

Report on trip to Bayonne, 28th April to 1st May 2013

Nature sans frontières – Journée européenne de la coopération des parcs naturels

organised by

Association de coopération transfrontalière et Interrégionale (ACTI)

Summary

Cross-border collaboration is an effective tool to improve nature conservation. In south-western Europe many protected areas adjoining international borders can be found. However expertise exchange between these parks is still limited and no network has been established to foster knowledge exchange yet. Therefore the Association of transfrontier and interregional cooperation (ACTI) organised a two day conference and field trip to bring together experts in transboundary collaboration from south-western Europe.

EUROPARC was the only pan-european organisation present at this meeting and introduced the Transboundary Parks Programme to the audience. Representatives from protected areas in Spain, France, Switzerland and Belgium showcased their good-practice examples but also the hindrances they see for better collaboration. Local authorities like the General Council of Atlantic-Pyrenees and the Genral Council of the High Pyrenees gave insight into their policies on and support of cross-border cooperation.

Only few participants knew about the EUROPARC Transboundary Parks Programme. A 20 minutes presentation followed by a discussion about the benefits and particularities of the programme familiarised the audience with the work of the Federation. EUROPARC learned about the necessities of cross-border parks, their challenges and what support they are looking for from an international network like the Federation. New contacts have been made and EUROPARC presented itself as reliable partner and facilitator when it comes to transboundary cooperation of European protected areas.

The programme comprised:

- 29th April** European Day of cooperation in natural parks
- 30th April** Field trip to cross-border site Somport-Candanchu, National Parks Pyrenees/F and Ordesa-Mont Perdu /E, good practice examples from the French-Spanish border

Introduction

- Welcome speech by the president of the General Council of the Atlantic Pyrenees
- Introduction to the conference by ACTI president Lucille Abadie and director of Bayonne University Mr. Zavoli

Main part

3 sessions with presentations of good practices examples, programmes and policies on cross-border cooperation

1st session: Protected areas – new actors in European transboundary cooperation

- The French-Spanish border

Mr. Berdou, president of Pyrenees National Park and **Manuel Montes**, president of Ordesa-Mont Perdu National Park present the successes and challenges of their cooperation

- France and other neighbouring countries

Juan Lloret-Salvo: Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park – towards common transboundary governance

Anne Girardet: Transboundary park project French-Swiss Doubs

2nd session: Nature conservation – a challenge without borders?

- **Petra Schultheiss**: Working cross-border – benefit for nature and people. Introduction to EUROPARC's Transboundary Parks Programme and its TransParcNet
- **Philippe Ospital**: A project of common biodiversity monitoring across the Pyrenees
- **Boris Opolka**: Creation of plans integrating transboundary cooperation in Queyras National Park

3rd session: Impact of public institutions on the creation of cross-border cooperation between protected areas

- **Eva Lamothe**: The role of the transboundary department within the General Council of the Atlantic-Pyrenees
- **Jean-Michel Larroche**: Example from the General Council of the High Pyrenees of creating a cross-border governance

End

- Closing by ACTI president Lucille Abadie and Director of Bayonne University Mr. Zavoli
- Invitation to field trip 30th April to French-Spanish site Somport-Candanchu

About 40 people from different countries and backgrounds followed the conference the first day. Amongst them were representatives from protected areas, local government authorities, university professors and students. It was a friendly atmosphere with lively discussions and very well organised.

The speakers from the protected areas, presidents and staff responsible for transboundary cooperation presented case studies and reported about the achievements and challenges cooperating with their partner parks. All speakers stressed the importance of cross-border collaboration for nature conservation in their protected areas. Even new transboundary parks are being planned, as shows the case of the French-Swiss Doubs.

The represented protected areas have three main fields of cooperation in common: biodiversity monitoring, exchange of youth groups and pupils, and organisation of cultural events. The level and depths of cooperation however differs. Hainaut Cross-border Nature Park is developing a common structure to govern the protected area together. Queyras Nature Park is working towards being named UNESCO Biosphere reserve with its Italian partner park. Ordesa-Mont Perdu and Pyrenees National Park are declared UNESCO World Heritage and cooperate on many levels. Interesting though that one partner sees the collaboration as not very intense.

As challenges or hindrances for transboundary cooperation they mentioned lacking support of politicians, missing of specific policies for cross-border collaboration and scarce finances. The case of the French-Swiss Doubs will be even more difficult with Switzerland not being part of the European Union.

It appears that the represented PAs identify good transboundary cooperation by implementing practical projects over the course of several years, preferably generously funded. None of them emphasised on the importance of good relationship between people. When EUROPARC and the audience mentioned that, they were agreeing. It seemed however this is not (yet) their idea of working cross-border. One on one discussion with the PAs representatives after the conference showed that their concerns are very particular. They are looking for very specific good practice examples that fit their case preferably 100%. Questions regarding the TransParcNet were: "Are there any mountainous areas in the network?" "Are there any MABs?" Apparently they are longing for knowledge exchange and good practices but those have to be as close as possible to their own situation.

PAs collaborating across borders need to understand that people must be the key to quality cooperation. Without the will of the people involved, all funding and politics will come to nothing. EUROPARC can only talk so much about the benefits of the programme and the knowledge exchange in the network. Future TB members must experience it themselves to really understand the potential of the TransParcNet. Hence, invitations to the TransParcNet should be send out. A stimulus like a first timer's participation fee reduction could help to bring new people to the meeting.

Follow up and actions/next steps

Intensify contact

- Invitation to TransParcNet meeting, note that it's open to everybody to get to know the programme and the people behind it [29.04. and 14.05.2013]
- Add email addresses to transboundary contact list, keep them posted about TB developments within the Federation [07.05.2013]
- Send informational material about EUROPARC Transboundary Parks Programme [14.05.2013]
- Inform potential TB areas about Transboundary project and possible participation as soon as working group developed it. [end of 2013]

Strengthen EUROPARC TB programme

- Agree with working group on strategy to address new members [TransParcNet meeting Maas-Schwalm-Nette]
- Call for new transboundary verifiers. With STEC members not being able to act as verifiers anymore the Federation only has few verifiers left. New people should be invited and verifier trainings planned. After the announcement about the need for new verifiers especially with French, Spanish and/or Italian language skills, one application arrived already. [13.05.2013]

Lobby for transboundary cooperation with authorities

- The Transboundary Parks Programme is one of the key programmes of the Federation and at the heart what EUROPARC stands for. Therefore it should be the Federation's obligation to support transboundary areas also by making their voice count. Lobbying in Brussels and in the particular member countries through the sections is considered important to advance transboundary cooperation in Europe. [agreement on lobbying strategy between working group, CR and FM needed; more information after TransParcNet 2013]

Others

During the conference EUROPARC was approached regarding its membership fees and facilitation for Eastern European protected areas to join the Federation at lower membership rates. Members keep promoting EUROPARC when they are visiting other countries and organisations. Unfortunately especially in Eastern European protected areas money is tight and the regular membership fee of 585 € sometimes too much. Members wish for more support of the Federation to overcome financial difficulties by lowering membership rates for a certain period of time.

Programme of the conference

Please find it attached.

Interesting contacts to follow up

Mr Berdou, Parc des Pyrenées : aberdou@yahoo.fr

Manuel Montes, Aragon : mmontes@aragon.es

Juan Lloret, Scarpe Escaut : j.lloret-salvo@pnr-scarpe-escaut.fr

Anne Girardet, Doubs Pays Horloger : anne.girardet@pays-horloger.com

Petra Schultheiss, Europarc : p.schultheiss@europarc.org

Philippe Ospital pnp.ospital@espaces-naturels.fr

Boris Opolka, Queyras : b.opolka@pnr-queyras.fr

Eva Lamothe, Conseil Général 64 : eva.lamothe@cg64.fr

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Colour code:

Red = still to be done **Green** = done

Regensburg, 15.05.2013

