

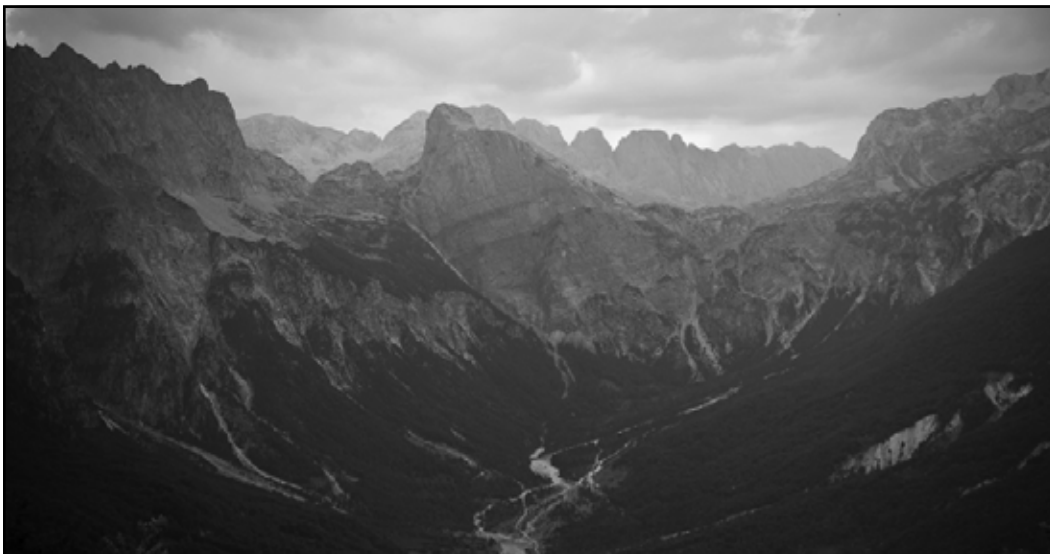


Institute for Environmental
Diplomacy & Security @
the University of Vermont

Case Study: The Evolution of the Balkans Peace Park Project

Todd Walters

This case study tells the story of the proposed Balkans Peace Park and its genesis and evolution as it progresses from an idea into reality, aspiring towards official Track 1 recognition.



Remote Alpine Village of Thethi, Albania. Photo Credit © International Peace Park Expeditions, Cory Wilson, 2009.

Full disclosure: The author volunteered for the UK charity (1105447) the Balkans Peace Park Project (B3P) for 3 months in 2008 (June, July and August) as the first Balkans Peace Park Summer Programme Coordinator, and was inspired by that experience to establish the US non-profit (27-1582462), International Peace Park Expeditions. I continue to work in Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro in the Prokletja / Bjeshket a Namuna Mountains in the proposed Balkans Peace Park region. The experiences gained in the region that summer and each year since, the personal friendships, the organizational partnerships, and the project collaborations combined with the academic research, literature review, and published writings on environmental peacebuilding in this post-conflict region have moved me to undertake sharing this intricate case as part of my fellowship at the Institute for Environmental Diplomacy & Security.

Challenges overcome and successes celebrated by people, organizations and institutions¹ form the foundation of this case. I will attempt to distill some key lessons learned that can inform transboundary environmental conservation as a tool for post conflict peacebuilding in other geographic regions.

¹ Authors Note: "I would like to recognize and thank the following people for their support in the Balkans: Fatos Laci, Ellen Frank-Leicji, Kushtrim Muriqi, Enko Dreshkovic, Almir Dreshkovic, Mensur Markasik, Kelmend Ahmetaj and Family, Pavlin Polia, Arian Gjura, Alma Shkreli, Eralda Nikshiqi, Mark Rupa, Ndrimiro Ciroka; the Gjeca, Polia, Gumnori, Gerla, Shpella, and Harusha Families in Thethi; and from the B3P Committee Antonia Young, Ann Kennard, Richard Hargreaves."

The Author

Todd Walters is the Founder and Executive Director of International Peace Park Expeditions (IPPE) an organization that applies experiential learning within international peace parks to foster an interdisciplinary approach to leadership and collaboration, build a network dedicated to the advancement of peace parks, and support the development of local communities (peaceparkexpeditions.org). Walters holds a Masters in International Peace and Conflict Resolution from the School of International Service at American University. He is a National Outdoor Leadership School certified adventure guide with wilderness first responder (WFR) medical training, and has led expeditions around the globe.

The Institute for Environmental Diplomacy and Security

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As an American land grant university, the University of Vermont has the obligation to play a significant role in fundamental research, as well as evaluation and analysis of policies and programs that affect the public at large in a variety of disciplines critical to global policy-makers. In recognition of this, the University established the James M. Jeffords Center in 2009, so named to honor former United States Senator James M. Jeffords for his long and distinguished service to Vermont and the nation. The center is, however, a nonpartisan organization and works in the spirit of independence that Senator Jeffords championed during his career. The Institute for Environmental Diplomacy and Security is a signature project of the James M. Jeffords Center.

Disclaimer: This case has been prepared as the basis for discussion and collective learning rather than to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of an administrative situation.

Introduction

The story starts with a flash of inspiration from one intrepid woman following her wanderlust in the footsteps of a famous British Explorer, Edith Durham, who trekked by horseback through the Dinaric Alps at the turn of the century – before communism lowered its iron curtain of isolationism and paranoia. Inquisitive young British anthropologist, Antonia Young, surrendered to her inner adventurer and began exploring Tito’s Yugoslavia in the 1960s. Using her inquiring personality and depth of anthropological knowledge, she accepted the phenomenal hospitality of the people of the region, all the while keeping her keen eye open to social and cultural nuances, particularly in the remote, rugged, and stunningly beautiful communities tucked away in the valleys of these limestone mountains. Those mountains, and those people, kept drawing her back; year after year, decade after decade, she continued to return. Friendships turned into adopted families, children grew up and had their own families, political systems transitioned, and conflict gripped the region more than once. Through it all, Antonia Young studied, wrote, and continued to explore. Her book *Sworn Virgins*² won international acclaim – unveiling the unique cultural phenomenon that allowed a widowed woman or eldest daughter who lost her father or the man of the house, to assume a man’s role in patriarchal Albanian society. Talking, dressing, acting as a man, and assuming the man’s duties around the home and in the community were all part of this phenomenon. The cultural anthropologist was fascinated, and dug deeper, exploring the shadowy world of the retribution killings through “Blood Feuds,” whereby the eldest male of the family was expected to commit a revenge killing of the murderer, the murderer’s male child, or the family patriarch – and thus the tit for tat murderous exchanges between families extended throughout generations. Antonia Young was in the region when Albanian communism came to an end in the 1990s, as well as during the scandal of the financial pyramid schemes which bankrupted as many as 70% of Albanian families. Shortly thereafter, Slobodan Milosovic and his ethnocidal brand of Serbian nationalism swept the Balkans, leaving a conflict-torn region with refugees, environmental damage, and a general psychological profile of post traumatic stress. It was during this point in time that Antonia Young learned something new from her husband, Dr. Nigel Young, a Peace Studies scholar, and former professor at University of California – Berkeley, who was then the founder of the Peace Studies program at Colgate University. She learned about the idea of an International Peace Park.

The Balkans Peace Park Project (B3P) Was Born

In June 2001 the idea of a transboundary conservation area for peace and reconciliation in the region began to coalesce into action. An open meeting in York, United Kingdom (UK) led to the formation of a UK based Project Committee working towards the creation of a Peace Park in the Balkans. This small group of

² Young, Antonia. 2000. *Women who Become Men: Albanian Sworn Virgins*. Berg.

ordinary citizens, many of them Quakers, and peace activists, resolved that they would undertake this project to help support the people of the region and help bring peace to the opposite side of Europe. After compiling a shared list of contacts throughout the region, the early strategy focused on developing partnerships with local NGOs, while simultaneously working to publicize the region, and the concept of a “Balkans Peace Park” in the UK and internationally, in order to draw attention to the plight of the people still struggling to recover and rebuild in the wake of the Yugoslav conflict. One of the first spotlights shone when Rosie Swale³, the internationally renowned explorer and travel writer, set out alone, on foot, to explore the approximate boundaries of the proposed Balkans Peace Park, while sharing the idea with anyone who would listen. And so the idea began to grow.

The summer of 2003 saw the ‘Inaugural trek’⁴ from Rugova (in present day Kosovo which declared independence on February 17, 2008), through the Prokletije Mountain range (and into present day Montenegro which achieved independence June 3, 2006) and onwards to Vermosh and Theth (remote villages in Northern Albania). Comprised of B3P committee members, international adventurers, US college students from Colgate University, and jointly organized with NGOs in the region, the trek brought together local people interested in transcending political boundaries and further exploring this idea of what it would mean to have a Peace Park in their region.

After receiving official recognition as a charity from the UK government in 2004, the B3P committee helped to organize a 550km cycle tour from Podgorica (the present day capital of Montenegro) through all three regions, broadening the growing local constituency supporting the Balkans Peace Park concept.⁵ This momentum led to a weekend workshop held in the Yorkshire Dales National Park, UK, with local NGO representatives from Albania, Kosovo, Serbia, and Montenegro, who were

3 Young, Antonia. 2008. Establishing the Balkans Peace Park (Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo/a) Overcoming conflicts through negotiation on cross-border environmental protection. *Central and Eastern European Review* 2.: “Rosie Swale has written six books and numerous articles. Her achievements are truly remarkable: she sailed the Atlantic alone in a boat only 6 meters long (70 days); she rode two horses alone, the length of Chile (5,000 kms.—8 months). She has run, for charities, across Romania, Iceland, Cuba and in the Sahara Desert marathon, then Nepal. She is currently running round the world for charities; you can check her progress at: www.rosiearoundtheworld.co.uk.”

4 Hargreaves, Richard. 2006. Report on Trekking from Theth to Curraj Eperm, Albania (Unpublished). <http://balkanspeacepark.org> : “In 2003 the ‘Inaugural trek’ took place. 36 people from 8 countries embarked on mountain walks in Kosovo, Montenegro, and Albania, finishing with a conference for 80 people in Shkodër, organized by Blendi Dibra of IRSH. Transport was used between countries because border crossings were not open. The walks included the wonderful mountain walk from Lepushë near Vermosh to Thethi via Qafa Koprishit and Qafa e Pejës, said to be the first time this route had been walked for 15 years.”

5 Hargreaves, Richard. 2007. Report on the 2007 two week multi-activity, borders-crossing trip (Unpublished). <http://balkanspeacepark.org> : “Cycle ride by 8 people from 5 countries: 550km. Podgorica – Kolashin – Andrijevica – Cakor Pass – Drelaj – Peja – (Transport to Berane) – Plav – Gusinje – Vermosh – Koplik – Thethi – Shkodër – round Lake Skadar – Virpazar – Podgorica. Trucks had to be hired for parts of the route, especially in Albania where the gravel mountain roads defeated those not on mountain bikes. Great help was provided by Branko Hajdukovic, President of the Yugoslav Cycling Federation.”

increasingly committed to embracing the idea of a Balkans Peace Park and wanted to learn more about how they could make it their own. The group developed and wrote a formal proposal for the establishment of the 'First Balkans Peace Park,' intending to secure sponsorship and financial support, while also formally introducing the idea to the government in each country. The Ministry of the Environment in Kosovo was the first government entity to fully support the idea. Additionally, the small group of committed citizens in the UK realized that the project was starting to take shape. Shortly thereafter, in March 2005, Nigel Young secured the opportunity to meet with Harald Eggerer, the United Nations Environment Program Liaison Officer in Vienna, Austria. By the conclusion of that conversation, the proposed Balkans Peace Park was declared the "First Cross-Border Balkans Peace Park." Though largely symbolic this declaration was another critical step towards broad international recognition and support for the idea.

While things were progressing on the conceptual level, Antonia Young could not ignore her close connections with the people on-the-ground, and was excited to return in 2005 and head a three year Ethnographic study as part of the Shala Valley Archaeological Project⁶ within the Theth National Park in Albania. Being back in her element allowed her to not only study in-depth the nuances of the unique mountain culture that spanned the political boundaries, but also allowed her to share the progress made on the Balkans Peace Park concept, and to introduce the concept to thousands of other individuals. The seeds were beginning to take root. Later that summer Fatos Lajci, a dedicated Kosovar environmentalist led a trek of local and international participants through the region, which he called the 'Long Walk for Peace.'⁷ The trek culminated in the first international conference to explore the idea of a Balkans Peace Park with local and international actors, held in the flashpoint region of Mitrovica, Kosovo. He was able to secure the support of the Kosovan Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sport, further inserting the idea into the political system in Kosovo, and actively completing the first project acknowledging the Balkans Peace Park idea sponsored by a local government and championed by a local stakeholder.

These successes were harnessed to develop a more comprehensive, integrated vision with practical projects which could initiate the environmental peacebuilding process on multiple levels of society simultaneously. In April 2006 UNEP committed to funding the first phase of this integrated vision for the purpose of promoting the development of strong local democratic procedures; fostering better cross-border cooperation; and promoting harmonious trans-border environmental protection in the Balkans Peace Park Project (B3P) region. The support of UNEP

⁶ Shala Valley Project. <http://www.millsaps.edu/svp/>

⁷ Rossi, Chris. A Long Walk for Peace: The Balkans Peace Park Project. <http://groups.colgate.edu/cews/archives/2004-2005/Chris%20Rossi%20Panel%201%20balkans.pdf> : "2003 signaled 'A Long Walk for Peace,' sponsored by the Kosovar Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sport, for 21 people, mostly from Kosovo but with two participants from the UK and three Albanians. The group embarked on mountain walks in each country."

went a long way towards establishing the legitimacy of the B3P committee, both in the UK and in the Balkans, and lent considerable weight to the idea. It also initiated a new stage in the evolution of implementation. In November 2006, a coalition of local NGOs in the region hosted a conference in the Grand Hotel in Prishtina, Kosovo, bringing together the mayors and other municipal leaders of the communities that would be considered in or around the B3P area, inviting them to commit themselves publicly to supporting the development of a transboundary Peace Park. The Mayors, or their deputies, from five of the six municipalities in the proposed Balkans Peace Park region addressed the conference and signed a Letter of Good Intent to work together to support the creation of the Peace Park within their municipalities in partnership with their counterparts across the border. The sixth Mayor gave his signature at a later ceremony.⁸

Since 2006 the B3P has collaborated with other International NGOs and government development organizations, including UNEP, IUCN, European Green Belt, Austrian Development Cooperation, SNV Dutch Development organization, as well as with local and regional NGOs and government organizations; and more recently in 2011, with GIZ (German Organization for International Cooperation). The start of 2007 saw additional cross-border trekking expeditions,⁹ including a multi-activity, borders crossing trip organized by B3P Committee member Richard Hargreaves, which also introduced the concept of “eco-tourism.” Hargreaves held this expedition to attract attention to the region and the cross-border efforts of environmental peacebuilding. The expedition crossed the Albania-Montenegro border twice and included sustainable climbing, hiking and mountain biking activities – with international participants and local guides from each country.¹⁰ During 2007, academic publications and conference presentations began to illustrate the progress of the Balkans Peace Park concept with the broader international academic community focused on peace studies, environmental studies, and border studies. Abbey Radis, assistant to Antonia Young, presented her own paper on The Role of Resource Sharing Initiatives in Peacebuilding, on behalf of the Balkans

8 Rossi, Chris. A Long Walk for Peace: The Balkans Peace Park Project. <http://groups.colgate.edu/cews/archives/2004-2005/Chris%20Rossi%20Panel%201%20balkans.pdf> : “Conference in Pristina in November at which mayors or leaders from 5 of the 6 municipalities serving the B3P region, Peja, Decan, Rozaj, Plav, Shkodër and Bajram Curraj, signed a Letter of Good Intent to support the concept of the Balkans Peace Park - organized by a Coalition of local environmentalists from Kosovo, Montenegro and Albania.”

9 Hargreaves, Richard. 2007. Report on the 2007 two week multi-activity, borders-crossing trip (Unpublished). <http://balkanspeacepark.org> : “A group of 15 did the two day round trip trek from Okol (above Thethi) in Albania to Zastan Kabila above Vusanje (Montenegro).”

10 Hargreaves, Richard. 2007. Report on the 2007 two week multi-activity, borders-crossing trip (Unpublished). <http://balkanspeacepark.org> : “July: ‘Multi-activity, borders-crossing trip’ from Plav: 4 day trek on foot into Albania from Ropojana valley (Vusanje), Qafa e Pejës, Thethi, Valbona, Kukaj, Qafa Valbona, Zastan Kabila, Plav. 5 day mountain bike tour to Kosovo: Cakor Pass, Drelaj, Peja, Decan, Qafa Bogicevica, Babino Polje, Plav. The group climbed a peak in each country: Maja Arapit (Albania), Ochnyak from Grbaje (Montenegro), Hajla Peak (Kosovo/Montenegro border) and also raised a B3P banner on Trimedra, c.2365m, the mountain point where Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro meet.”

Peace Park, at the *Parks, Peace and Partnerships Conference* in Waterton Lakes National Park, Alberta, Canada, as part of the celebration of their 75th anniversary of cross-border collaboration. Ann Kennard, made a presentation about the B3P, marking the formal close of *EUROPARC's Nature - Bridging Borders* conference held in Cesky Krumlov in the Czech Republic. Every year since November 2007, B3P colleagues have addressed the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) on some aspect of B3P's work at their Annual Seminars. A busy 2007 closed with an accolade, as the B3P received a Highly Recommended Certificate from the British Guild of Travel Writers as part of the Best Overseas Tourism Project.

At this point the B3P had built a fairly robust network of contacts throughout the region at multiple levels of society, including central government, several international government organizations, regional government, municipalities, NGOs, and other organizations from Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro. In March 2008 the B3P helped to convene 60 of these stakeholders in a two-day workshop in Shkodra, Albania, for the purposes of planning the next steps towards the creation of the transboundary Balkans Peace Park. Specialist groups were formed around key topic areas from ecotourism, to organic food certification, to development projects and environmental challenges. This meeting formalized the process adopted by this diverse group of stakeholders, introduced the concept and all of its players to new participants, and established a superordinate regional goal for all stakeholders. After this conference the B3P returned to the region in the Summer for the first annual B3P Summer Programme. The Summer Program signaled the first occasion in which the organization implemented a project in the region, which was not a conference or an ecotourism trek. The Summer Programme demonstrated a direct, concrete contribution to the community in the remote Shala Valley – where Antonia Young had completed her ethnographic work with the Shala Valley Project. (Note – this was also the project that the author coordinated for 10 weeks in the village of Theth, Albania.) Through Antonia Young's ethnographic studies, members of the Shala Valley community identified English language instruction and practical skill development as a necessity. The summer programme brought 17 international volunteer teachers and 5 local Albanian teachers to instruct over 80 youth in English and environmental education.¹¹ To complement the formal classes the volunteers also harnessed their passions to provide extracurricular instruction in art, music, drama, and sports activities, while also contributing to the development of sustainable tourism in the Shala Valley by living with local families, and supplementing their income. These families were learning how to adapt their traditional notions of hospitality to the concept of hosting foreign travelers in their homes, providing meals and supplies, and offering local guide service to sites of environmental, cultural or historical significance. The Summer Programme has also served to provide a presence in the region for the B3P when other activities take

¹¹ Walters, Jonathan Todd. 2008. B3P Summer Programme 2008 Report. Paper presented at the 2008 B3P Annual Meeting at Coventry University – Peace & Reconciliation Centre, September 20, In U.K.

place – such as first ascents of mountains within the region; partners can synergize publicity and co-promote each other’s activities. This synergy took place when the US rock climber John Ely and his team pioneered a new route to the Summit of Maya Arrapit in Theth, Albania and a Polich team named their new route up Maya Lagojvet, the “Balkans Peace Park Route.” Ely and his team even collected signatures at their base camp in support of the creation of a Balkans Peace Park.¹² The Summer Programme in Thethi has continued each summer since 2008, and expanded to include the Rugova Valley in Kosovo in 2010, when B3P volunteers participated in a Summer Camp organized by the Environmentally Responsible Action (ERA) Group and The Ideas Partnership. In 2012 the Summer Programme will further expand to a second village in Albania – Vermosh, and is working to develop a sister program across the border in Vuthaj, Montenegro. Teaching both Environmental Education and English language classes, helps to support inter-generational skills that will help to foster ecotourism as a livelihood opportunity as well as increase environmental awareness and activism targeting youth within the region. In order to foster greater local ownership of the B3P concept and process, the UK-based committee has worked hard to build the capacity of local supporters and local partners, culminating in 2011 with the formal founding and recognition by the Albanian national government of B3P Albania, a local NGO committed to the creation of a Peace Park in the tri-border region, founded and operated by Albanians. Further reflecting the global growth of the concept, there has also been some momentum towards creating a 501c3 non-profit B3P USA; however, the formal application to the US federal government has not been filed at the time of the drafting of this case study.

In 2011, other organizations working in the region in conjunction with the B3P made significant progress; the German organization GIZ arranged for 40 members of mountaineering clubs in the three countries to trek from Rugova to Plav, then from Vusanje to Thethi, Valbona and Cerem. This signaled a significant development: a cross-border trek route which has now been mostly waymarked. Details can be viewed on Facebook under the group called ‘Peaks of the Balkans’¹³ or in GIZ Newsletters written in German. Polish climbers returned to make a route ‘Peacehammer’ up Maja Shkurt in Prokletije and a party of UK climbers enjoyed what they called ‘adventure climbing’ from a camp between Qafa e Pejës and Runic meadows in Albania. Finally, International Peace Park Expeditions – the author’s organization, ran the first accredited academic expedition in the proposed peace park region in partnership with Dr. Saleem Ali and the University of Vermont (USA), focused on transboundary environmental cooperation, sustainable devel-

12 Hargreaves, Richard. 2011. B3P Newsletter. No. 8. <http://balkanspeacepark.org> : “Rock climbing developments: Polish climbers made a new route and possible first ascent of Mt. Lagojvet in Prokletije, which they named ‘Balkans Peace Park route.’ John Ely from US and climbers from Germany and Albania made a major new route up the 1000m face of Maja Arapit. They also visited the Summer Programme in Thethi and collected names for a petition to promote B3P at their base camp by the spring at the start of the Qafa e Pejës path.”

13 Peaks of the Balkans Facebook Group. <http://www.facebook.com/groups/230169227008743/>

opment projects, and ecotourism initiatives – it allowed students to experience first hand the link between the theory of the classroom and how it plays out in the real world.¹⁴

Organizational Structure

The Balkans Peace Park Project B3P is a UK-based, registered charity,¹⁵ comprised of a group of people who passionately believed in an idea, and after a decade of challenging work, remain determined and committed to bring their idea to fruition. “B3P is a genuine grassroots network bringing together a diverse selection of people: academics, artists, environmental activists both in the Balkans, and around the globe, and of course involving local people living and working in the valleys and villages of Northern Albania, Montenegro and Kosovo/a.”¹⁶ The organization has fostered the development of a Balkans Peace Park Project Albania – B3P Albania – closely tied to the UK Charity, but comprised of a Board of Directors and members, who are all local Albanians who have embraced the mission. Each organization is an NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) that is recognized locally and nationally, and is built on a shared vision, relying on the hard work of volunteers. In addition to internal member fundraising, B3P applies for grants from Embassies, Foundations, regional/national banks, and other companies. The organization actively seeks partnerships with other people, organizations, institutions, ministries, and international agencies which share the vision of the Balkans Peace Park. B3P Albania is expected to operate in much the same manner.

Sir Graham Watson, Liberal Democrat Member of the European Parliament for South West England and Gibraltar, is a Patron of the Balkans Peace Park Project and places the BPP in its context by indicating:

The European Union has done a great deal to secure peace and prosperity for its members, but has been deeply troubled by conflict in South East Europe. Whilst EU membership remains a beacon of hope for Balkan countries, schemes like the Balkan Peace Park Project are vitally important to peace in Europe. The Project rises above the politics that have plagued the region, and instead focuses on the issues that are common to Albanians, Kosovars and Montenegrins alike; protecting the shared natural environment and promoting a sustainable economic prosperity for all those living in the area. For me, this embodies both the spirit of liberalism and European integration, and I am therefore proud to be a Patron of the Balkans Peace Park Project.¹⁷

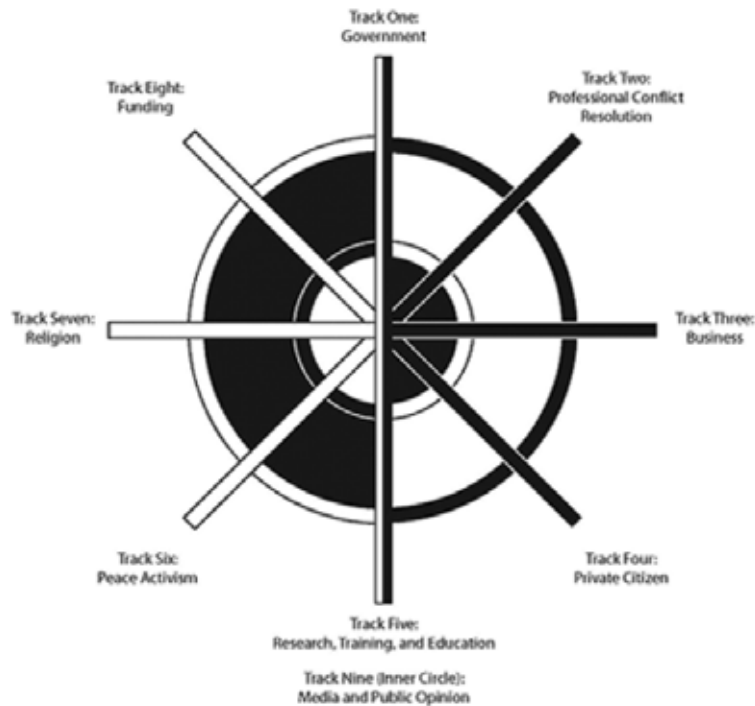
14 Conservation Beyond Borders: Exploring the Prospects for a Peace Park in the Balkans - <http://newswatch.nationalgeographic.com/2011/09/28/conservation-beyond-borders-balkans-2011-academic-expedition/>

15 According to their website (B3P Website). <http://balkanspeacepark.org> (accessed April 15, 2012).

16 B3P Website. <http://balkanspeacepark.org> (accessed April 15, 2012)

17 MEP Graham Watson: 2010, B3P Website. <http://balkanspeacepark.org>

Strategy – A Multi-track Grassroots Approach



*Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy. 2004. Principles of Multi-Track Diplomacy. Accessed June 15, 2012
www.imtd.org*

The following passage is an excerpt from the author's chapter: "A Peace Park in the Balkans: Cross-Border Cooperation and Livelihood Creation through Coordinated Environmental Conservation"¹⁸ in a seven volume series on Natural Resource Management for Post-Conflict Peacebuilding published by UNEP and the Environmental Law Institute in 2012.¹⁹

A prime example of the use of the multi-track approach is the proposed Balkans Peace Park in former Yugoslavia, between formally closed, formerly communist Albania and newly independent Montenegro and Kosovo. Due to the dramatically different relationship that Montenegro and Kosovo have with their former state of Serbia, as well as the role that the United Nations Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK) played in building up Kosovo's institutional capacity, the decision for Kosovo and Montenegro to formally recognize each other's sovereignty and independence was one fraught with consequences, not least of which was Serbia's expulsion of the Montenegrin Ambassador the day after recognition. Such actions render a Track 1 approach to formally creating an international peace park

18 Walters, Jonathan Todd. 2012. "A Peace Park in the Balkans: Cross-Border Cooperation and Livelihood Creation through Coordinated Environmental Conservation." In *Post-Conflict Natural Resource Management and Peacebuilding. Livelihoods, Natural Resources and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Volume*, ed. Helen Young and Lisa Goldman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (http://www.eli.org/Program_Areas/PCNRM/livelihoods.cfm).

19 Environmental Law Institute and UNEP – Program on Post Conflict Natural Resource Management. http://www.eli.org/Program_Areas/PCNRM/

extremely challenging, making it possible to employ a multi-track approach just below the highest levels of government, where political constraints are not as significant.

Engaging with the multi-track approach for the Balkans Peace Park has created a collaborative community comprised of the Mayors of the Municipalities where the proposed peace park would be located, the government Ministries for Environment, Tourism and Development, the international development agencies of foreign countries including ADA (Austrian Development Agency), SNV (Dutch Development Agency) and GTZ (German Technical Cooperation), individuals from the U.S. Peace Corps and the U.S. and British Embassies, local NGO leaders from Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo (who created their own coalition of local NGOs), and local people who reside within the proposed peace park area.

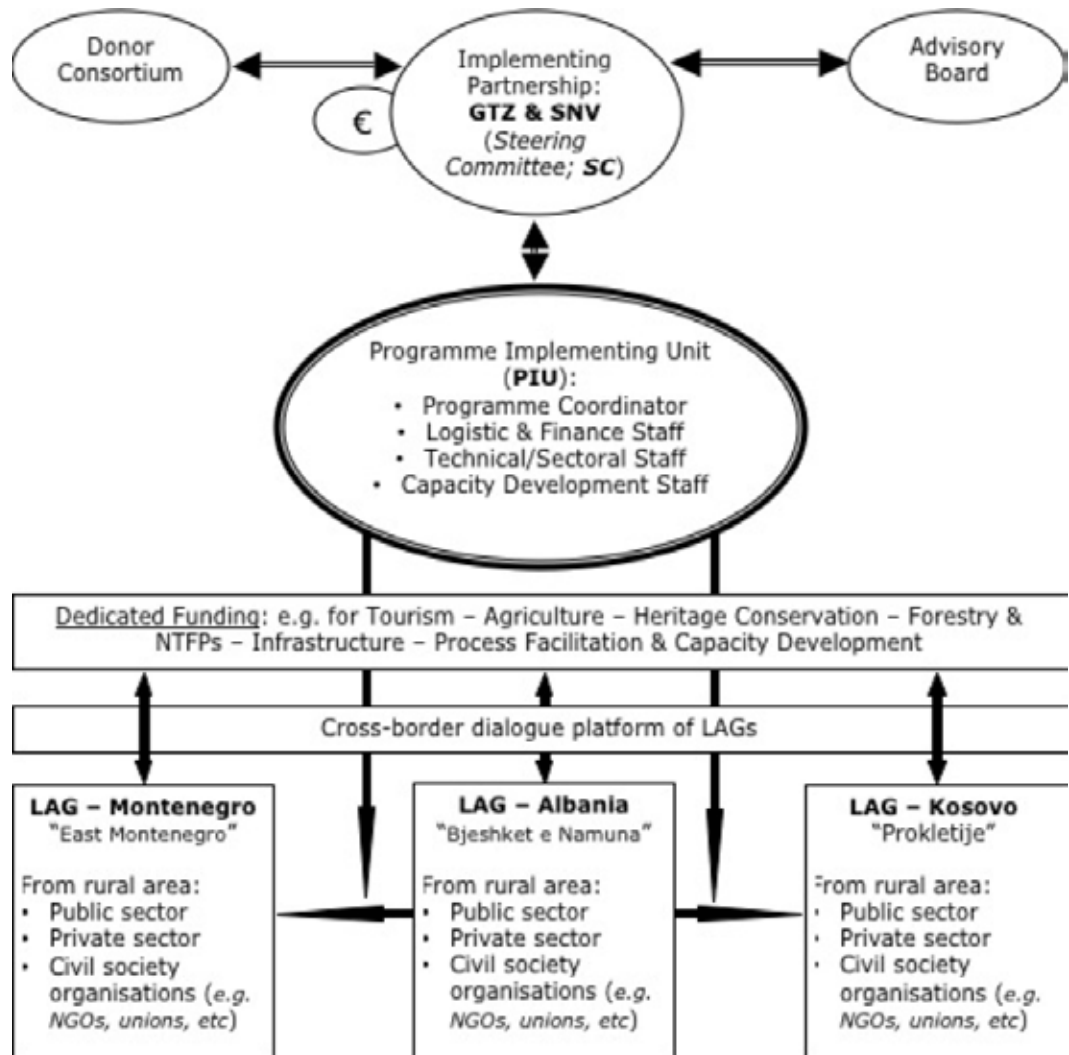
Many different actors and projects yield a variety of opportunities for livelihoods creation - from small-scale sustainable development initiatives to large-scale biodiversity surveys to even larger infrastructure development projects. The loosely knit coalition of stakeholders is growing closer together over time capitalizing on one of the under recognized benefits of collaboration – the more people collaborate, the better and more efficient and effective the collaboration becomes over time. Almost a decade since the Balkans Peace Park Project began in 2001, there is now a community of stakeholders committed to cross-border cooperation on issues of environmental conservation, natural resource management, and sustainable development. These stakeholders are all engaged with one other and working towards many of the core goals of creating an International Peace Park. It is crucial to note that an infinite amount of multi-track diplomacy can occur, but until the diplomacy generates a critical mass of citizens in many different capacities putting pressure on the Governments involved, or unless it involves Track 1 actors, there can not be a formal “official” declaration of the Peace Park’s existence. Multi-track diplomacy while broad in depth, is limited in scope of official national efficacy, particularly when engaging issues of sovereignty. For the International Peace Park to successfully make the transition from multi-track collaboration on a “proposed peace park,” involving a number of different stakeholders at a number of different levels, to an “Official” International Peace Park, actors at the Track 1 level need to recognize the park in an “official diplomatic declaration” in a MOU or formal Treaty.

A key objective of the B3P project is to promote sustainable visitor activities in the mountains and valleys, so that people living in the region can benefit from the income generated by visitors, enabling traditional life styles to continue, albeit with some modern facilities. For active mountain tourists, the Prokletije / Bjeshket a Nemuna range of Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo

is a landscape of wild beauty, almost unique in Europe, relatively unspoilt by modern development. There is great hospitality in the farmhouses in the valleys, where home-made raki flows freely. Many of the peaks are suited to the serious rock climbers only, but several can be climbed by experienced mountain trekkers. Above all, this is a magnificent area for multi-day trekking through the mountains. B3P and the German partner organization, GIZ, are working to establish a straightforward procedure for obtaining police permission so that walkers, trekkers, climbers, cavers, cyclists, etc. can cross between the countries in the mountains, far from official road crossing points.

Strategy Evolves - Future Activities

A new strategy emerged for consideration, working through the co-leadership of SNV and GIZ, two larger professional international development agencies with paid staff and sizeable budgets. ADA proposed a partnership between SNV, GIZ and the B3P, and local NGOs in each country in order to combine the B3P volunteer grassroots approach with the funded, professional top-down approach of SNV and GIZ. The aim was to develop accommodations, information centers, waymarking, map production, training of local guides, and procedures for obtaining official border crossing permission from the relevant governments. SNV developed the following leadership and organizational structure (which was considered confidential at the time) to more effectively try and coordinate and monitor all of the stakeholders involved in transboundary environmental cooperation, and all of their projects. The key donor for this proposal, ADA, the Austrian Development Agency, determined that the approach was too “top down,” and did not include the B3P in a meaningful way beyond participation in the Advisory Board – which carried only “recommendation power” and not decision making power – which would be maintained by SNV and GIZ. Recognition of the grassroots approach of the B3P, and its lack of a clearly defined role in this new strategy, is what led to its ultimate demise. ADA stipulated that funding would only be granted should the structure and approach be changed to focus on the bottom up approach, with a top down administration process, and that the B3P become a member of the “Steering Committee” and not just the “Advisory Board.” Neither SNV, nor GIZ, agreed to those terms and this structure (*below*) and proposal were withdrawn from consideration and never enacted. Indeed, according to B3P Chair Ann Kennard, GIZ decided to not even contribute their part of the proposal, with their page remaining blank. Both GIZ and SNV went on to develop alternative proposals that included pieces of this initiative that never came to fruition, and they solicited other donors in order to fund their plans. This aborted initiative highlights the challenges of a multi-stakeholder approach to transboundary collaboration – bringing into focus the different operating approaches, the different budget sizes, the differences between professional development agencies and volunteer based NGOs, and the difficulty in agreeing on a common strategic approach despite sharing similar goals and objectives. Perceived power discrepancies between the different stakeholders can derail an initiative before it even begins.



Donor Consortium:

- Consists of initial donors: BMZ/GTZ, EKN, ADA, SNV
- For initial programme funding on basis of programme proposal, and for proposals for subsequent phases
- Receives reports from Steering Committee (SC) of implementing partnership
- Donors can 'come and go'

Implementing Partnership:

- Consists of GTZ and SNV; through partnership agreement
- Sets-up PIU and fund-account
- Accountable to donors

Steering Committee:

- Made-up of GTZ & SNV management representatives
- For overall steering, advice, integration, harmonization, planning and monitoring, problem solving
- For final decision-making and approval of inception report, plans, and budgets

Advisory Board:

- Made-up of PIU Coordinator, and one representative each of SC, LAGs, technical advisors (e.g. WWF, UNEP, B3P, etc.)
- Advises the SC on programme implementation

Programme Implementing Unit (PIU):

- For implementation, coordination, and facilitation
- With permanent staff, as well as consultants and partner organizations: 'need based'

Local Action Group (LAG):

- For development of local strategies, plans, and proposals
- For implementation
- Formally registered group

Dedicated Funding:

- For dedicated funding of proposals from LAGs; in line with programme inception report, strategic plan, and budget

Dialogue Platform:

- For cross-border dialogue between LAGs, and for alignment and harmonisation

Challenges

Like any initiative that involves fundraising, volunteers, and coordinating on an international stage, with stakeholders from many different countries, the Balkans Peace Park Project has faced a number of challenges over the course of its first decade of evolution. Obvious language barriers and lost in translation moments, and the cultural nuances of invitations exchanged and hospitality returned have both developed positive collaboration, while also creating misunderstandings which have generated distrust. Communication styles that fail to recognize power dynamics have contributed to this distrust amongst stakeholders of different levels (from Embassies and International Development Agencies to the National government ministries and the local NGOs) often alienating potential local partners. There are inevitable challenges when a people are seeking to transition from a way of life built on rural agriculture, livestock raising, and traditional village life; to another life-style built on adapting notions of hospitality towards an ecotourism, including guest houses, restaurants/bars/cafes, and locals offering guide services in mountain trekking, mountain biking, white water rafting, fly fishing, motorcycle tours, etc. These challenges include adaptability to discrepancies and disagreements between local people and organizations; and the unintended consequences of selecting some people and organizations to receive funding to spur this transition, while others receive nothing and harbor resentment.

Internal challenges with local partner NGOs included the need to overcome initial distrust of these "outsiders" and the perception that the B3P was "all talk and no action" as the initial years of engagement were based around conferences and vacation treks, before the "on-the-ground projects" began with the B3P Summer Programme in 2008. Also lacking was a long term strategic vision for the region with an understanding of all three countries' national development priorities, as well as the large scale infrastructure development projects interconnected at the regional level through international development priorities, creating practical and meaningful livelihood opportunities from civil engineer to construction laborer po-

sitions. The B3P recognized that collaboration with GIZ and others who could provide leadership, funding, and dedicated, paid, full-time staff, was the best way to facilitate cross-border collaboration on the regional level, addressing multiple issues simultaneously (including national park creation and capacity building in all three countries); allowing the B3P to contribute their grassroots strengths, sizable network of contacts, and expertise in anthropology, geology, cross-border cooperation, management, knowledge of and background in Eastern Europe culture and languages, and authorship of numerous articles and chapters, while being able to maintain their original vision, and contribute to a long term strategic development plan – coordinated and managed by other organizations.

Communication across cultures is both critical to success, and one of the most common potential pitfalls. A complex, nuanced, underlying communication challenge occurs with the evolution of technology options that are now increasingly prolific with the ubiquitous mobile phone culture, the rising smart phone culture, and the infinite number of internet based communication tools, from email, to VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol like Skype), to instant messaging, to Facebook chat, to twitter, to SMS. These technological tools have all broken down the cost barrier in terms of money, but have erected a knowledge barrier, in terms of a generational gap. B3P leadership have indicated directly that they do not feel comfortable keeping pace with the current pace of technology evolution and adoption, and have made the decision to consciously limit the tools with which they communicate on an everyday basis to email and phone calls – both while in the Balkans and when working from the UK. Recently, the B3P Secretary has begun using Facebook, but feedback from B3P Committee Chair, Ann Kennard, indicates that it has not been at all useful. Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro form a region suffering from a demographic bulge due to the conflict in the 1990s, as most starkly displayed in Kosovo where 70% of the population is under the age of 30.

Youth unemployment is stratospheric throughout the region, including among the college educated, which security experts call a toxic mix. And Kosovo, with 70 percent of the population under 30, has a so-called ‘youth bulge.’ Scholars have long linked youth bulges to historical instances of social instability and even wars, especially when combined with high unemployment, though Bloom cautions that the empirical evidence is shaky.²⁰

Now just imagine all of the ways that local people, organizations, friends, and colleagues can connect by embracing more than just communication through telephone and email. Projects have the potential to be planned more smoothly, fundraising can be more easily coordinated, and local stakeholders can more easily share local news. Lastly, harnessing the tools that the locals use everyday allows any organization to become a part of the naturally evolving communication structure – whether they are based in the region or in the UK, USA or elsewhere.

²⁰ Bloom, David E. 2012. Youth in the Balance. *Finance and Development*, Vol. 49, No. 1. <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/fandd/2012/03/bloom.htm>.

Using only telephone and email relegates people and organizations to the periphery, increases the gap time between responses, unnecessarily limiting flexibility and hindering effective communication. As the B3P works to attract younger volunteers, including some from the region, they are actively working to address this intergenerational communication/technology gap. Initial steps along this path include 8 Master's Students who have used the B3P as their dissertation topic, and others who have volunteered in the Summer Programme in Thethi, Albania for their University Internship.

Some of the local organizations from the region also struggle with the word "Peace," and the designation of the mountains as a "Peace Park;" the primary rationale being that "we were not involved in the conflict, we did not need to build peace, we are already peaceful." This perspective is often countered with Galtung's "positive peace theory"²¹ which states that negative peace is just the absence of violence, while a positive peace is active collaboration for mutual benefit. We can build peace in a region that already considers itself peaceful – the example of Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park between the USA and Canada reflects this notion of positive peace. This charged terminology of "peace" is avoided altogether in the "Peaks of the Balkans" initiative, and has probably received wider acceptance than the "Balkans Peace Park" term. Of course, this new terminology changes the focus of the cross-border collaboration, yet the fact remains that cross-border collaboration is being stimulated and issues like environmental conservation, ecotourism opportunities, and waste management make this initiative an environmental peacebuilding initiative – whether or not it is "named" a peace park.

Another major challenge that is preventing the formal declaration of the proposed Balkans Peace Park is the status of the National Parks in each country: Theth National Park in Albania, Prokletja National Park in Montenegro, and the proposed Bjeshket e Namuna National Park in Kosovo. You cannot have an International Peace Park if you do not have existing, functioning, contiguous National Parks in all three countries to link into a Transboundary Protected Area or Peace Park. In Albania, Theth National Park is the furthest along in its development, having existed since before the end of communism in 1992 – yet it remains woefully understaffed with just two local rangers for the entire Shala Valley.²² The other challenge regarding Thethi is that the park does not officially extend all the way to the border with Montenegro, so in order to establish transboundary environmental protection, it is necessary to pass national legislation in order to extend the park boundaries. In Montenegro, the Prokletja National Park system was declared in 2010, but has been critiqued by many as a "paper park" existing only in law and not in reality, without any infrastructure, understood or demarcated boundaries, or management structures. There is potential for improvement, as word has recently reached the author that the newly appointed Montenegrin Director of National Parks is the

21 Galtung, J. 1996. *Peace by peaceful means: Peace and conflict, development and civilization*. London: Sage.

22 Shala Valley Project. <http://www.millsaps.edu/svp/>

founder and President of the HRID Mountaineering Club, a man who intimately understands transboundary conservation and collaboration and ecotourism. He has been hard at work to make the border crossing process in the mountains more streamlined and efficient. Finally, in Kosovo the current initiative to formally gazette Bjeshket e Namuna National Park system has been defeated two times in the past few years, and if defeated a third time will be forced by the Kosovar constitution to face a 20 year moratorium before it can be proposed again. The reason that the bill failed the previous two times is directly related to the knowledge of the local people regarding what the benefits and the multi-use regulations of the National Park would be. Past proposals failed to inform local people of these benefits, and they were under the misconception that creating a National Park would displace them from their land and mountain homestead, to which they have territorial family or clan claim, but not a legal title; as well as remove traditional grazing rights for livestock. Until all of these challenges on the National level can be addressed, there can be no functioning National Parks to link together into an International Peace Park. The B3P has attempted to operate on the “National Park” level by arranging “study tours” for professionals from the region to the Yorkshire Dales National Park in the UK and the Brecon Beacons National Park in Wales to understand how this UK National Park is managed. Unfortunately, the majority of the attendees of these UK trainings are not Park Administrators from Thethi, Prokletja or the yet unformed Bjeshket e Namuna National Parks, and therefore, they are unable to bring their knowledge back to these Parks to improve administration or achieve successful gazetting. There was one ranger from Thethi National Park in Albania who attended one of these trainings; unfortunately, he has since immigrated to Australia, taking his knowledge with him. The frequent mis-identification of attendees at these trainings, primarily including local NGO leaders and members, and scholars from the region, signals a critical oversight in effectively addressing a crucial step in the process towards creating a functioning transboundary Peace Park.

Even when national level issues can be addressed, the hurdle of the official Track 1 political context with all of its layers of international diplomatic intrigue remains—from the relationship with Serbia, to UNMIK, and later EULEX (which replaced UNMIK in December 2008), in Kosovo maintaining its capacity building presence, to the competition to achieve EU Accession status and eventually full membership. All of these issues make it politically unlikely that an international agreement in the form of a Treaty to formally create an international peace park is feasible within the current context. However, the political situation changes so rapidly that there may be a ripe moment in the future when the multi-track approach will build a critical mass of support and be applied effectively during the right window of opportunity. The B3P has been effective, working at many different levels of society and politics in the region, but has yet to muster the cache to influence Track 1 diplomacy, and international policy.

Fundraising has long been a challenge for all charities and it remains a challenge for the B3P, which continues to be a committed volunteer organization without an endowment, with fundraising efforts implemented on a project to project basis through proposal writing and grassroots campaigns. Several emerging international actors present the potential to be part of a greater international project and network of organizations, institutions, and local actors; and a strategic, coordinated funding body and project implementation process. This recent development of large international actors further embracing the transboundary collaborative process includes GIZ, the German Organization for International Technical Cooperation, and their “Peaks of the Balkans” Initiative – “A Hiking Trail between Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro” and SNV, the Dutch International Development Agency. SNV has been working with WWF and IUCN on “The Dinaric Arc Initiative.”²³ “Environment for People in the Dinaric Arc is a project designed to promote the natural and cultural values of the area while enhancing local livelihoods through improved regional cooperation and strengthened environmental governance. It aims at fostering sustainable development and building capacity of rural communities in the transboundary areas in the region.” The B3P Committee has embraced the GIZ/SNV lead “Peaks of the Balkans” project and is actively collaborating on strategic steering committee decisions as well as sharing project information concerning the B3P Summer Programme plans. Initial collaboration in this next phase of the relationship began in earnest in November 2011.

Critiques

A critique which local partner organizations have expressed to me and others is a disconnect that the B3P is now addressing. In spite of the conferences, meetings, and publicity events in the early years of BPP development: 2001 to 2007, there was not enough sufficient on-the-ground action, with practical projects and programs actively making a difference in people’s lives. The successive B3P Summer Programmes (from 2008-2012) have proven the commitment to on-the-ground projects, and their expansion into Kosovo, and soon into Montenegro, further galvanizes this long term commitment. B3P is no longer viewed as an organization that is “all talk and no action.” Other local partner critiques include unintended consequences, and the B3P’s lack of ability to adapt to quickly address them – including responding to damage to local partner vehicles in the field and determining whose responsibility it was to pay for repairs; as well as not working to create real partnerships in the early days of cross-border trekking or sharing the experiences together as peers, but treating local guides like service providers. A final local partner critique revolves around an oft cited challenge faced by small International Organizations – the impossible necessity of being a foreigner, who is not a local, and no matter how deep of a connection one develops with a place

23 Erg, B. 2010. Dinaric Arc Initiative to boost transboundary cooperation in the Western Balkans. Gland, Switzerland: International Union for Conservation of Nature. April 16. www.iucn.org/about/union/secretariat/offices/iucnmed/?5059/Dinaric-Arc-Initiative-to-boost-transboundary-cooperation-in-the-Western-Balkans .

over time, short of living there, one can not possibly understand the nuance of local politics in each of the three countries. Therefore, the international organizations/NGOs often unknowingly choose a path that ignores the local and national political structure and procedures, and instead focuses on the international and community levels. A prime example centered around efforts to create the International Peace Park, when there is no existing National Park in Kosovo; or bringing the Mayors together to sign the “Letter of Good Intent,” but not being able to bring this initiative to the regional or national level. Local partner organizations have realized many positive interactions and collaborations with the B3P. Yet, the above critiques remain, even as B3P members seek to redress the mistakes of the past and avoid committing similar ones in the future.

French scholar Juliet Fall, an Associate Professor in the Geography Department at the University of Geneva has been one of the most outspoken critics of the proposed Balkans Peace Park and the idea of “peace parks” in general. Fall asserts that the concept of borders in general is inherently violent, and that creating a collaborative framework to manage transboundary areas is only entrenching the concept of the border itself, and its inherent ability to divide, demarcate, and separate. Through her historical review of the ontological derivation of the words “border” and “protected area” she uncovers the international communities evolution of the concepts over time, but continually highlights the inability to deal with this inherent dichotomy. She views International Peace Parks as a new name for an old concept – the ontological evolution of using the symbolism of words to create divisions in the real world.

In her 1999 article “*Transboundary biosphere reserves: a new framework for cooperation*,” she examines the idea of cross-border environmental conservation and highlights the challenges and barriers to successfully setting up management structures for transboundary cooperation; asserting that “management of protected areas adjacent to political borders is rarely thought of as a common necessity for neighboring countries.”²⁴ Her argument becomes more nuanced in her 2003 article “*Planning protected areas across boundaries: new paradigms and old ghosts*.” This article drills down to the definition of a coherent planning unit for protected areas, and she explores the differences between the natural and social science approaches to defining the boundaries of transboundary protected areas; she then applies that analysis to explore how natural and social science approaches have influenced planning.²⁵ This line of thought continues in her 2010 co-authored article “*Unbounded boundary studies and collapsed categories: rethinking spatial objects*.”²⁶

24 Fall, Juliet J. 1999. *Transboundary biosphere reserves: a new framework for cooperation*. *Environmental Conservation*, 26, pp 252-255.

25 Fall, Juliet J. 2003. *Planning protected areas across boundaries: new paradigms and old ghosts*. *Journal of Sustainable Forestry*, 17, pp 81-102.

26 Debarbieux, Bernard; Fall, Juliet J., Schaffter, Marius. 2010. *Unbounded boundary studies and collapsed categories: rethinking spatial objects*. *Progress in Human Geography*, 34, pp 254-262. first published on July 8, 2009.

She asserts in a 2004 article *“Constructing the Carpathians: the Carpathian Convention and the Search for a Spatial Ideal.”* that “what is missing is an appropriate internationally recognized legal framework.” I completely agree with this critique.²⁷ International Peace Parks appear to be a concept that is applied differently around the world based on the local legal norms, the local culture, the locally available assets of the natural world. A standardized, accepted, international legal framework would benefit the field greatly and provide a basic road map of required steps to be accomplished in order to reach International Peace Park recognition.

Milestones

Many milestones over the past decade have highlighted the fits and starts of progress in building a multi-track, multi-country grassroots movement:

- A cross-border trek in 2003 led by Antonia Young with 36 people including 3 Albanians and 3 Kosovars, while Serb forces remained on-the-ground, and Montenegro and Kosovo were not yet formally independent countries, culminated in the first international conference focused on the proposed Balkans Peace Park, sponsored
- by the US Embassy in Tirana, and attended by one of their senior members, as well as 4 local Albanian policemen and the Head of the Shkoder Qark (Council).
- The “Long Walk for Peace,” a multi-country trek with members from all three countries and other international participants, organized by local Kosovar partner NGO, ERA.
- The B3P Committee achieved charitable status recognition from the UK government in 2004.
- The “Letter of Good Intent” signed by the mayors of the 6 municipalities where the proposed Balkans Peace Park would commit to protecting land and working together towards that goal.
- The support of UNEP declaring the proposed Balkans Peace Park as the “First Balkans Peace Park.”
- Participation in conferences with the “European Green Belt” movement, established by Mikhail Gorbachev to rebrand the Iron Curtain as a green zone, that would be used to stimulate crossborder environmental conservation efforts.



Photo Credit: IPPE / Cory Wilson 2009. Border Post 16 lies toppled in a high alpine field on the Montenegrin/Albanian border.

- The formation of a Local NGO Coalition comprised of ERA, HRID, TRITON, AQUILA, and two other organizations to begin to foster a network of organizations, including Kosovars, Albanians, and Montenegrins committed to working towards transboundary cooperation on environmental issues concerning border crossing for alpinists in the Prokletja / Bjeshket a Namuna Mountains.
- The B3P's initial role was to serve as a convening organization, hosting and attending International Conferences to present the proposed Balkans Peace Park, to garner support, and to create a network of different organizations, different government ministries, different international development agencies, and different local political leaders meeting in the same room at the same time to discuss transboundary collaboration, conservation and ecotourism, infrastructure and road development, environmental education, and summer school programs.
- The first tangible, on-the-ground project, in the region, directly benefitting the local people in the proposed Balkans Peace Park region (not focused on ecotourism or conference facilitation), was in Thethi, Albania: the "Balkans Peace Park 2008 Summer Programme."
- The resulting English language skills of the youth in Thethi who have attended the B3P Summer School, have been instrumental in helping to foster the adaptation towards ecotourism.
- The creation of the "Peaks of the Balkans" initiative, managed by GIZ.
- The formal founding of B3P Albania, the first locally founded organization, nationally recognized by the Albanian government as a local NGO, which could fundraise and implement projects and programs and recruit volunteers, clearly demonstrating the local motivation to embrace the initiative and make it their own.

Behavioral Change

There have been several key behavioral changes which I have observed through my annual travels to the region, a clear shift towards embracing Ecotourism, and creatively learning how to multi-task, by combining agro-tourism, adventure tourism, cultural heritage tourism, and nature tourism. This evolution has helped to foster a vibrant community approach that values the sustainable farmer, as much as the entrepreneur restaurant/bar/café owner, on par with the family who has adapted their traditional notion of hospitality into the ability to run an ecotourism guest home.

Through a degree of organization in the Peaks of the Balkans initiative, a loose network of stakeholders has been formed into Local Action groups, representing local government, small business, local religious leaders, and local community leaders. This process has allowed a broad and relatively diverse group of people with a common interest to earn a living sustainably, protecting the beauty and integrity of their natural ecosystem, and committing to not only working together as a local action group, but also to collaborating with other local action groups in the region from the three countries of Montenegro, Kosovo and Albania.

The real key to the growth and evolution of transboundary environmental collaboration in the tri-border region between Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro has been the development and coalescing of a critical mass of people in all 3 countries on many different levels of society, in different types of organizations. These stake-

holders have bought into and worked towards a shared regional vision, which includes long term collaborative, strategic planning and the identification and implementation of a wide variety of projects that create a platform for establishing relationships across borders. The Institute for Multi Track Diplomacy²⁸ (IMTD) has shown that a tipping point can be reached, whereby post-conflict healing can reach a point of resilience, whereby the likelihood of a return to violent conflict is dramatically lessened, whereby there are strong personal relationships across borders on multiple levels of society from the highest political levels, to the business sphere, between the local and national organizations working in the region, and between the local communities in the border regions. The more ties you can build, and the greater the depth of those ties, will lead to enhanced societal based resiliency that can help prevent a return to violent conflict.

Visible Impacts Observed

The visible impacts are the real indicators of the relative success/failure of the transboundary collaboration for conservation, livelihoods, development, and peacebuilding. I have no scientific data to support these observations. However, these are my personal observations of the changes that I have witnessed between 2008 and 2012.

The promotion of the concept of EcoTourism and Geo-Tourism has become a driving force for change in the remote and rugged tri-border region between Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro.

Ecotourism is often touted as one of the key forces for generating livelihood opportunities for local populations in and around peace parks, and for helping to shift the incentive structure toward ecosystem-level conservation and cooperation, both domestically and across political borders. In order to move toward conservation and cooperation, stakeholders must shift their activities away from illegal exploitation of forests or game animals and competition for limited, protected resources. Geotourism takes the ecotourism approach one step further. It can be defined as: Tourism that sustains or enhances the geographical character of a place— its environment, culture, aesthetics, heritage, and the well-being of its residents. Geotourism incorporates the concept of sustainable tourism—that destinations should remain unspoiled for future generations—while allowing for ways to protect a place’s character. Geotourism also takes a principle from its ecotourism cousin—that tourism revenue should promote conservation— extending this principle to culture and history as well: all distinctive assets of a place.²⁹

28 Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy. 2010. What is multi-track diplomacy? http://imtd.server295.com/?page_id=119.

29 National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations. 2010. About geotourism. Washington, D.C.: National Geographic Center for Sustainable Destinations. http://travel.nationalgeographic.com/travel/sustainable/about_geotourism.html.

Geotourism and ecotourism both seek to capitalize on an advantage of the multitrack approach: the ability to focus on a region from a strategic-planning perspective and an ecosystem point of view. This stands in sharp contrast to the Track 1 approach, which elevates the importance of sovereign boundaries and creates diplomatic challenges that must be negotiated and overcome in order to stimulate cross-border cooperation. Focusing on an eco-region can prompt a powerful shift in perspective for diverse stakeholders whose interests may suddenly come into alignment when they view an issue without human-drawn boundaries and sovereignty constraints.³⁰

Ecotourism Guest Houses have sprung up as people adapt their homes, and as traditional Balkans hospitality has been adapted to host paying tourists visiting the region. Children are learning English and German quickly and easily to bridge the language gap with most tourists, and serve as translators for their families as well as essentially “concierges” for the tourists, helping to explain everything from pricing to locations to visit, to meals, to transportation, etc. Standards of living in the homes that host tourists compared to those that do not is starkly different. Running water for western style toilets and showers instead of out-houses and water bucket baths outside; western style kitchens with a stove and a small refrigerator instead of cooking over an open flame and using root cellars; finally western style mattresses and beds instead of sheepskin rugs and straw stuffed mattresses and pillows. All of these lifestyle changes are directly related to the ability to host tourists as a guesthouse; and almost all families that have successfully made this transition have done so with the help of international aid from organizations like GIZ. The flip side of this coin represents the families that were not chosen to receive development aid so that they could successfully make the conversion into an Ecotourism guest house. Not only do they not have access to the same standards of living, but a tension within the tight knit mountain village community also arises— between the haves and the have-nots. That tension extends not just towards the international development aid organizations that chose only certain families, but also to those local families who were aid recipients, creating a divide within the community. This tension represents an unintended consequence of development.

With a growing number of tourists coming to the region for trekking, mountain climbing, rock climbing, mountain biking, white water rafting, hang gliding, base jumping, off road motorcycling, adventure guide training programs have developed, seeking to standardize the compensation, and assure a level of knowledge and understanding of risk management, and to provide a certification for a new livelihood opportunity that did not exist five short years ago. Austrian, Swiss and Italian Mountaineering organizations have developed a series of programs and im-

30 Walters, Jonathan Todd. 2012. “A Peace Park in the Balkans: Cross-Border Cooperation and Livelihood Creation through Coordinated Environmental Conservation.” In *Post-Conflict Natural Resource Management and Peacebuilding. Livelihoods, Natural Resources and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Volume*, ed. Helen Young and Lisa Goldman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (http://www.eli.org/Program_Areas/PCNRM/livelihoods.cfm).

plemented them in all three countries on a local level. In 2011, through the creation of the Peaks of the Balkans trail, which crosses boundaries and takes trekkers through all three countries, a training was developed that focused specifically on guiding a transboundary expedition. In addition to ensuring language skills, basic medical first aid skills, interpretive nature and culture skills, and a knowledge of the trail networks (which is often innate knowledge for these young men and women who have grown up in the same mountainous valley their whole lives), these guides are also learning about the cultures and expectations of their foreign visitors. Over the past four years a small number of outdoor adventure companies have blossomed into a market where competition is fierce, and those that can adapt to international tourists and their desire to research online, look at photos, connect on Facebook/twitter, review itineraries, book deals, and ultimately keep in touch with the region and its people after they return home – are the companies that thrive. The guides that are able to effectively turn what was a rare, income supplementing guiding opportunity into a full time career are able to generate employment for others in the business administration, marketing and promotion, and web development/social media industries.

One component has remained consistent throughout the evolution of the concept of the proposed Balkans Peace Park: the urgent need for as much environmental education as possible, not only for school children, but for society in general. One of the legacies of any conflict is that it takes children out of school, and takes young men away from higher education in exchange for the military path, and it places the burden on the homefront squarely on women's shoulders. It places environmental education and prioritization below basic survival. Thus an environmental stewardship ethos is often destroyed during times of conflict. The sad fact is that this situation often lingers as a low priority into the post-conflict reconstruction and recovery phase; thus, decisions are made with more urgency to jumpstart the economy and construction. Environmental impact assessments and environmental priorities fall to the bottom of the political agenda. The B3P and local organizations like ERA have led the charge to change this reality, and to make environmental education a core part of their programs. Beginning in the first B3P Summer Programme in 2008 environmental education was taught, alongside English, as the core component of the Summer School program. Classes used experiential learning, exploring the environment and learning about the plants, animals, rocks, trees, flowers and rivers, and then tying them to larger concepts like eco-systems, eco-system services, and environmental awareness in decision-making. Side by side with the education program was a practical project that installed trash and recycling containers in the remote village community of Thethi, Albania and then worked with the local village headman, and the regional political structure in the Shala Valley to ensure trash pickup and removal to the landfill 4 hours away by 4x4 vehicle. This waste collection process ebbs and flows as more time passes since the receptacles were installed in 2008, and many locals have returned to burning their trash, or dumping them into garbage pits close to their homes. This method replaced the locals' historical approach, when western style waste (plastic bags and bottles, aluminum cans, and cardboard packaging) was introduced: either burn it, or bury

it. Interestingly enough, the local people were living in a relatively sustainable way, in harmony with nature, without the need for a “Waste Management Program,” until these products with their non-biodegradable packaging were introduced. As the concept of ecotourism is further embraced, the local people are realizing that one of the key reasons the tourists come to their region is to experience the beauty of the nature, the fresh air and water, and the stunning species that can be found in one of Europe’s last bio-diversity hot spots. The local people are realizing that tourists will stop coming to the region if that natural beauty is marred by garbage strewn about, by pollution in the air and water, and by loss of species and biodiversity to illegal poaching, over-hunting and over-harvesting, and by the impacts of overuse. Therein lies one of the core dilemmas of ecotourism as a part of the solution for transboundary collaboration, livelihood creation, development, and cross-border peacebuilding – if you attract too many tourists to the region, you run the risk of depleting the ecosystem’s resiliency to deal with the negative impacts of more vehicles coming to the region, of more waste being produced in the guest houses than in typical sustainable family farms, and of more people using the trail network and potentially amplifying their impact by travelling off trail – particularly in the rugged alpine regions where moss, lichens, and wildflowers take hundreds of years to grow, and can be killed by one poorly placed boot print. Environmental education of youth, of outdoor guides, and of political decision-makers remains a crucial component of the B3P Strategy, and is beginning to show real dividends with community organized environmental clean-ups of rivers, swimming holes, and public spaces; as well as with privately developed recycling programs for cans and bottles, and more stringent tracking of the number of visitors, so as to track hard data collection.

Lessons Learned

Distilling some key lessons learned from the first decade of existence of such a complex case is both challenging and perilous, as it is difficult to determine if these potential lessons are unique to the case at hand, or have applicability to other cases, contexts, and transboundary environmental collaboration in other regions around the world.

- **International peace parks possess great potential as a tool for cross-border cooperation, for environmental conservation, sustainable development, and livelihood creation—if they are created and managed with the participation of a broad range of stakeholders from all affected countries.**
- **It is important to coordinate efforts to develop peace parks at the ecosystem level.**
- **Short- and long-term employment opportunities linked to the peace park initiative can help shift incentive structures for local communities towards conservation as a viable land-use option and can consolidate public support for the establishment of a peace park.**
- **Use of an integrated multi-track approach can increase the chances of success and spur the development of a wide range of related programs, projects, and initiatives on multiple levels.**

- **Timing is critical in the development of an international peace park because a park cannot be created unless the principal state decision makers are ready and the concept is embraced by a critical mass of stakeholders.³¹**
- **Effective and functioning National Parks must exist in each country, and be contiguous, in order to be functionally linked together to form a trans-boundary protected area, which can then be dedicated as an International Peace Park.**

Even though the Balkans Peace Park remains a proposed park, steps towards formally establishing the park continue to be taken, and cross-border connections continue to be built and strengthened, while stakeholders prepare for the proper moment to apply pressure at the national levels for the formal creation and dedication of the Balkans Peace Park. Lessons from the Balkans can serve others involved in transboundary conservation efforts around the world, allowing them to learn from, adapt, and apply these lessons in their own local context. And of course, the Balkans Peace Park Project (B3P) continues to scour the literature from Peace Studies, Environmental Studies, Borderlands, Anthropology, and other disciplines, in order to apply lessons learned elsewhere in Albania, Kosovo and Montenegro, and make the dream of that formal declaration a reality.



Photo Credit: IPPE / Todd Walters 2008. The Harusha Family in the high alpine mountain village of Thethi, Albania demonstrate traditional hospitality by walking the guest out the gate of their property.

31 Walters, Jonathan Todd. 2012. "A Peace Park in the Balkans: Cross-Border Cooperation and Livelihood Creation through Coordinated Environmental Conservation." In *Post-Conflict Natural Resource Management and Peacebuilding. Livelihoods, Natural Resources and Post-Conflict Peacebuilding Volume*, ed. Helen Young and Lisa Goldman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (http://www.eli.org/Program_Areas/PCNRM/livelihoods.cfm).