Hansag (Austria/Hungary)

The two National Parks in Austria and Hungary protect an area of nearly 30.000 ha, including parts of the westernmost step lake in Europe. More than half of its surface is covered by the mighty reed belt, an important habitat particularly for birds. The southern part and the neighbouring meadows form the nature zone of the National Park, where every form of exploitation – tourism, hunting, fishing, reed-cutting – has been banned.

Due to its position at the border, the recent Red List of threatened species in the Austrian province Burgenland contains fauna and flora, which in Austria only appear in this specific region. Several breeding birds and step plants underline the importance of this area for the protection of species not only in Austria but also in Europe and are an argument for the rich biodiversity of this transborder protected area.

Summary – The westernmost European steppe lake offers a marvellous birdlife. Salt lakes, reed belts and a mixture of pastures and strictly protected areas, it gives a glance of the Hungarian *puszta*. High biodiversity and fascinating wildlife underline the importance of the area.

10. Drava Mura Danube River Ecosystem (Austria/Slovenia/Croatia/Yugoslavia)

Box 3 - Nature conservation in the Balkans

Since 1991 Yugoslavia has been more or less isolated within Europe. A normalisation of the relations between Yugoslavia, its neighbours and other European governments is needed and would be important for both sides.
In the field of environmental protection and nature conservation, such a normalisation might consist in transborder co-operation in protected areas, exchange of experts, experience and data, free access for people in the border areas without any restrictions and stabilisation of good contacts between administrations, local authorities and local populations on both sides of borders.

Environmental protection and nature conservation are in some way transnational tasks. Neither do ecosystems follow the state borders nor does pollution stop on international boundaries. The inclusion of Yugoslavia in different environmental programmes should therefore be in the interest of Europe as a whole.

A step-by-step process can be recommended. There are some proposals for transborder co-operation in nature protection, which have some effects on Yugoslavian territory. Including Yugoslavia in the discussion, feasibility studies, and – at least – their realisation might be a way of re-establishing old relations and better understanding. But not only the neighbouring states can play a role in this process. Even other countries and international organisations can show their responsibility for a Common House of Europe by supporting such contacts and co-operations.

Recommendations

Transboundary co-operation in protected areas occurs in different fields and at different levels. At the moment, legally sanctioned or written agreements are rather rare, while good personal contacts play an important role. However, there are no official common international standards for transboundary co-operation.

There are different recommendations in other fields of international tasks for nature protection, like the IUCN-guidelines for protected areas management categories. To improve the international co-operation, to define common goals and to support the better understanding of neighbouring protected areas, official documents or agreements might be helpful. Such agreements should concentrate on the framework of transborder co-operation like:

– Definition of common standards of transborder co-operation in protected areas;
– Assimilation of the protected areas system on both sides of the border;

– Improvement of the management system;
– Establishing an exchange programme for the staff;
– Visitor facilities for transborder tourism.

The major protected areas are the Danube-Drava National Park in Hungary and the Nature Park Kopacki Rit in Croatia. The main value of the Drava-Mura region is its high biodiversity. Many species are indicators for natural river courses, including the Little Tern, an excellent bioindicator for highly endangered natural rivers throughout Europe.

The existing protected areas such as the Nature Park Kopacki Rit and the Danube Drava National Park are part of the riverine ecosystem and can be maintained only if the whole riverine ecosystem is preserved. The buffer zone has to include the whole naturally free flowing course of the river and all remaining alluvial wetlands. Sites upstream depend on the connectivity because fish and otter populations will decrease if the river is intersected by dams. Natural dynamic is the key for high diversity. Only as long as new islands and oxbows continue to be formed by the river will the unique wildlife survive and natural processes such as the purification of the water reach optimal level.

The green corridor of meadows, pastures and lowland forests formed by Drava and Mura from Austria down to the Danube is a key axis in the European ECONET. There are few cases in Europe where such rivers and natural areas are connected through alluvial wetlands over such large distances through intensively used countryside and without intersection.

The most important step now is to establish an agreement between the States. It would improve the work of the specialists and the protected areas and ease the fund raising for the project. The transfrontier protection of the Drava and Mura as well as the development of protected areas (Nature Park Kopacki Rit/HR, Drava Forests/HR, Drava/HU-SLO and Mura/SLO) are already included in the Strategic Action Plan for the Danube River Basin (Task Force 1994). Only the governments can apply for Environmental Programme funds for the Danube River Basin. The development of the protected areas along the Danube in Yugoslavia could be supported by GEF.

The protection of a riverine landscape in five countries is a long process. The informal working group and three conferences held in Kaposvar 1993, Radenci 1996 and Zagreb 1998 played an important role during the conception, promotion and formulation phases.

Summary – The river ecosystem of Drava, Mura and the Danube (and its potential partner along the Sava river) offers one of the most beautiful and untouched floodplain ecosystems in Europe. Due to the political situation in the Balkans, it might be an important project for co-operation between countries and people very recently involved in warlike conflicts.

11. Danube Delta (Romania/Moldova/Ukraine)

The Danube Delta is the second largest in Europe after that of the Volga, in Russia, and constitutes a vast wetland area divided between Ukraine and Romania and measuring more than 600 000 ha, nine-tenths of which are in Romania. It comprises four main ecological units:

– the Danube Delta proper (about 340 000 ha);
– the Razim-Sinoie lagoon complex, separated from the Black Sea coast by a cordon of dunes (about 101 500 ha, four-fifths of which are lakes);
– the floodplain in the Tulcea sector, in the upstream part of the delta (about 9 100 ha);
– the Black Sea coastal strip (130 000 ha).

The Danube Delta Biosphere Reserve (DDBR) is situated in the heart of the delta and was established in 1990 under the auspices of UNESCO. It covers 580.000 ha, representing 2,5% of the country's land area.

The reserve contains a dozen types of habitat, each differing from the others, comprising continental, dry and wetland systems, as well as coastal systems in an excellent state of conservation. The DDBR is a wetland of international importance, designated in 1993 under the Ramsar Convention, especially as a nesting and wintering waterfowl habitat. It may also be the largest dense reed-bed in the world. There are any number of arguments to support the contention that, in terms of plant and animal life, this is a wetland of unique biological value.

The regional action plans for conserving the Danube system have an important contribution to make to the future of the delta in general, and the reserve in particular. In addition, the current discussions between Romania and the two other delta countries, Moldova and Ukraine, about the establishment of a cross-border reserve in the Danube Delta should facilitate and give impetus to the necessary co-ordination of conservation activities on a delta-wide scale, particularly with regards to fishing.

Management objectives were identified for the reserve at an international workshop in the delta in October 1991. After the meeting, a draft management plan was drawn up, with an action programme of 87 projects, to be implemented over the period 1994-99 (Lethier, 2000).

Summary – The value of the Danube Delta ecosystem is out of discussion. But it is endangered both by land use in the delta area itself and by influences from the Danube itself. The protection of the area, one of the most important ecosystems in Europe, should be a common task for all European countries.

12. Dinarid Mountains (Slovenia/Croatia/Bosnia-Herzegovina)

The Karst area in southern Europe is a very sensitive ecosystem and can be seen as a kind of underground transboundary ecosystem. Recently, due to the political situation, opportunities for international co-operation have been rather poor, but the Stability Pact is giving some chances.

Among priority large scale projects, there are no nature conservation projects, but there are certainly chances for some activities in that direction.

13. Prokletije Mountains (Yugoslavia/Albania)

Box 4 – Transboundary Protected Area Co-operation in Yugoslavia

Joint protected areas of the countries, originating out of the former Yugoslavia, have been recently added to the transboundary protected areas that Yugoslavia shares with several neighbouring countries.

Among the first ones: the Selevenj sands Nature Reserve (with the adjoining border area, which is part of the Kiskunsag National Park in Hungary), the Derdap National Park which adjoins a nature reserve in Romania, the recently designated protected nature reserve of the Balkan mountain range at the border with Bulgaria, the Prokletije National Park mountain range which was to have been established in 1998 and joined to the protected area in Montenegro and Albania, and the Skadar Lake, and even the national park at Skadar Lake for which currently there is no equivalent conservation site in Albania. Included in the protected areas between the former Yugoslavian Republics are the Shar mountain ranges with the neighbouring Mavrovo National Park in the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia; the Durmitor National Park adjoining the Sutjeska National Park in Bosnia-Herzegovina; the Tara National Park with the future Drina National Park in Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as the Upper Danube basin, an integral part of a large wetland complex represented in Croatia by the Kopacki rit protected area.

The intensity of co-operation between the areas mentioned varies.

There was little or no co-operation with Albania concerning the Skadar Lake which is also the Ramsar territory, the Durmitor National Park and the proposed national park of the Prokletije mountains. Here, there were initial contacts between experts from both countries in 1994, but without any concrete results to date.

Formal and official contacts exist between the Derdap National Park, the Tara National Park and the protected areas in the Danube basin and the respective neighbouring regions.

Co-operation with Hungary, which has existed for more than 20 years, was strengthened in 1994 through an official protocol. The protected areas are monitored in accordance with a joint management plan, negotiations are currently in process to facilitate border-crossings in protected areas.

Co-operation with Hungary is a model for the protected landscape area of the Balkan mountains, which is to become a biosphere reserve. An inter-state co-operation agreement was concluded with Bulgaria in 1995. Concerning the Shar mountain range, scheduled to become a national park as of 1998, a protocol was signed concerning co-operation with the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

The Prokletije Mountains, an area of high ecological value are of extreme wealth in biological resources, of high biodiversity, valuable both as cultural and natural landscape, and also from a geomorphological point of view. It is the habitat of many local and Balkan endemic species. After the Kosovo war in 1999 Prokletije was recommended by the UNEP Balkan Task Force as an important area according to the Convention of Biodiversity. Both in the eyes of UNEP Task Force and experts from the former Yugoslavia, it could be a good example for the establishment of a "fruitful mutual" co-operation between Montenegro, Albania and Serbia.

Whereas a detailed feasibility study is available in the Serbian part of the Prokletije Mountains, the Montenegrin part (14.000 ha) is still in discussion. The Montenegrin Government started an initiative for the designation of the Prokletije Mountains as a national park, prepared and adopted by the Institute for the Protection of Nature, Municipality of Plav and Public Enterprise for National Parks of Montenegro.

Referring to that Initiative, the Montenegrin Government has a key role in the following activities:

- adoption of the Initiative for the designation of that area – in progress;
- adoption of the Study on ecological evaluation and adequacy – planned for next year (the Institute for the Protection of Nature will prepare this study);
- law enactment – revision of the Law for National Parks (it is expected during next year);
- establishment of appropriate administrative/management bodies/services for protection of the area;
- management planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation.

Box 5 - Biodiversity in Yugoslavia

The geographic position of Yugoslavia being on the crossroads of most varying biogeographical impacts, and pathways in the biodiversity of a great number of ecologically differing mosaic-like habitats were preconditions for the extensive species diversity of particular areas as well as of the whole of its territory. Yugoslavia was one of the most important refuge regions of Europe during the Ice Age. One could differentiate between the ancient Tertiary types (relicts) on one side and glacial and interglacial ones on the other. Relatively numerous species are endemic ones, and species locally distributed are particularly important.

Especially Prokletije Mountains, a proposed National Park on the border of Serbia (Kosovo) with Montenegro and carefully monitored and scientifically researched, is one of the centres of vegetal biodiversity (out of six in Europe and out of 154 globally) not only for the Balkans and Europe.

Summary – Prokletije has been selected as an example due to its special situation on the crossroads of Albania, Yugoslavia and the Kosovo. It stands for a protected area, where co-operation between people should come first.

14. Balkan Green Belt (Albania/FYROM/Greece/Bulgaria)

The Balkan Green Belt programme was suggested by experts, NGOs and representatives of the NATURA 2000 awareness programme of the European Union as well as non-governmental organisations from Greece. It was approved by representatives of the Macedonian Ministry for Environment, the Bulgarian Ministry for Environment and Waters and the Albanian National Environmental Agency which met in Oteshevo at the Prespa Lake to elaborate a real network of protected sites in the Balkan peninsula. It will combine 14 sites along the Balkan to a green corridor stretching from Albania almost to East Rhodope.

Box 6 - Communique draft 13.01.2000

Balkan Green Belt created. NATURA 2000 comes down to the ground and will conserve the natural treasury of the Balkan for the next millennium

Representatives of three Balkan countries, Albania, Greece and FYROM, met in Oteshevo at the Prespa Lake to create a joint nature conservation programme called Balkan Green Belt as a contribution to the network of protected sites of the European Union called NATURA 2000. It is also the implementation of international conventions for nature conservation signed by the assembled countries and can also be seen in the spirit of the Mediterranean wetland strategy.

The selected sites are mainly areas along the common borders of the four neighbouring countries Albania, Greece, Macedonia and Bulgaria. The green belt in the Balkan will start north of the Ohrid Lake in the Jablanica/Raijca mountains, a Macedonian and Albanian transboundary area. The programme includes the Ohrid Lake and its surroundings, the Macro and the Micro Prespa Lake, the Pelister Mountain ranges on the Macedonian side and the Varnous Mountain on the Greek side. A new national park is planned in Albania called Shelegura connecting the already existing park Drenova-Fir with Greece to allow mammals like bears, lynx and wolves to migrate.

A Macedonian and Greek transboundary project is the Dojran Lake shared between both countries. Also shared between them are the mountain ranges of Nidze/Voras and Kozuv/Tzena. An important project will be the protection of the Vardar/Axios river system between both countries.

The Belasitsa/Beles Mountain is a common Macedonian, Bulgarian and Greek natural heritage and an important corner stone of the Balkan Green Belt network. The Western Rhodope Mountains are shared between Bulgaria and Greece and the Slavianka/Orvilos Mountain.

Finally, a Macedonian and Bulgarian joint venture is foreseen to protect the transboundary Osogovo Mountain as well as the Maleshevo Mountain.

The Balkan Green Belt programme will furthermore provide activities for raising awareness among the concerned local people as well as their participation in the further development and implementation process. To achieve this, a transboundary commission is proposed between governments of neighbouring countries to harmonise the legislation for nature conservation and to co-ordinate and facilitate the transboundary approaches. Additionally, management programmes will be elaborated and implemented. Monitoring programmes to control the status of the protected sites will be carried out (Fremuth, 2000).

Summary – For a long time, transborder co-operation seemed to be impossible in this area. The new development offers chances to co-operate. For south-eastern Europe it could play the same role as the Green Belt of Fennoscandia does in the north.

Classification

The listed transborder co-operation examples can be classified in the following categories. Aims and recommendations for different categories should not be strictly bound to a single category but also as general ideas for all co-operations in Europe.

Category 1

Protected areas between western European states and the transition countries: Green Belt of Fennoscandia, Oder Valley, Bohemiam – Saxonian Switzerland, Sumava – Bavarian Forest, Danube - Morava -Thaya Floodplain Forest, Lake Neusiedl - Fertö Hansag, Balkan Green Belt (partly)

Aims

- To equalise the quality and the system of nature protection, considering e.g. the administrative tasks, the budget, the legal background and participation of the population.
- To diminish the economical decline between these countries.
- To avoid the exploitation of natural resources, especially by foreign economic interests.

Recommendations

- Direct financial support from the wealthier country.
- Financial support and grants from international funds, applied by both countries in joint development programmes.
- Reduction of technical and organisational impacts on transborder co-operation (like fences, travel restrictions etc.).

Category 2

Protected areas between countries in transition with a stabilised political and economical situation: Nigula Bog, Beskides, Sudet Mountains, Drava-Mura-River ecosystem (except Yugoslavian part).

Aims

- To harmonise the endeavour in nature protection.
- To enforce co-operation both in nature protection and regional development to avoid different aims, standards and measurements in both fields.
- To promote and harmonise development programmes which can positively affect protected areas.

Recommendations

- Joint development programmes for protected areas and the border region itself (e.g. tourism).
- Joint management plans to ensure the quality of nature protection.
- Harmonisation of protected area systems on both sides.

Category 3

Protected areas between countries in transition with a stabilised political and economical situation and countries with social and economical problems: Curonian Spit, Bialowieza, East Carpathians, Danube Delta, Prokletije, Balkan Green Belt, Dinarid Mountains

Aims

- To enforce co-operation of local populations across borders.
- To ensure the protection of areas in times of social or economical conflicts or crisis.
- To prevent consequences of conflicts on protected areas.
- To stabilise the economy for people in and around protected areas.

Recommendations

- Joint regional economical development programmes.
- Support of sustainability in all fields of nature conservation and regional development.
- Cross-border training courses for protected area staff.
- Capacity building programmes.
- Joint committees and administrative bodies.

Conclusions

The reasons to protect the listed areas might differ to some extent. In general, the areas were selected according to their size, their role in the maintenance of biodiversity and their role in a wide European protected area network, like migrating routes, river corridors or stepping stones, but their role in the co-operation of people and nations too. Better understanding and cohabitation across borders might help to preserve peace or at least deepen understanding between people. And in future, it might help to prevent conflicts, altogether a very challenging task.

Cross-border co-operation no longer consists simply in an agreement between two protected areas. Experience has shown that to think in a broader context and in terms of networks is necessary. Cross-border co-operation can help provide larger protected areas with uniform management and thereby make a considerable contribution to the conservation of biodiversity. But networking or bilateral transborder co-operation need more than a political agreement, personal exchange or joint management. Differences in the economical situation, political tensions and traditional behaviour can hinder co-operation across borders.

Thus the primary aim is to conserve nature and to fulfil the tasks in the individual protected areas in terms of a unified protected area. In this respect, one long-term objective should be to reduce the emphasis on purely national interests.

Things are not so simple in each case of co-operation across borders. Some protected areas at national boundaries have no partner on the other side of the border, others are separated by physical barriers at the border which prevent wild animals from crossing.

Compared with other parts of the world the political situation in Europe seems to be rather stable. But the warlike conflicts in the Balkans a few years ago and their consequences, as well as the sharp economical and social incline between the two European parts, former divided by the so-called Iron Curtain, are still obvious. Restrictions and prejudice still exist.

Therefore it is important to involve the people who support – indeed must support – the protected area. The daily lives of the people living in and around protected areas are linked to a greater or lesser extent to the protected area and its purpose. Without this population it would not be possible to co-operate across borders. People in border regions often have a common history and a common culture, and frequently a common language, even if today

they belong to different nationalities. It is vital to convince this population of the need for cross-border co-operation – or the chances of success will remain slim as long as the population fails to identify with the protected area and regards it as no more than an administrative task.

The daily work in the areas themselves has to be done by people on the spot, the management, the authorities and the local population. International organisations might provide the frame, financially, with technical support and with expert knowledge.

A model project could show the way, including training programmes, capacity building and supervision. There is already a broad knowledge in some of the listed protected areas, others have to be analysed in detail.

But in general there is still a lack in data and information in a broader context like protected area clusters or networks. It might be the next important step to fill these information gaps to safeguard Europe's natural heritage.

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