
**THE ROLE OF TRANSBOUNDARY PROTECTED AREAS IN PROTECTION AND
MANAGEMENT OF SHARED ECOSYSTEMS (OHRID -PRESPA CASE)**

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Abstract: Protected areas are known as a very important tool for the protection and the conservation of nature and until now they are spread out all over the world. The first role of them is to emphasize the protection of biodiversity, especially for those habitats, types and ecosystems of a very special importance and for those that are in danger. During the years they changed some times the approach which is reflected also in the new definitions and categories. Many of ecosystems of the world are divided from political borders and in these conditions they appear to be managed by different laws, rules and management structures. For that reason between countries which share such ecosystems, have been created and designated transboundary protected areas.

Border areas have a relatively short history in an official level even though their embryonic origins can nearly a century. They have started spontaneously in a local level as a need for cooperation with the neighbor across the border, and then they have included political institutions at different levels to consolidate the agreement between states. Worldwide, a large number of mainly aquatic ecosystems, such as rivers and lakes, are divided politically between two or more states. People living there have always been more isolated by development of their countries, especially in those regions with historic problems of cooperation and political misunderstanding.

Between Albania, Macedonia and Greece there are the Ohrid Lake and the Great and the Small Prespa separated by political boundaries. Due to the uniqueness of the lakes, the diversity of the landscape and wildlife on both sides of the border, previously have been established protected areas at a national level based on different categories. Cooperation between countries for joint management of the lakes started after 1995 and it is being formalized and consolidated in progress. Transboundary protected areas, created in the Ohrid, and Prespa region, are located along the so called former Iron Curtain which divided Europe for about fifty years during the Cold War and represents a case of very low cooperation in the past.

Through this kind of cooperation, divided ecosystems creates linkages between those countries basically in managements of the protected areas and managers that work directly in the field, but also between people living along the borders and their cultures. In the most effective cases these designations are supposed to bring economic benefits as well as social effects in communities that live in the peripheries of the countries involved. In today's conditions of globalization transboundary areas are consistent with the requirement for the removal of barriers between people and their cultures and they also contribute to open the way for nature which was and used without borders. To create, designate and make functional such transboundaries protected areas is not an easy task. The goal of the this paper is to evaluate the cooperation between Balkan countries that share Ohrid and Prespa lakes through transboundary protected areas and other designations, especially in the context of joint conservation of the ecosystems and protection of the nature and culture in the area.

Keywords: *transboundary protected areas, management, ecosystems, nature, cooperation*

1. TRANSBOUNDARY PROTECTED AREAS IN THE WORLD AND THEIR EFFECTS

Cross-border areas have become the subject of discussion and study in the global context mainly during the XX century. Frequent changes of political borders between the countries after the wars, conflicts or the creation of independent states have created a situation of passing territories from one side to another side. In this way political border has divided arbitrarily the communication spaces, traditional markets and ecosystems. As borders between countries are mostly located politically regardless of ecological criteria, many ecosystems are governed unequally by laws and institutions. Each partner is a sovereign state with different legal systems and distinct cultural traditions.³¹¹ In this way, they have become the subject of different traditions, practices and management. This situation has raised the demand for a new approach to the management of their joint design based on ecosystem through cross-border protected areas.

Official cooperation between countries to establish cross-border areas does not have a long history although spontaneous strands can be traced nearly a century. One of the most interesting initiatives in Europe is Green

³¹¹ Lausche B.,(2011), Guidelines for Protected Areas Legislation. IUCN Environmental Policy and Law Paper No. 81; IUCN, Gland, Switzerland, Pg. 292

Belt realized specifically after the political changes of 1990 by supporting the creation of transboundary protected areas along the former Iron Curtain.³¹² African countries that announced later independence faced great obstacles towards peace and sought ways to make people work together. After 1990, transboundary parks emerged in many countries as South Africa, Mozambique, Zimbabwe and Botswana.³¹³ In the regions of Asia and Latin America the creation of transboundary areas began later, but it has special importance because it included spaces with a more natural character, and a large area with biological diversity. The experience of many countries in the world has shown that transboundary co-operation can bring good benefits even in case of the presence of hostilities and conflicts.³¹⁴ In terms of today's global border areas are consistent with the requirement for removal of barriers between people and cultures and at the same time paving the way to contribute for the common nature.

The increase in number and their spread is an indication of success and benefits achieved in many of them. Most researchers accept that the creation of these areas improves cooperation mainly in terms of their management for protection and conservation, encourages friendship and brings local, national and economic benefits. So, Hamilton in 1996 has defined benefits that can bring their design. According to him there are a considerable number of reasons for which they are created and can generate benefits by listing 21 of these.³¹⁵ There were cases in which border areas did not function well and the benefits have been limited or unbalanced. If a country allows environmental degradation but the country next to it works hard to protect it, dispute and political problems may arise between them.³¹⁶ Hamilton in 1996 besides the benefits, he also identified factors that hinder cooperation between transboundary protected areas such as: different legislation; cultural and religious differences; differences in resources and commitment between countries; differences in economic levels and practices to balance the use and protection of resources etc.³¹⁷ In practices of enough protected areas it has been observed that some of the factors that are considered significant obstacles are not so significant, whereas the others have had more weight. Different circumstances can determine the cooperation between two or more countries.

2. EVOLUTION OF THE CONCEPT OF TRANSBOUNDARY PROTECTED AREAS

Protected areas are known as a very important tool for the protection and the conservation of nature and until now they are spread out all over the world. As a result of the evolution in time and the new approaches, the concepts and definitions have changed occasionally. The definition of Protected Area in 2008 focuses the importance of their long-term conservation and ecosystem services. Many water ecosystems are consistently divided between countries and almost all of the world's major lakes are transboundary. Transboundary protected areas are based on the same principle of protection of nature among neighboring countries. According to the definition accepted by IUCN, in the Guideline 2001, *is an area of land or sea that straddles one or more boundaries between states, subnational unites such as provinces and regions, autonomous areas and/or areas beyond the limits of national sovereignty or jurisdiction whose constituent part are especially dedicated the protection and maintenance of biological diversity and of natural and associated cultural recourses and*

³¹² Sandwith T., Shine C., Hamilton L., Shephard D., (2001), Transboundary Protected Areas for Peace and Co-Operation. IUCN., Gland, Switzerland, Cambridge, UK, Pg 12

³¹³ Pool C., (2006), "Transboundary Protected Areas as a Solution to Border Issues" *Nebraska Anthropologist*. Paper 23, Pg.44, available at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/nebanthro/23>

³¹⁴ Sandwith T., Shine C., Hamilton L., Shephard D., (2001), Transboundary Protected Areas for Peace and Co-Operation. IUCN., Gland, Switzerland, Cambridge, UK, Pg. 12

³¹⁵ Lawrence S. H., (2001), International transboundary cooperation: Some best practice guidelines. At; Harmon, David. Crossing Boundaries in Park Management. Proceedings of the 11th Conference on Research and Resource Management in Parks and on Public Lands. Hancock, Michigan: The George Wright Society, Pg.206

³¹⁶ Pool C., (2006), "Transboundary Protected Areas as a Solution to Border Issues", *Nebraska Anthropologist*, Pg.43

³¹⁷ Sandwith T., Shine C., Hamilton L. and Sheppard D., (2001), Transboundary Protected Areas for Peace and Co-operation. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK, Pg.14

*managed cooperatively through legal and other effective means.*³¹⁸ In 2015, in the new Guide prepared by IUCN for CBC another definition is given: *TPA is a clearly defined as geographical space that include protected areas that are ecologically connected across international boundaries and involve some forms of cooperation.*³¹⁹ In this new position it is gone beyond the limitations of transboundary conservation practices not only between protected areas, but also in adjacent areas with natural and cultural values. Here "space" means three dimensions, air, water, underwater if there is any etc. In this new approach, protection should be clearly defined for these intermediate spaces. Despite IUCN categories, the transborder areas receive international recognition even from global intergovernmental agreements, the convention and specific programs such as MAB UNESCO, World Heritage Convention, Ramsar Convention, etc. Several international organizations actively encourage governments to create such complex cross-border cooperation in order to strengthen friendship and reduce tensions.

3. TRANSBOUNDARY PROTECTED AREAS AROUND OHRID AND PRESAPA LAKE

Lakes of Ohrid and Prespa are quite popular at the international level about their values of the landscape, biodiversity and cultural heritage. From the perspective of geographical and geopolitical position, the areas of Ohrid - Prespa are situated along the European Green Belt, an area of an outstanding importance for natural, cultural and European heritage.³²⁰ For these reasons the surrounding territories in three Balkan states are announced fairly protected areas based not only on nature values but also on the rich cultural heritage and local traditions.

Protected areas in Macedonia started with the announcement of the Peristeri National Park in 1948, whereas, Galicica National Park was created to protect the terrestrial ecosystems between the two lakes in 1958. Lake Ohrid and Prespa are declared National Monuments in 1977. Ezeran's Lagoon, despite having a status as a strict reserve in national plan for the protection of water birds, it was declared a Ramsar site in 1995 together with the lake.³²¹ In 1979 the Macedonian part of Lake Ohrid was declared a world heritage based on natural values criteria (iii) whereas in 1980 the site included cultural and historical values based on criteria (i) and (iv). Appreciating that the site is not complete without the Albanian part of Lake Ohrid, UNESCO has initiated the extension of the project site with the Albanian side. In Greece the beginning of the territorial defense of Prespa belonged to 1974 when the area was classified as Prespa National Forest, and this label has changed several times after that.³²² There are also designated a Ramsar Site, in 1974, a *Nature 2000* site in 2009, and a "Special Protection Area", based on the Birds European Directive. In Albania, lake Ohrid and lake Prespa were declared as protected areas in 1999, respectively Prespa Park and protected landscape of Pogradec, according to the IUCN categories. In 2013 the banks of two Prespa with agricultural areas of wet marshes, temporary fresh water and carstic springs were announced Ramsar Site.³²³ On the Albanian side, slightly from the border there is the national park "Bredhi i Drenovës", and two reserves, that of Krastafilaku and Cangonji, of the category IV, as well as a significant number of monuments of nature and culture which are situated within the territory of protected areas and outside them.

In this space with a significant number of protected areas of great value, three concrete efforts have been realized to institutionalize co-operation between states. On February 2, 2000, the prime ministers of the three countries Albania, Greece and Macedonia declared the creation of Crossborder Park of Prespa in the territories around two Prespa lakes in three countries as one of the most important initiative of this kind in Southeast Europe. The second attempt is the declaration of a Transboundary Biosphere Reserve "Ohrid-Prespa" on 11 June 2014 with wider borders than Prespa Park under the auspices care of the UNESCO MAB program. Actually it is only limited to cross-border territories of Macedonia and Albania and it has an area of 446 244.52ha. Its geographical expansion crosses line of the of basin Lake Ohrid that includes the basin of two

³¹⁸ Vasiljević M., Zunckel K., McKinney M., Erg B., Schoon M., Rosen Michel T., (2015), Transboundary Conservation: A systematic and integrated approach. Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No. 23, Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. Pg.6

³¹⁹ *Ibid*, Pg.8

³²⁰ European Greenbelt <http://www.europeangreenbelt.org/initiative/origin.html>

³²¹ Faloutsos D, Constantianos V, Scoullos M, (2006), "Assessment of the Management of Shared Lake Basins in Southeastern Europe". A report within GEF IW:LEARN Activity D2. GWP-Med, Athens, Pg.38

³²² *Ibid*, Pg.38

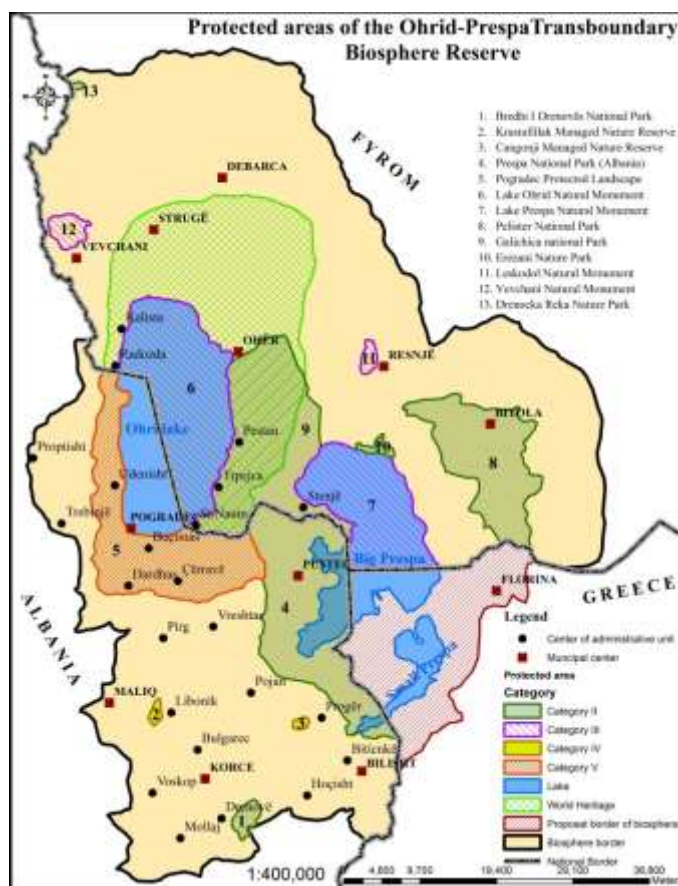
³²³ http://akzm.gov.al/index.php?option=com_k2&view=item&layout=item&id=78&Itemid=367&lang=en.

Prespa lakes along with their surrounding territories, the sinking part of the Black Drin River in Macedonia and the Devoll River in Albania. The landscape included in the Transboundary Reserve of "Ohrid-Prespa" Biosphere is a balanced combination between water bodies of Ohrid and Prespa lakes that occupy 13% of its mountainous and field landscape around them.³²⁴

The third concrete attempt is a project which is ongoing to extent the site of world heritage, "Natural and cultural values of the lake Ohrid" in the Albanian part of the lake. The finalization of this project will mark the creation of a mix and transboundary world heritage site with a common management structure in this region. Although Prespa lakes are declared Ramsar sites of international importance by the three countries, they do not represent a Transboundary Ramsar Site. Biosphere reserves constitute the largest area declared as a protected area in the cross-border context in the region and it is one of the most interesting designs selected in relation to the purpose, the political level and model involved in cross-border cooperation.

4. TRANSBOUNDARY COOPERATION FOR MANAGEMENT OF JOINT ECOSYSTEMS IN THE CROSS BORDER REGION OF OHRID-PRESPA

Cooperation about management of common natural resources between three Balkan countries, Albania, Greece and Macedonia despite political and ideological problems between them, constitute the basic motive of first negotiation between them paving the way for other issues. Albania-Macedonia cooperation for the management of the lakes and the surrounding territories has begun for the first time in 1956 when the countries established contacts about "Water management issues" and then they signed an agreement with Yugoslavia. Although it was created a joint committee, it remained ineffective since its first steps.³²⁵ Officially the cooperation between Macedonia and Albania started when they signed the Memorandum of Understanding on 29 November 1996. Under its frame, the countries committed themselves to the creation of a Bilateral Board to run and implement the Lake Ohrid Conservation Project as well as to cooperate in solving the environmental actual problems. With the signing the "Agreement on the protection and sustainable development of Lake Ohrid and its watersheds" on 06.17.2004, bilateral cooperation was further strengthened. The agreement was ratified by the parliaments of both countries in the years that followed and the management structures were formalized too; Ohrid Lake Watershed Committee and the Joint Secretariat. Trilateral Cross Border Cooperation about the Prespa Park took shape in 2002 with the establishment of the Coordination Committee of the Prespa Park. This managing structure functioned well by realizing regular meetings twice a year, but the unofficial status has limited the authority to take important decisions for three countries. After signing the agreement in 2010, the joint structures were revitalized. The fact that this agreement has not been ratified by the Greek authorities makes their status not fully official. Consequently, Lake Ohrid Agreement remains the most important achievement in terms of cross-



³²⁴ Transboundary Biosphere Reserve "Ohrid-Prespa" Nomination Form, Revised Version, 27.05.2014, Pg.10

³²⁵ Faloutsos D., Constantianos V., Scoullos M., (2006) "Assessment of the Management of Shared Lake Basins in Southeastern Europe". A report within GEF IW:LEARN Activity D2. GWP-Med, Athens

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border cooperation because it has expressed the political will at the highest level and it has created a legal framework of cooperation. In 2014, the Committee of the watershed of Lake Ohrid together with the joint secretariat were chosen as governance and management structure of the Biosphere Reserve.³²⁶ Through this institutional line, two management structures that were created separately for both lakes will cooperate in the future as one.

Agreements between countries remain an important initiative which confirms the political will and legalize the management structures. But equally important remains the functioning of these structures and the achievement of cooperation in reality. It is also useful to assess the level of cooperation and progress made occasionally. To realize this it is used the model of five levels adapted from IUCN by Dorothy Zbicz to assess cooperation between internationally adjacent protected areas.³²⁷ Zbicz has established a rating system with 6 levels referring to the selected criteria to evaluate cooperation to its fully achievements. This rating system starts from level 0 to 5.³²⁸ As a rule, the border areas should reach at least level 1 in order to be recognized internationally as such. Level 0 means lack of communication and meetings of their representatives.

Levels of Cooperation	Characteristics
Level 0 : No cooperation	Staff from two protected areas (PA) never communicate or meet ; There is no sharing of information or cooperation on any specific issues
Level 1: Communication	There is some two-way communication between the PA's; Meetings/communication takes place at least once a year; Information is sometimes shared; Notification of actions which may affect the other PA will sometimes take place
Lever 2: Consultation	Communication is more frequent (at least three times a year); Cooperation occurs on at least two different activities; The two sides usually share information; Notification of actions affecting the adjoining PA usually occurs
Level 3: Collaboration	Communication is frequent (at least every two months); Meetings take place at least three times a year; The two PA's actively cooperate on at least four activities, sometimes coordinating their planning and consulting with the other PA before taking action
Level 4: Coordination of planning	The two PA's communicate often and coordinate actions in some areas, especially planning ; The two PA's work together on at least five activities, holding regular meetings and notifying each other in case of emergency; PA's usually coordinate their planning, often treating whole areas as one single ecological unit
Level 5: Full cooperation	Planning for the two PA's is fully integrated and if appropriate, ecosystem based, with implied joint decision making and common goals; Joint planning occurs and, if the two share an ecosystem, this planning usually treats the two PA's as a whole; Joint management sometimes occurs, with cooperation on at least six activities; A joint committee exists for advising on transboundary cooperation

Table 1: Levels of Cooperation and Characteristics between internationally adjacent protected areas (adapted by Zbicz, 1999,b)³²⁹

Starting from the number of agreements and the high level of representation of states in them it is clear that among the three countries there is a political will to cooperate in the joint management of ecosystems. They have established two structures of joint management respectively for the two lakes, Ohrid and Prespa. For Transboundary Prespa Park the process of cooperation is strengthening from year to year despite legal binding or non-binding agreements. This process is being supported and funded (in money or in kind) by international

³²⁶ Vasiljević M., Pezold T. (eds.), (2011), *Crossing Borders for Nature. European examples of transboundary conservation*. Gland, Switzerland and Belgrade, Serbia: IUCN Programme Office for South-Eastern Europe. Pg.19

³²⁷ Lausche B., (2011), *Guidelines for Protected Areas Legislation*. IUCN Environmental Policy and Law Paper No. 81; IUCN, Gland, Switzerland, Pg. 292

³²⁸ Sandwith T., Shine C., Hamilton L. and Sheppard D., (2001), *Transboundary Protected Areas for Peace and Co-operation*. IUCN, Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, Pg.34

³²⁹ *Ibid*, Pg 34

community like KFW, UNDP, GEF, National NGOs etc.³³⁰ Prespa Park Management Committee has worked well, accomplishing anticipated meetings twice a year. In terms of joint planning there have been some initiatives. Transboundary diagnostic analyze or the Prespa Lake was done in 2009, based on which the Strategic Action Plan in 2010 established a framework on agreed management actions to be implemented that addresses to the key transboundary concerns.³³¹ In December of 2011, Trilateral Tourism Strategy and Action Plan for the Prespa Lakes Basin 2012-2016 were created as a joint document Committee that will lead to undertake joint activities in the field of tourism.

Some of the protected areas included in this region have as their plan management and some not. There is no coordination between their plans even within the same country and in addition there is not a joint management plan for the whole biosphere. A positive initiative is the involvement of the management plan for the extension of the World Heritage Site of Ohrid in Management Plan of Protected Landscape of Pogradec as its additions is all inside it. Exchanging the information and scientific data between managers and between research institutes abroad is not a constant practice. During the implementation of joint projects in some cases there has been cooperation between experts and they share some information. The states usually notify activities which can have effects on the other side of the border. Joint activities are not planned and implemented at the initiative of their staff but such activities are encouraged and funded by projects and donors. With the creation of Biosphere two structures have not yet established institutional links. Lake Ohrid Watershed Committee should organize meetings twice a year, which in recent years has not worked regularly. Therefore this cross-border area is currently in level between the first and the second phase of cooperation, passing slowly from the stage of the communication in that of consultation. It is known that if a transboundary area is newly established authority may be limited to planning and visioning, not implementation.³³² But a support towards its rapid progress constitutes experiences, projects and joint managing resources set for each lake independently.

CONCLUSIONS

Developments during time show that environmental protection and the need for sustainable development remain today the main reasons for the design of protected areas, while the existence of the borders between ecosystems is the basic reason of the creation of their cross-border type. Referring to natural, cultural diversity, national and international sites, Biosphere Reserve is a design with a global importance. It represents a protected zone with a large area which carries natural and human resources to support sustainable development in the region balanced with protection. This transboundary area is governed by a form of shared governance known as transboundary governance, since various actors and structures are involved in the decision-making process. It is based in both formal and informal arrangements made between multiple actors from involved countries and it is built in a high level of authority such as government and ministries. Besides coordinating plans with each other it is important that they are combined with management plans and administrative units and where ecosystems are shared they must be ecosystem based.

Despite the high level of involvement, cooperation in low levels of managers and experts needs to be strengthened through formal or informal flexible communication. In this case issues must better be addressed at a very local scale between managers and practitioners. It would be necessary to add staff and to enlarge the equipment and logistical of permanent management structures. In order that this transboundary area to be active and functional, it is needed cooperation to be implemented at all levels of governance and management through monitoring and continuous evaluation.

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³³⁰ Bogdanovic, Slavko; 2008, Technical assessment report, Prespa park coordination committee in transboundary ecosystem management. Consultant Report, Pg.45

³³¹ Prespa Lakes Basin; Strategic Action Programme, November 2010

³³² Vasiljević M., Zunckel K., McKinney M., Erg B., Schoon M., Rosen Michel T., (2015), Transboundary Conservation: A systematic and integrated approach. Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No. 23, Gland, Switzerland: IUCN. Pg. 45

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