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**A SECTION OF THE IUCN EUROPEAN GREEN BELT: THE CROSS-BORDER PEACE
PARK (ALBANIA/MONTENEGRO/KOSOVO)**

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Abstract

*Nelson Mandela, speaking of peace parks said "I know of no political movement, no philosophy, no ideology, which does not agree with the concept of peace parks ... in a world beset by conflict and division peace is one of the cornerstones of the future ... in the entire world"*¹

The IUCN publication, Transboundary Protected Areas for Peace and Co-operation[1], lists over 600 such regions and defines Parks for Peace as: "transboundary protected areas that are formally dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and to the promotion of peace and co-operation".

The single Prokletije mountain range is divided by three borders. It is one of the most beautiful and untouched areas of high natural habitat in Europe. One of the aims here is to preserve this most outstanding area of natural beauty and value, as well as making a contribution towards peace and stability in the region, promoting the growth of community between ethnic and religious groups. Interest in a peace park for this area has already been activated in Belgrade, Peć, Plav, Podgorica, Shkodra, Tirana, Plav and elsewhere, although, as Franz Stummann observed, "Politicians don't see what's happening on the borders" [2].

It has been said that "borders constitute the main cause of wars ... neighboring countries are the most prone to fight. The danger of violence creeps around borders" [3]. Despite considerable skepticism initially, a "peace park", covering a wide geographical area has been developing for the past decade in the area surrounding the meeting point in the high remote mountains of Kosovo/Albania/Montenegro. Each of these aspire to EU membership. There are already many people, NGOs, local and national authorities working on ongoing relevant projects within the area, as well as dialoguing, across the borders.

¹ Speech to the Peace Parks Foundation, 2001.

1. INTRODUCTION

The Balkans Peace Park Project Committee is composed of a group of enthusiasts. It is a registered charity in the UK and works closely with partners in all three regions (Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro) towards the creation of the Peace Park itself. This area is perhaps the last Alpine wilderness in Europe. This is peace park not just for former Yugoslavia, but a unique way to bring together the two Europes, East and West, in a special place.

I shall look briefly at the following points: addressing location, local attitudes to environmental issues and eco-tourism, and the relevance of sustainable development, progress and activities, and finally problems to be faced.

2. LOCATION OF THE BALKANS PEACE PARK (B3P)

Within the three regions: Northern Albania, Western Kosovo and South Eastern Montenegro, work on this primarily rural project is outside urban areas. Hence it should be East of Shkodra, North of Bajram Curri, West of Gjakovica and Peć, South of Berane. This sets a natural limit to the area outside any network of main roads.

The three particular regions which concern us are the Rugova region of Western Kosovo, the Montenegrin Prokletije Park², and the Thethi National Forest Park in Northern Albania. In 1991, Montenegro declared itself as the world's first Environmental State[4]. Initial links through roundtables on biological monitoring of birds, fish, flora and fauna within the area have already begun

3. ADDRESSING LOCAL ATTITUDES TO ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES AND ECO-TOURISM

Sustainable use of the land has been hampered by a lack of coordinated legal parameters or even the effective attempt to find out and implement them. The project respects already existing landownership. Of high importance is care for existing and

² Montenegro has four national parks: Biogradska Gora, Lovćen, Skadar Lake (bordering Albania) and Durmitor. In discussion with Montenegrin government ministers it became clear that, while they encourage outside investment in the Prokletija area, they do not have funding to support a fifth national park.

improved agriculture and for endangered species. Somewhat opposed to this we must consider the development of carefully limited hiking, biking, climbing, caving, mountaineering and fishing expeditions. Further research is necessary to co-ordinate all existing projects and to discover the feasibility of all its aspects and the order of further activity, allowing for adaptability where necessary.

4. THE RELEVANCE OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

The regions with which we are concerned are all rural areas which are suffering in greater or lesser degree from migration. Most of the communities have thrived in the past through small-scale agriculture, but now, depleted of manpower, and overtaken by mass-production, or deprived of the means to get their produce to markets, the remaining inhabitants are existing in conditions of great poverty, yet in areas of immense beauty and hence potential wealth. In northern Albania in particular, there are pockets of village life barely touched by the last century: accessible only on foot (a 4 or 5-hour walk), there are also subsistence farmers making their bare living in complete eco-harmony (though not content with their meager existence). Issues to be addressed include refugee returns (Kosovo) and bloodfeuds (Albania).

5. PROGRESS AND CURRENT ACTIVITIES

The Balkans Peace Park Project (B3P) is working with strong support from the United Nations Environmental Protection Department (based in Vienna), and also from ADA, the Austrian government agency. BPPP also attempts to collaborate with many existing projects, e.g. *Euronatur*, the *Vermosh Community of Kelmend*, *Oxfam's village structures*, *The National Mission for the Reconciliation of Bloodfeuds*, and with other NGO's and charities which enhance rural and cultural life in the area as well as local and national government agencies. In Montenegro B3P is in communication with the *Ministry for Environmental Protection and Spatial Planning* and the *Republic Institute for Nature Protection*. It is also in discussion with other government ministries in all three regions. It has dialogued with the *Institute for Nature Conservation in Belgrade*, as well as the *Head of the Montenegrin Economy and Environment Section of the Organisation of Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)*.

As an inhabitant myself of a national park in the UK, we have hosted potential park rangers from all the three regions in the Yorkshire Dales National Park and shown how private ownership can exist within a national park.

UNEP, in naming B3P, "The First Balkans Peace Park"[5], is working on eleven other Balkan cross-border environmentally protected areas. However, B3P aims to encompass more than simply environmental protection, to include human security in all its forms. Cross border linkage as a factor in peaceful and unpeaceful relationships. Cross-border linkages may help enhance transboundary co-operation in a world of changing and dissolving frontiers. On the other hand, linkages of ethnic, religious or political groups, may also exacerbate conflict, if cross-border activity is linked to irredentist, separatist, or expansionist movements, or to organized smuggling, trafficking or crime. The recognition of the salience of trans-boundary relations in the modern world, as a key issue in the politics of peace is essential, as the situations in parts of Africa, the Middle East and the Balkans currently illustrate. Transboundary cooperation and environmental protection is also an increasingly urgent issue in dealing with planetary trends and biodiversity security. The growth of peace parks is one example of consolidating such linkages beyond frontiers, which deal with existing and potential cross-border relations, in conflict and post conflict situations. Transnational activity may form a primary mode of peacebuilding, but without such action and awareness may also lead to less benign linkages, endangering peace and regional security, may develop.

We have had student interns assisting in the region every summer since 2001 (the founding year of B3P).

It was our regional partner NGO's who first brought together the mayors of all the B3P regions (November 2006), to sign a Letter of Good Intent. In March 2008, they and higher authorities all met together to take their commitment to a higher stage. Consultations are ongoing.

In the meantime, I have taken responsibility this year for the organization of a 2-month pilot Summer Programme to teach Environmental Awareness and English language in a remote Albanian mountain village. This year its connection will be with another remote Albania mountain village, a full day's walk to the next valley. In future years the plan is to have parallel programmes in all three regions, with exchanges of local youth, and training in mountain guiding. This last is especially in demand as increasing numbers of tourists are finding their way into the Peace Park region. In past years we have organized a number of cross-border treks.

B3P currently has an exhibition on show in a Leeds museum (UK) and is one of the 30 contributors to the IUCN Greenbelt exhibition in Utrecht, "A Wider View: European Cultural Landscape Challenges" opening on 16th June, (in just over a week), and to

remain on display for the rest of the year.

Information on all aspects of B3P is disbursed through our website: www.balkanspeacepark.org

6. PROBLEMS TO BE ADDRESSED

1. The need for maintaining co-operation at governmental level, but at the same time allowing for decision-making to take place at the local level.
2. Ensuring that political motivation plays no part.
3. Funding - this is being sought internationally.
4. Landownership.
5. Ongoing bloodfeuds.
6. The need to clarify eco-tourism objectives.
7. The ambivalence between preserving local culture with its systems of honour and the need, when dealing with the wider world, for transparency with written contracts.
8. Opening the borders could increase illegal activity.
9. Cases of local conflict can be exacerbated by the presence of outsiders.
10. Increased external input can have the effect of either of increasing or decreasing local initiative.

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