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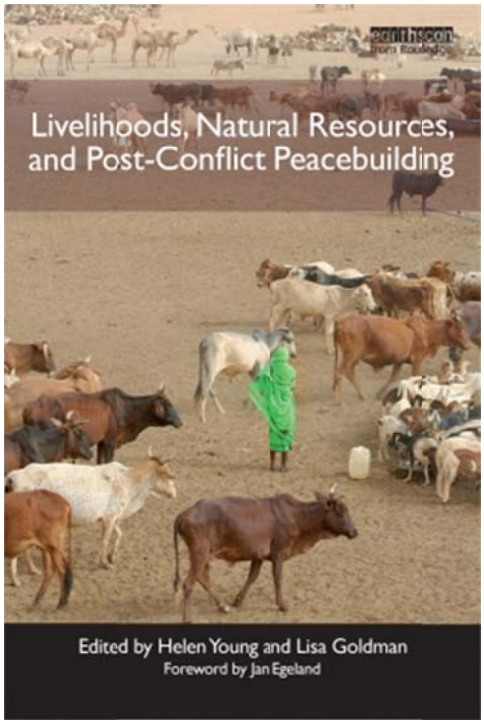

A Peace Park in the Balkans: Cross-Border Cooperation and Livelihood Creation Through Coordinated Environmental Conservation

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A peace park in the Balkans: Cross-border cooperation and livelihood creation through coordinated environmental conservation

J. Todd Walters

The peace movement of the 1960s and the growing sophistication of an environmental movement that embraced a scientific, evidence-based approach to advocacy helped pave the way for the development of international peace parks. In the post-apartheid and post-Soviet eras, these parks and their champions have introduced what Nelson Mandela calls "a concept that can be embraced by all" (Peace Park Foundation n.d.). Generations worth of labor have helped shape peace parks into a policy tool that helps resolve border disputes, stimulate cross-border cooperation, and generate opportunities for livelihood creation, particularly with a focus on environmental conservation, sustainable development, ecotourism, and geotourism.

This chapter begins by providing a brief history of international peace parks and highlights their significance in international diplomacy. It continues with an examination of multitrack diplomacy and the use of this approach in the development of a proposal for the Balkans Peace Park, a transboundary park to be shared and jointly managed by Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo. In addition to transboundary cooperation, the initiative to create a peace park in this region illustrates another benefit of such approaches: the creation of sustainable livelihoods through the needed emphasis on natural resource management. A discussion of lessons learned from the project and the next steps needed for the Balkans Peace Park to be realized conclude the chapter.

THE VALUE OF INTERNATIONAL PEACE PARKS

Nelson Mandela, Ted Turner, and Mikhail Gorbachev have all become champions of a growing global movement to create international peace parks in response to some of the world's most daunting challenges in international diplomacy, environmental conservation, and cross-border cooperation in areas affected by conflict.

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The seed for the concept was planted during the U.S. presidency of Theodore Roosevelt and at the beginning of the modern environmental conservation movement in the United States a century ago. In 1910, the United States established Glacier National Park, and over the next two decades Rotary International worked hard to link Glacier National Park to its Canadian counterpart, Waterton National Park, so the transboundary region could be jointly managed from an ecosystem perspective. In 1932, the U.S. Congress and the Parliament of Canada formally dedicated Waterton Glacier International Peace Park, widely recognized as the world's first international peace park (UNESCO and World Heritage Convention n.d.). It symbolizes the peaceful friendship between Canada and the United States and highlights new opportunities for cross-border collaboration.

International peace parks are an idealized conception of a larger conservation initiative—transboundary protected areas (Dudley 2008). The World Commission on Protected Areas (WCPA) of the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) defines transboundary protected areas as "areas that meet across international borders" and that "provide important opportunities for collaboration between managers and scientists in neighbouring countries." As the WCPA notes, "these areas provide possibilities for promoting biodiversity conservation and sustainable use across politically divided ecosystems, while at the same time encouraging international collaboration in management, the sharing of experience and the sharing of information" (WCPA n.d.).

International peace parks and other transboundary protected areas have similar core areas of focus, from environmental conservation at the ecosystem level to sustainable development requiring cross-border cooperation. Peace parks and transboundary protected areas in general can also help create local livelihoods and shift incentive structures toward conservation as a land use option.

International peace parks are distinguished from other transboundary protected areas, however, by being formally dedicated as a symbol of peace between two or more sovereign nations. Peace parks recognize conservation of not only environmental resources but also cultural and historical resources, and they are consciously utilized as a tool for international diplomacy. Their establishment can be written into treaties that end active conflicts in order to build trust and effective frameworks for interstate and intrastate cooperation after the conflict has ended. The distinction between international peace parks and other transboundary protected areas was elucidated in 2001 by IUCN, which declared that international peace parks are "transboundary protected areas that are formally dedicated to the protection and maintenance of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and to the promotion of peace and co-operation" (Sandwith et al. 2001, 3).

Whether peace parks promote peace or serve as a symbol of peace is the subject of a highly charged debate. According to positive peace theory, it is important to recognize that peace is much more than just the absence of violence; peace includes active cooperation for mutual benefit (Galtung 1996). It follows that conflict is not a prerequisite for peacebuilding; countries that have not

been in conflict can still build peace with one another by actively increasing collaboration and by strengthening bonds between individuals, organizations, and government institutions. Peace parks can be created between longtime allies to serve as a physical symbol of their trust and cooperation, as with Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park.[1] They can also be established between active adversaries during times of war and used as a tool to help solve conflicts and end violence, as seen in the territorial dispute between Ecuador and Peru in the Cordillera del Cóndor region (UNEP 2009).

Peace parks can be used as a common goal that adversaries can work together to achieve. They provide what Ken Conca and Geoffrey Dabelko call a "soft entry point" to cooperation (Conca and Dabelko 2002). The creation of peace parks is less politically charged than attempts at military or economic cooperation—as exemplified by the proposed Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) Peace Park between North and South Korea. The proposed Balkans Peace Park would provide a framework for collaboration across historically conflict-affected border areas, as well as for the development of opportunities for post-conflict livelihood creation and the maintenance of traditional cultural heritage. The multilayered transboundary network in Albania, Montenegro, and Kosovo has developed into a movement to formally establish the park.

A MULTITRACK APPROACH TO PEACE PARK ESTABLISHMENT

The Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy identifies nine different tracks upon which diplomacy and international collaboration take place, all of which enhance and support one another. The traditional Track 1 approach is official government diplomacy. Its core operational approach is policy coordination, and its primary actors are heads of state, ambassadors, and government ministers. The Track 1 approach is fundamentally top-down, which creates a dominant framework for policy coordination through which all stakeholders must operate.

In contrast with the traditional (Track 1-centered) approach to diplomacy, multitrack diplomacy views the process of international peacebuilding "as a living system. It looks at the web of interconnected activities, individuals, institutions, and communities that operate together for a common goal: a world at peace" (Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy n.d.). At the core of the multitrack approach is recognition of the multiple pathways to peacebuilding and of the interconnectedness between them. The resiliency of the peace process is increased when stakeholders are engaged on multiple levels in ways that are most effective to each, and when bonds are built across borders among many different individuals, organizations, and institutions.

International diplomacy in the post-Westphalian world has broadened in scope dramatically. The secretaries of state, ambassadors, and special envoys of

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[1] For an analysis of peace parks generally, see Carol Westrik, "Transboundary Protected Areas: Opportunities and Challenges," in this book.

nation-states no longer dominate international diplomacy with the Track 1 approach. Additional tracks to conduct diplomacy between nations have been identified and are being creatively used. A sports-based track thrusts athletes into a diplomatic role, as with the U.S.-China ping-pong diplomacy of the 1970s and U.S.-Iran wrestling matches and wrestler exchanges more recently. A scientific track does the same with scientists, as is most evident in the joint development of the International Space Station and the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, and in the collaboration on scientific experiments that were developed and conducted as a result. An educational track places students and professors in a diplomatic role through exchange programs like Fulbright fellowships and Rhodes scholarships, as well as direct university partnerships across borders.

Multitrack citizen diplomacy allows for multiple layers of society to be engaged simultaneously. This process can continue even when official diplomatic efforts falter or fail. By engaging a wider range of stakeholders, citizen diplomacy can increase the number of connections across borders over time and build a critical mass of individuals and organizations with friends and colleagues on the other side of a border, all of whom may oppose a return to conflict.

The multitrack approach cannot be used by itself to formally establish a peace park; that requires an official declaration from Track 1 diplomatic actors. Though multitrack diplomacy is broad and deep, it is limited when it comes to official actions, particularly concerning issues of sovereignty. The transition from a multitrack collaboration around a peace park proposal to the establishment of an official international peace park requires recognition from actors at the Track 1 level in the form of an official diplomatic declaration—often a memorandum of understanding (MOU) or formal treaty.

THE PROPOSED BALKANS PEACE PARK

A prime example of the use of a multitrack approach is the proposal for the Balkans Peace Park in a part of former Yugoslavia, currently being developed between formerly communist Albania and newly independent Montenegro and Kosovo (see figure 1). Due to the dramatically different relationships that Montenegro and Kosovo have with the former state of Serbia, as well as the role that the United Nations Mission in Kosovo played in building up Kosovo's institutional capacity, the decision for Kosovo and Montenegro to formally recognize each other's sovereignty and independence was fraught with consequences—not least of which was Serbia's expulsion of the Montenegrin ambassador the day after recognition (*Helsinki Bulletin* 2010).

Another dynamic on the national level is the national park structure in each of the three countries. Thethi National Park in Albania lacks the funding and park management to effectively enforce regulations and management principles, and the park boundaries do not extend all the way to the country's borders. Prokletja National Park in Montenegro was created by an act of parliament in 2010, but it has not yet been formally defined or implemented on the ground; locals often call it a "paper park." Bjeshket a Namuna National Park in Kosovo

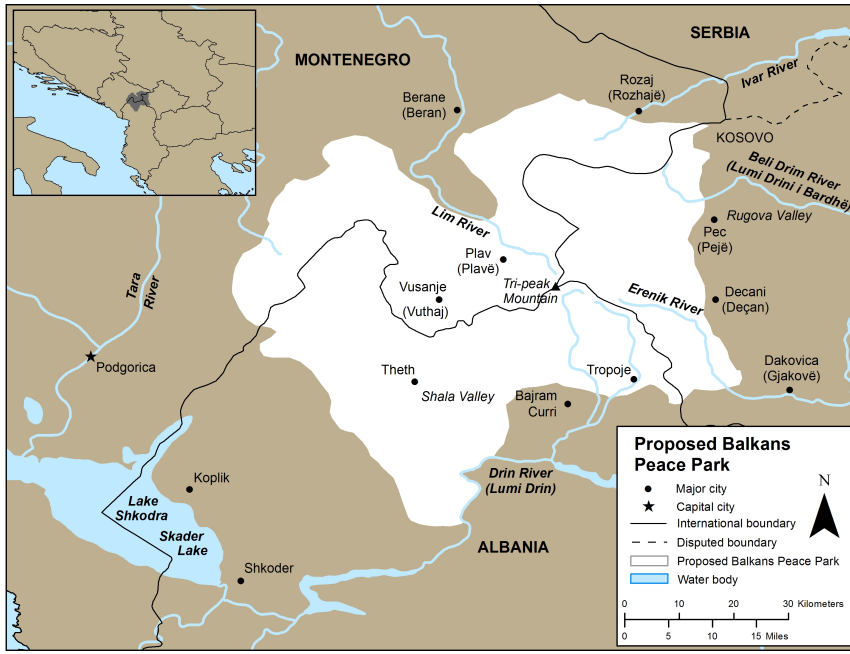

Figure 1. Proposed Balkans Peace Park
Source: B3P (2003).

has not yet been formally dedicated by the Assembly of Kosovo, and it faces significant challenges, such as local opposition to the idea, a lack of local consultation, and a lack of understanding about potential local benefits and not just restrictions. It is impossible to create a functioning international peace park that links the national parks of all three countries until national parks in each country are established and operational.

Such circumstances render a Track 1 approach to formally creating an international peace park extremely challenging. However, it is possible to employ a multitrack approach just below the highest levels of government, where political constraints are not as significant.

The multitrack approach for the proposed Balkans Peace Park has created a collaborative community, comprising mayors of the municipalities where the proposed peace park would be located; government ministries for environment, tourism, and development; international development agencies of foreign countries, including SNV Netherlands Development Organisation (SNV) and German Society for International Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, or GIZ);[2] individuals from the U.S. Peace Corps and the U.S. and British embassies; local nongovernmental organization (NGO) leaders from Albania,

[2] GIZ was formerly German Technical Cooperation (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit, or GTZ).

Montenegro, and Kosovo, who created a cross-border coalition of local NGOs; and local people who reside within the proposed peace park area and buffer zone, immediately outside the protected areas designated as national parks.

The presence of many different actors and projects yields a variety of opportunities for livelihood creation—from small-scale sustainable development initiatives to large-scale biodiversity surveys, and even larger-scale infrastructure-development projects. The loosely knit coalition of stakeholders involved in the park's development can grow closer over time, capitalizing on one of the under-recognized benefits of collaboration: efficiency and effectiveness increase as the same group of people collaborate together.

A decade after the Balkans Peace Park Project began in 2001, the commitment made—to cooperate across borders on issues of environmental conservation, natural resource management, and sustainable development—by the community of stakeholders still exists (Kennard 2009). These stakeholders are all engaged in working together toward many of the core goals for the creation of the proposed peace park, while supporting the creation and development of the three national parks as well.

CREATING LIVELIHOODS

It is important to create sustainable livelihood opportunities for individuals living in and around a peace park. This can be accomplished through the establishment of incentives for the local population to support and work with other stakeholders in creating and managing the park itself and for sustainable activities that occur around and within the park, as well as the establishment and enforcement of regulations that discourage activities that work against those ends, such as illegal logging, dumping of waste, or poaching.

Peace parks can shift the economic incentive structure away from resource exploitation and toward environmental conservation and cultural heritage preservation by providing livelihood opportunities for local people who may not otherwise have a clear reason to support the creation of a peace park. Residents may work as park rangers, managers, and guides; host tourists in homes or guesthouses; sell food, drinks, supplies, and handicrafts to tourists (from both within and outside the region); or provide transportation to visitors. Peace parks can give people living in and around the park an incentive to remain in their communities instead of relocating to urban centers for employment or turning to environmentally detrimental income-generating activities.

The ongoing development of the proposed Balkans Peace Park has produced jobs that are as diverse as the efforts under way to stimulate cross-border cooperation. Some of these jobs have gone to highly educated citizens of the three countries, including scientific researchers, civil engineers, and resource managers. In cases where local expertise falls short of the need, international experts from universities, development agencies, and NGOs have been brought to the region to contribute their expertise and to work in concert with local experts and other local people.

One ongoing initiative is a transboundary biodiversity survey of the Bjeshket a Namuna–Prokletja mountain ecosystem, one of the areas to be included in the proposed peace park. This effort is being spearheaded under a larger program known as the Dinaric Arc Initiative, a collaboration of many international organizations which began in 2008 (Erg 2010). The Dinaric Arc Initiative has hired local forestry experts, biologists, hydrologists, and botanists for programs to improve local living conditions, focusing on waste management, personal hygiene, and better cooking facilities inside homes in this remote mountain region. Some of the programs are managed by the ministries of cultural heritage of each country, while others are initiatives of international NGOs and development agencies, particularly GIZ (and before it, GTZ). A local NGO in Kosovo, Environmentally Responsible Action group, has already developed a similar program to update the biodiversity information in Kosovo's National Environment Report, which as of 2010 was still using scientific data from the 1970s.

Coordinated water resource management systems at both the local and regional levels address everything from traditional rural irrigation methods to small-scale and major hydroelectric projects (such as a dam on the Drin River), as well as shared cleanup and pollution regulation efforts in Lake Shkodra, on the border between Albania and Montenegro.[3] These projects provide high- and low-skilled jobs in construction, installation, and maintenance for the local population, in addition to short-term volunteer opportunities and nonmonetary benefits including cleaner water and more reliable electricity. The projects also bring people together to work side by side, developing a framework for cooperation that evolves and improves over time. All of these efforts demonstrate how transboundary environmental collaboration can catalyze action on multiple levels, bring together a new community of stakeholders, and generate a critical mass of political will to press for the establishment of a functioning national park system and eventually a linked international peace park through the Track 1 diplomatic process.

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—and extends it to culture and history as well, that is, all distinctive assets of a place (National Geographic Center for Sustainable Desitnations n.d.).

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[3] Drin River is also known as Lumi Drin, and Lake Shkodra is also known as Skader Laker.

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 is 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 for cross-border cooperation to be stimulated. Focusing on an ecoregion can prompt a powerful shift in perspective for diverse stakeholders whose interests may suddenly align when they view an issue without human-drawn boundaries and sovereignty constraints.

An excellent example of this shift in perspective can be seen with the Jordan River Peace Park and the work done by Friends of the Earth Middle East, an organization comprising and headed by Jordanians, Palestinians, and Israelis. The group has mounted the successful Good Water Makes Good Neighbors campaign to shift public perception away from a focus on sovereign borders and a tragedy-of-the-commons mentality toward one that views the Jordan River and its wetland ecosystem as a critical part of a shared heritage that should be protected for a number of cultural, political, and environmental reasons.[4]

This shift in perspective can foster a whole new realm of opportunities for coordination and cooperation that are not possible under a strict Track 1 approach. In the case of the proposed Balkans Peace Park, ecotourism has helped spur the founding of local small businesses that cater to tourists visiting the region, who often spend time in more than one country. Outdoor-adventure seekers can contact one of the many alpinist organizations founded in the past ten years to book mountain trekking, climbing, white-water rafting, and mountain biking packages. On their expeditions, these tourists can stay at local guesthouses that have adapted traditional cultural notions of hospitality to host paying customers who are eager to contribute to the local economy and spend a night in a traditional stone house; eat traditional dishes made with locally grown, organic ingredients; and sample local wine and raki (spirits distilled from plums and other fruits).

Tourist expeditions have also helped stimulate the local transportation industry because reaching remote mountainous regions is best done with a local driver and a four-wheel-drive vehicle. The demand for souvenirs has begun to revitalize the local handicrafts industry as tourists purchase everything from hand-knit socks and locally woven rugs to woodcarvings and handmade instruments like the *chieftelli*. One goal of the Dinaric Arc Initiative is to link all of these independent initiatives in a comprehensive informational database that tourists can use to plan a cross-boundary adventure vacation (Erg 2010). Another resource developed by the international community is a guide by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to managing the social and environmental impact of mountain tours, which includes a section on "Local Communities and Livelihood Planning" (UNEP 2007). The guide has proved to be a valuable

[4] For more on the work by Friends of the Earth Middle East, see Mehyar et al. (2014).

resource to businesses. Together, the informational database and guide represent a conscious effort by the international community to ensure that the initiative is locally grounded.

Opportunities for construction laborers, both skilled and unskilled, arise around locally managed sustainable development projects, which can, with the help of stakeholder focus groups, help set priorities for the type of development that should occur. Livelihood opportunities can also be created by conservation initiatives, such as rehabilitation efforts for degraded areas, conservation easements for local landowners, and infrastructure improvements designed to minimize human impacts on the environment. In the proposed Balkans Peace Park, such initiatives have taken the form of an in-progress mountain road–engineering project; improvements in small-scale hydroelectric power generation; and the development of an ecotourism infrastructure of converted guesthouses, GPS-navigable hiking routes with well-marked trails, and a local guide service.

The multitrack approach also enables the coordination of programs across multiple levels: local, regional, national, and international. Jobs may be local or national, and they may be private sector or government based. Two key areas of focus, conservation enforcement and park management, require a significant degree of coordination among workers from each country—including rangers, park managers, conservation biologists, natural resource managers, and guards seeking to prevent illegal poaching and logging. Through coordinated, sustained dialogue, stakeholders can develop a strategic plan for these areas that addresses both livelihood needs and natural resource protection. The Balkans Peace Park Project and the Dutch aid group SNV have been conducting facilitated dialogues, hosting conferences of stakeholders to conduct needs assessments, developing a strategic plan, and generating transboundary collaboration among stakeholders—but many of the livelihood opportunities still exist only in the plan, and not yet in reality.

National park creation and management remains a challenge in the Balkans, primarily due to lack of funding and minimal human resources, as well as unresolved issues such as private landownership within park boundaries and the related challenge of balancing private use with the requirements of park regulations. These issues have been exacerbated by a lack of communication between governments and local people and, in the case of Kosovo, have led to local opposition to the formal creation of the Bjeshket a Namuna National Park. In existing national parks, enforcement of such regulations (particularly with respect to conservation) is negligible, as rangers are local people who intimately understand the survival challenges faced by the local population and are often related through family or tribal ties to those they are expected to police. Hunting is not regulated, and prohibitions against illegal logging are rarely enforced. The few rangers who do work within existing national parks tend to overlook their fellow community members' violations of park regulations. Though many new livelihood opportunities have been created as the idea of a Balkans Peace Park takes shape, viable

alternatives have yet to be provided that eliminate the need of communities to rely on the environment for basic necessities.

LESSONS LEARNED

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 during the proposal stage can help shift incentive structures for local communities toward conservation as a viable land use option and can consolidate public support for the establishment of a peace park. Use of an integrated multitrack 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. In the Balkans, the time is not yet ripe to officially create the proposed peace park. Kosovo is struggling to maintain government stability under UN oversight, and it still has significant Track 1 diplomatic issues to work through with Montenegro. Diplomatic ties between Kosovo and Montenegro were not formally established until January 2010, and the repatriation of refugees remains a challenging issue. Bjeshket a Namuna National Park is not yet established in Kosovo, Prokletja National Park exists only on paper in Montenegro, and Thethi National Park in Albania lacks the resources to effectively enforce regulations; until these challenges can be solved, combining the national parks into an international peace park will remain a goal and not a reality. Yet steps in the direction of establishing the park can be taken, and cross-border connections can be built and strengthened while stakeholders prepare for the proper moment to apply pressure at the national level for the formal creation and dedication of the proposed Balkans Peace Park.

CONCLUSION

The world is increasingly acknowledging the value of international peace parks, which serve many different roles in many different circumstances, all of them stimulating cross-border cooperation and building trust and peace among countries, organizations and institutions, and individuals. The proposed Balkans Peace Park illustrates many of the challenges inherent in creating an international peace park, highlights examples of effective measures to overcome some of those challenges, and provides some key lessons that are informing new initiatives to create international peace parks in different regions around the world.

One of the main lessons involves local support and stakeholder involvement. In working to create an international peace park, it is critical to develop locally

specific solutions in concert with the local population and with their support. This means involving and effectively coordinating a diverse range of stakeholders on multiple levels and across multiple sectors. During this process, it is important to recognize and acknowledge the power discrepancies among stakeholders, as well as the variety of ways in which different stakeholders can contribute their strengths and resources to address the issues that emerge.

Consistent laws and policies are needed on an ecosystem level. These laws and policies will require collaboration among the countries in terms of implementation and enforcement. Creation of livelihoods as part of an international peace park can shift incentive structures toward conservation and more sustainable uses of land, but only if the economic incentives are sufficient to generate a meaningful and measurable change in behavior, attitude, and income. Finally, a balance should also be maintained between large infrastructure projects and smaller community development projects, and the diverse array of benefits must be distributed in a way that all stakeholders feel is equitable, so no one has an incentive to become a spoiler.

A diverse, multitrack group of stakeholders has continued to work toward the goal of making the proposed Balkans Peace Park a reality. This amalgamation of different individuals, organizations, and institutions is actively working through each challenge of creating the proposed park, is continually building a critical mass of people on the local, regional, national, and international levels who support the vision, and is continuing to prepare the ground for the day when Mandela's "concept that can be embraced by all" reaches the Track 1 leaders who can put pen to paper and make the dream a reality.

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