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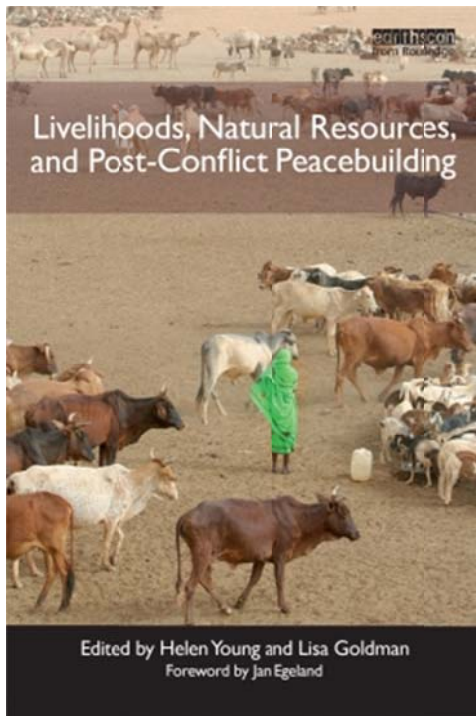
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Transboundary Protected Areas: Opportunities and Challenges

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Transboundary protected areas: Opportunities and challenges

Carol Westrik

Transboundary protected areas—parcels of land designated for joint protection by neighboring countries—can be important tools for post-conflict peacebuilding and environmental management. The benefits of transboundary protected areas are evidenced by their growth in popularity: in the late 1980s, there were fifty-nine; as of 2012, there were more than 600 (Balkans Peace Park Project n.d.).¹ This chapter discusses three kinds of transboundary protected areas: demilitarized zones (DMZs), World Heritage sites, and peace parks. The focus is primarily on the opportunities and challenges associated with the third category, international peace parks.

DMZs are areas where military activity has been severely restricted or banned altogether in an attempt to avoid further conflict. A DMZ can be formed through a peace treaty or ceasefire agreement; typically, both the respective countries' governments and the United Nations play a role in the establishment of a DMZ. Examples include the UN Buffer Zone in Cyprus; the Sinai Peninsula, between Egypt and Israel; and the DMZ between North Korea and South Korea.

World Heritage sites, which are designated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), must be of “outstanding universal value” and meet one or more of ten criteria (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2012, 2). Sites that meet criterion (ix), for example, are “outstanding examples representing significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, fresh water, coastal and marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals”; and sites that meet criterion (x) are “the most important and significant natural habitats for in-situ conservation of biological diversity” (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2012, 21).²

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¹ See also UNEP (2009).

² Countries adopted the Convention Concerning the Protection of World Cultural and Natural Heritage in 1972. UNESCO administers the convention, the full text of which is available at <http://whc.unesco.org/en/conventiontext/>.

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Examples include Garamba National Park, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and Grand Canyon National Park, in the United States.

Peace parks—transboundary protected areas formed as part of a peace treaty or a multilateral peacetime agreement—symbolize peace and cooperation between nations. Examples include the Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park (UNESCO World Heritage Centre n.d.), which is shared by the United States and Canada, and the Cordillera del Cóndor peace park (IEDS n.d.), which is shared by Ecuador and Peru. The formation of a peace park often involves various parties, including the UN (for example, the United Nations Security Council or the United Nations Environment Programme), stakeholder governments, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) such as the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) or the Global Transboundary Conservation Network.

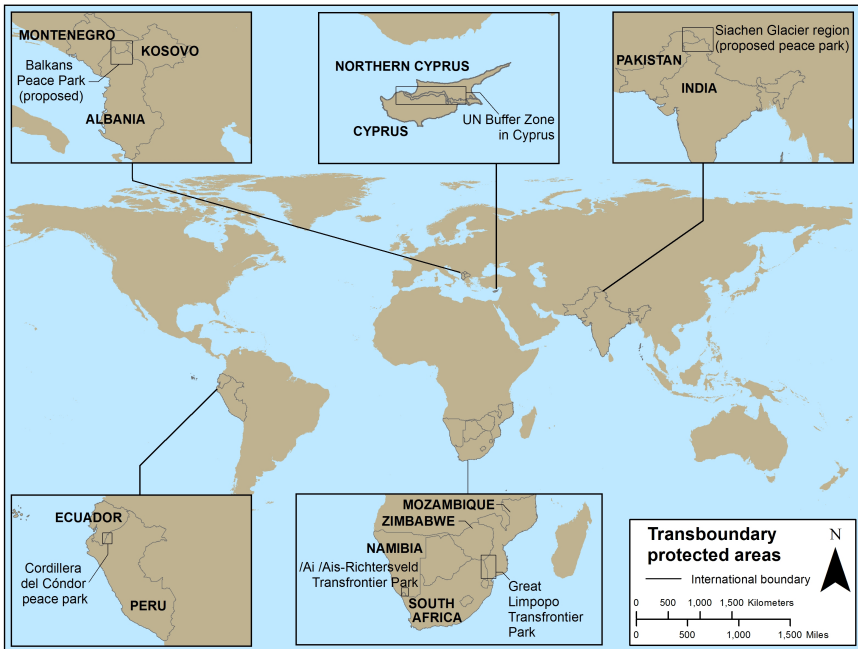
OPPORTUNITIES FOR PEACEBUILDING

Transboundary protected areas in general, and peace parks in particular, can strengthen post-conflict peacebuilding in several ways: by supporting negotiation and the withdrawal of troops; building trust; fostering economic development; facilitating disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR); providing a neutral meeting place; and attracting international attention to the region. These are considered in turn.

Supporting negotiation and the withdrawal of troops

Transboundary peace parks offer valuable opportunities to promote cross-border cooperation and natural resource management. In the immediate aftermath of conflict, a park can provide a neutral location for meetings and negotiations. The designation of a peace park can also be used to resolve territorial disputes that might otherwise hinder the resolution of armed conflict. For example, even if adversaries would prefer to end a conflict, they may be reluctant to lose land and honor by withdrawing; establishing a neutral park in a contested area can “enable both armies to withdraw under conditions of honor and dignity” (Ali 2002, 318).

The Cordillera del Cóndor peace park demonstrates how protected areas can be used to encourage parties to withdraw armed forces from a contested region. Ecuador and Peru had engaged in border clashes for over 150 years. The Rio Protocol, a peace agreement signed in 1942, ended hostilities for a time, but failed to clearly define the new boundaries of the Cordillera del Cóndor region, leaving room for disagreements that eventually led to armed conflict in 1981 and 1995 (Franco 1997; Ali 2007). Finally, in 1998, the countries signed the Acta Presidencial de Brasilia, which committed them to withdraw from the disputed zone. Although only a relatively small part of the Cordillera del Cóndor region was designated as a protected area—two adjoining parcels on each side of the border—and the political conflict has yet to be completely resolved, a joint committee has been governing the development of the area in accordance with the



Bi-National Development Plan, and there has been no further armed conflict (Global Transboundary Conservation Network n.d.).

The Siachen Glacier region—a high-alpine area located in the Kashmir territory of India, and the subject of long-standing conflict between India and Pakistan—might benefit from the designation of a peace park (Tallone 2003). Despite an informal ceasefire in 2003 that ended nineteen years of open conflict, military forces remain stationed in the region, and both countries continue to lose forces because of the harsh living conditions. Creating a peace park in the disputed region might help resolve the conflict by allowing both sides to withdraw; in addition to protecting the environment, such a park would save money and lives (Ali 2002).

Building trust

By fostering trust—an essential element in peacebuilding—cooperation helps countries move toward a sustainable solution to conflict. Working together to achieve a common goal, such as the development and management of a peace park, enables former belligerents to learn from each other. Moreover, joint management of a peace park can create a foundation for working through more sensitive issues, such as the original causes of conflict and the presence of continuing tensions. To achieve this level of collaboration, the emphasis must be on shared management and responsibility: no one party should take charge. Acknowledging

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differences in available resources, authority, and legal systems is also vital to ensuring that all participants are on a more equal footing and avoiding further conflict (Sandwith et al. 2001).

Although it was not in direct result of or response to a conflict, the /Ai /Ais-Richtersveld Transfrontier Park illustrates how joint management of a peace park can encourage cooperation between countries with a history of conflict (PPF n.d.a). In an armed conflict that lasted from 1966 to 1988 and led to more than 8,000 deaths, Namibia (then South West Africa) sought independence from South Africa (UCDP 2013). Namibia and South Africa signed a treaty establishing the park in 2003. Since its inception, numerous bilateral committees have jointly addressed community development, conservation, security, and financing. Joint planning and development have been so cooperative and constructive that Namibia and South Africa intend to significantly expand the transboundary area. Thus, even a peace park established more than a decade after conflict can strengthen transboundary cooperation (PPF n.d.a).

Fostering economic development

Peace parks can spur economic development by generating or encouraging ecotourism—which, in turn, yields economic benefits that create a tangible incentive for former adversaries to maintain peace. In addition to providing direct employment by creating demand for park employees, ecotourism can spur indirect economic growth in nearby areas, in the form of stores and accommodations, along with possible opportunities for local residents to be employed as guides. The income generated should not only improve livelihoods but also encourage local communities to help protect and maintain the park. Local economies may also benefit from increased cross-border movement, which can provide merchants and manufacturers with access to new markets. Finally, relaxed borders may enable pastoralists to reach better land, thus improving regional food security and reducing the potential for pastoral-agricultural conflict (Pavanello 2010).

The proposed Balkans Peace Park provides a prime example of ecotourism opportunities. Situated between Albania, Kosovo, and Montenegro, the park has already created jobs in all three countries and promises to create more. Local residents have assisted with the early stages of park planning—for example, participating in biodiversity studies and water resource management projects. A fully functional park would create opportunities for alpinist organizations, local small businesses, and the local transportation industry, among other entities, thereby contributing significantly to regional stability in a post-conflict area.³

The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, which is intended to join existing parks in Mozambique, South Africa, and Zimbabwe into a single protected area, offers another example of economic development potential (Siyabona Africa

³ For more discussion on the Balkans Peace Park, see J. Todd Walters, “A Peace Park in the Balkans: Cross-Border Cooperation and Livelihood Creation through Coordinated Environmental Conservation,” in this book.

n.d.). The three existing parks, which include South Africa's Kruger National Park, are popular destinations that have already boosted their respective national economies (PPF n.d.a, n.d.b, n.d.c). Kruger National Park alone attracts almost 1 million visitors a year, generating approximately US\$30 million (Saayman and Saayman 2006). The creation of a transboundary protected area is expected to benefit all three countries, bringing more tourists to Zimbabwe and Mozambique and boosting South Africa's considerable tourist appeal by expanding the park area, increasing support for park development and management, and helping to ensure stable and peaceful relations with its neighbors.

Facilitating DDR

Peace parks can support peacebuilding and economic development through the employment of former combatants. The UN approach to DDR is designed to help excombatants reintegrate into civilian life, in part by providing sustainable livelihood opportunities. As the following chapters explore in greater detail, protected areas in general, and peace parks in particular, directly support post-conflict peacebuilding by creating employment opportunities for excombatants—for example, as park rangers or ecotourism guides.

Mozambique and Indonesia both illustrate successful efforts to integrate DDR into the development of protected areas. In 1994, Mozambique's Gorongosa National Park hired seventy-six former combatants to provide much-needed repairs and help reestablish control of the park, which had been occupied by militant groups during the conflict. The excombatants were hired because they knew the locations of landmines and wildlife, and possessed the necessary skills to track and apprehend poachers.⁴

Indonesia's Aceh region, where 70 percent of the forest is under some form of protection, has seen a huge boom in ecotourism since the conflict subsided, in 2005; as of 2008, more than 400 tourism sites had been established. Seeking employees with strong local knowledge, tourism companies hired former rebels who had operated as combatants in the jungles.⁵ As in Mozambique, hiring excombatants has helped with reintegration while strengthening the local economy. Because transboundary parks offer similar tourism and employment opportunities, DDR programs can also function at the transboundary level.

Providing a neutral meeting place

The neutral status of transboundary protected areas makes them a useful meeting place for hostile parties, as exemplified by the UN Buffer Zone on the island of

⁴ For a discussion on this topic, see Matthew F. Pritchard, "From Soldiers to Park Rangers: Post-Conflict Natural Resource Management in Gorongosa National Park," in this book.

⁵ For more information on integrating natural resources into DDR frameworks, see Glauca Boyer and Adrienne M. Stork, "The Interface between Natural Resources and Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration: Enhancing Human Security in Post-Conflict Situations," in this book.

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Cyprus. Established as a temporary dividing line in 1964, the zone marks the boundary between the Republic of Cyprus, in the south, and the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus, to the north. Since the establishment of the zone, land that was once the scene of conflict became the only neutral meeting place on the island. Over the years, the UN Peacekeeping Force in Cyprus has facilitated meetings between northern and southern communities, as well cooperation on antimosquito programs, mixed farming, and water use—which was necessary because the demarcation line effectively divided the island’s water resources (Westrik 2003).

Focusing international attention

Heightened international attention and involvement can help prevent conflict from escalating into violence. World Heritage sites, which can increase both tourism and the involvement of international organizations, are a prime example: areas designated as protected sites under international law benefit from the attention of the UN and other international organizations. And if violence does occur, World Heritage status can assist in obtaining support for the affected area that might otherwise be more difficult to secure.

The DRC provides a good example of the usefulness of World Heritage status. As of this writing, all five World Heritage sites in the DRC were included on the List of World Heritage in Danger, meaning that their “outstanding universal value” was deemed at risk. In 2004, the director-general of the Congolese Institute for Nature Conservation (Institut Congolais pour la Conservation de la Nature, or ICCN) noted that “the prospects for the future lay mainly in the commitment of the Congolese Government to support the conservation of the World Heritage sites” (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2004, 108). Although the status of the parks has not insulated the sites from the effects of conflict, it has helped draw attention to their needs.

A number of parties—among them UNESCO, ICCN, and several NGOs, including the World Wide Fund for Nature and the Wildlife Conservation Society—have worked together to help protect the DRC sites on the danger list. At the height of the civil war, four of the five sites were in rebel-held territory, and the cooperating organizations were among the only groups in the area capable of providing support (UNESCO World Heritage Centre 2010). Despite having suffered some impacts from the conflict, a number of sites have shown signs of improvement—however fragile—including increased tourism and financial investment (Virunga National Park n.d.).

CHALLENGES FACING PROTECTED AREAS

Although peace parks offer significant opportunities to promote conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding, a number of obstacles must be addressed before such opportunities can be brought to fruition. First and foremost, it is imperative that all fighting factions support the establishment of the park. In

practical terms, this requires political goodwill and trust—as well as a durable agreement—between former adversaries. Without a strong framework, a peace park will not serve its intended purpose and could even trigger further conflict.

Once former belligerents have agreed to support the park, they must be given equitable footing with respect to developing and maintaining it. Rosaleen Duffy warns of the potential difficulties that may arise when some partners stand to gain more than others by establishing a park. If the parties feel that they are not receiving fair representation or benefits, the situation could easily devolve into further conflict (Duffy 2007).

Even when initial obstacles are addressed, the parties may disagree about priorities, such as whether to promote economic development at the expense of environmental conservation, or vice versa. Managing tourism so as to maximize both of these objectives can be particularly difficult (Fennell 2008). Areas of disagreement must be addressed carefully, and with full participation of nearby communities, to sustain peaceful relations between all parties.

Although strong and continuous support from external actors can help overcome some of the challenges, such support may be hard to sustain: many aid groups tend to depart after open conflict has ceased. Fortunately, however, two primary resources can provide lasting support: first, NGOs such as IUCN and the Global Transboundary Conservation Network are devoted to sustaining peace parks; second, World Heritage status brings attention from UNESCO even after conflict has ended.

Although the challenges associated with establishing and maintaining peace parks are substantial, they are not insurmountable. The IUCN World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) has developed the following guidelines to help ensure that peace parks are developed in an inclusive, sustainable manner (Sandwith et al. 2001):

- Identify and promote common values.
- Involve and benefit local people.
- Obtain and maintain support of decision makers.
- Promote coordinated and cooperative activities.
- Achieve coordinated planning and protected area development.
- Develop cooperative agreements.
- Work toward funding sustainability.
- Monitor and assess progress.
- Deal with tension or armed conflict.

Each of these steps requires a great deal of time and effort, particularly in a post-conflict situation, but the potential payoff is substantial.

CONCLUSION

Protected areas establish a space where natural ecosystems can be revived; when such areas take the form of peace parks, they can also provide a number

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of additional benefits to peacebuilding. Peace parks must be carefully planned, developed, and maintained, however, to avoid exacerbating existing conflicts or inciting new ones. As more peace parks are developed, they can serve as positive examples of how to promote conservation while supporting local livelihoods, both of which are critical elements in the post-conflict peacebuilding and redevelopment process.

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