Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT) – an innovative partnership enhancing conservation and cooperation

Panorama Protected Area Solution published in July 2018 (https://panorama.solutions/en)

Cooperation between protected areas, NGOs and local people in Prespa National Park, Albania © PPNEA

Summary

The Prespa-Ohrid Ecoregion covers parts of Albania, Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The transboundary area covers six protected areas (PAs). To ensure sustainable conservation and effective management of PAs, cooperation within and across borders is crucial. To strengthen cooperation between local stakeholders, three NGOs officially established a regional conservation network called PrespaNet. Through PrespaNet, a 5-year strategy for the Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT) was elaborated with partners. PONT is a transboundary conservation trust fund that has established long-term financing (~€1.5-2million/year drawdown until 2030), which is additionally used to leverage the co-financing of activities. Initial grants have supported capacity development and conservation objectives, including to PA management bodies for transboundary activities and essential PA operating costs in line with the respective management plans. Shared services reduce administrative costs.

Classifications

Region East Europe

Scale of implementation Multi-national

Ecosystem

Forest ecosystems
Freshwater ecosystems
Grassland ecosystems
Pool, lake, pond
Temperate deciduous forest
Temperate grassland, savanna, shrubland
Wetland (swamp, marsh, peatland)

Butterfly during spring © PONT

Theme

Connectivity / transboundary conservation
Outreach & communications
Protected area governance
Protected area management planning
Species management
Sustainable financing
Sustainable livelihoods

Hazards addressed Land and forest degradation & Loss of biodiversity

Governance type By government

Sustainable development goals:

Aichi targets

Location

Prespa Ecoregion, Prespa National Park Albania, Prespa National Park Greece, Galicica National Park, Pelister National Park, Prespa Lake Monument of Nature, Ezerani Nature Park

Challenges

Environmental: Conservation isn't a priority for the three national governments. The protected area management bodies are weak in terms of conservation expertise and funding. Transboundary cooperation only functions informally. The most important conservation challenges are related to water quality and the trophic status of both lakes, and the eutrophication and other degradation processes which threaten the lakes ecosystem. In addition there unsustainable resource use occurs.

Socio-economic: High emigration rates and a consequent loss of social capital. The area is inhabited by an ethnically diverse mix of people with high unemployment rates, poor local economic conditions with difficulties in trading local products, and a lack of basic infrastructure. Civil society in the Prespa area is weak in Albania and FYR of Macedonia, though stronger in Greece. It is a rural area dominated by agriculture (with a monoculture on two sides of the basin) and some income from stockbreeding, fisheries, forestry and tourism.

Beneficiaries

The direct beneficiaries are the six protected area management bodies and the three NGOs of PrespaNet operating in the three different countries. The indirect beneficiaries are the people living in the Prespa region.

Building block 1

Partnership between MAVA Foundation and KfW

A strong partnership between MAVA Foundation and KfW (on behalf of the German government) enabled the creation of the Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT) in 2015. Both partners have invested considerable funds in the Prespa region in the past in different projects and to sustain their efforts in perpetuity they joined forces to mobilise enough money to give PONT a great start. The initial endowment and sinking fund investments of both MAVA Foundation and KfW (28.2 Million Euro in total) enable PONT to co-finance the work of the protected areas and NGOs until at least 2030.

Classifications

Category Alliance and partnership development **&** Sustainable financing

Scale of implementation Multi-national

Phase of solution Inception phase

MAVA and KfW in action in Galicica National Park © PONT

Enabling factors

Willingness by two strong donors for long-term financing of a biodiversity hotspot

Each donor has its geographical limitations but join forces to conserve the whole Prespa Ecoregion

Dependency on each other through co-financing. The initial funding by MAVA Foundation enabled KfW to lobby for funding by the German government

Creation of synergies by experiences in supporting NGOs and the government sector.

Support by other actors such as WWF Greece, Frankfurt Zoological Society, Caucasus Nature Fund, EuroNatur and CEPF

Lessons learned

Two strong donors invested in a specific geographical area, a biodiversity hotspot, in different projects. Both donors understood that to conserve this area it is important to secure long-term financing within and across state boundaries and for protected area management bodies as well as the civil society. It was understood that the financing gaps were mainly in the financing of running/operational costs. Both parties joined forces through the creation of a transboundary conservation trust fund to make this happen as they couldn't achieve the funding coverage of the whole ecoregion on their own. They did this with the help of strong partners with extensive knowledge in the Prespa area i.e. WWF Greece and the Frankfurt Zoological Society. WWF Greece conducted the feasibility study on behalf of MAVA Foundation and KfW with the help of funding by the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF). Caucasus Nature Fund and the Frankfurt Zoological Society gave important inputs as well.

PONT Supervisory Board visits Prespa National Park in Greece © PONT

Building block 2

PONT strategy promotes transboundary cooperation between government and non-government partners

At the initial start of PONT the five year strategy was elaborated by drawing on the experiences of the PrespaNet partners who have worked in the area for a long time. By working directly with the main NGOs and protected area management bodies the main conservation and capacity development objectives were determined. This resulted in a strategy focusing on the financing of the gaps and building of strong partnerships with stakeholders that have a mandate, vision and the expertise to achieve the conservation results in the Prespa area. The PONT strategy promotes transboundary cooperation between government and non-government partners based on previous experiences.

Classifications

Category

Alliance and partnership development
Collection of baseline and monitoring data and knowledge
Evaluation, effectiveness measures and learning

Scale of implementation Multi-national

Phase of solution Implementation

Cooperation between protected areas, NGOs and local people in Prespa National Park, Albania © PPNEA

Enabling factors

A comprehensive study gathering lessons learned of what was done in the last 25 years and where the remaining gaps are.

Making use of the NGO network PrespaNet to work on a transboundary level where no formal transboundary institutions are in place yet.

Available funding for both government and non-government partners

Lessons learned

Instead of re-inventing the wheel the previous experiences were gathered by PrespaNet partners who have been working in the geographical area for a long time. This was done under coordination of WWF Greece who knows the area very well and could verify the results. The recommendations for the conservation objectives were verified by the protected area bodies and this formed the basis for the conservation objectives for the PONT five year strategy. With the help of PONT expertise the objectives for organisational development and capacity development were identified and added. This resulted in a participatory developed strategy and conflict assessment study that was accepted by both government and non-government stakeholders within and across state borders. To focus financing on the identified gaps selection of grantees was made based on their mandate, vision, proven track record and expertise to work in the area. This enabled the rapid granting of first grants to NGOs and protected area management bodies and real implementation.

Opening of the MES office in Resen © PONT

Building block 3

Funding across the eco-region enabling ecosystem management of habitats and wildlife on a landscape level

The NGO Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP) received financing via the MAVA Foundation since 1991. On behalf of MAVA Foundation PONT took over this core funding for SPP from 2016 onwards. This ensured solid core funding for SPP. Due to this long term financing SPP managed to increase its funding by other donors with a declining contribution from MAVA/PONT from 80% to 64% while increasing their financing portfolio. The latter has enabled SPP to start working more on an integrated landscape approach providing a basic framework for balancing competing demands and integrating policies for multiple land uses within a given area. As an example PONT awarded a grant for transboundary large carnivore conservation activities, specifically the monitoring of brow bears across the region. Tracking the brown bear population will shed light on the population, movements and habitats of this amazing animal. The damage caused to livestock and the development of guidelines for preventive measures in the identified conflict hotspots is part of the grant. PONT also supports SPP and the other PrespaNet partners in establishing and running their local offices. Increased local presence is considered an important step in strengthening stakeholder involvement in the Prespa region.

Classifications

Category

Alliance and partnership development
Collection of baseline and monitoring data and knowledge
Communication, outreach and awareness building
Sustainable financing
Sustainable livelihoods

Scale of implementation Multi-national

Phase of solution Implementation

Active habitat management by local shepherd © PONT

Agios Achillios in Lesser Prespa © PONT

Enabling factors

A donor willing to pay for staff salaries and overheads

Long-term secure financing

Long-term organisational development and presence on a local level

Transboundary large carnivore project © PPNEA

Lessons learned

In 2018, PONT granted the Society for Protection of Prespa (SPP) in Greece, a five-year grant aimed at further strengthening its institutional capacities, in order to continue its successful involvement in implementing conservation actions and facilitating integrated landscape approaches in the region. This funding across the eco-region includes an emphasis on transboundary projects, applied research, and the monitoring and management of important habitat and species such as large carnivores.

The PONT grant provides core funding to support the SPP's main conservation work, and operational support for a dedicated team living and working in the Prespa region. A portion of the grant supports the involvement of local people in and beyond conservation actions, through the formation of a Local Action Group consisting of local authorities, farmers and cultural associations. This long-term stable core funding enabled SPP to raise sufficient co-financing from other donors (3 Foundations and LIFE funding) to increase its annual budget to realise its ambitions and goals.

Building block 4

Nature Trust Alliance: a partnership for shared services to save on administrative costs

PONT is part of an unique cooperation between three funds called the Nature Trust Alliance (NTA), to share operational services. NTA was established between the Caucasus Nature Fund (CNF) and PONT in June 2016. In March 2017, Blue Action Fund joined the working partnership. The mission of NTA is to "provide operational support to our partners to allow them to focus on their core missions in nature conservation". The NTA office is located in Frankfurt as all three partner funds of NTA are registered foundations in Germany. NTA enabled PONT to establish its Regional Programme Office in Tirana, Albania from which the grant programme is managed. Through this partnership for shared services, PONT is saving costs for administrative purposes (payments; accounting; reporting; audits; investment support; communication).

Classifications

Category

Alliance and partnership development
Evaluation, effectiveness measures and learning

Scale of implementation Multi-national

Phase of solution Implementation

Enabling factors

Strengthened negotiating position with external service providers (banks, auditors, etc.)

Economies of scale by pooling certain services

Efficiencies in developing and implementing new procedures, systems and legislation compliance (1 time developing/3 times used)

Shared Investment Committee and investment policies (for CNF and PONT)

Lessons learned

It is important to analyse, define and agree on potential shared services. If there are no expected economies of scale it is not advisable to make it a shared service as the level of complexity increases in a shared services set-up. Identical type of services fit better in a shared services concept. In the case of NTA this means that administrative and investment related services in Germany are shared services. As the grant programmes and the site-specific administrative services are different for the three funds these are not included under the shared services.

Expectations, procedures and a management / governance structure should be discussed and agreed from the start. Clear and easy communication and decision making tools should be established. Regular knowledge sharing enables continuous improvement through learning from each other. An existing shared service office can be very beneficial for new funds in their start-up phase enabling a quick start. However, the entry of new partner fund should be carefully considered and there should be enough common elements to be beneficial.

Nature Trust Alliance © NTA

How do the building blocks interact?

The transboundary conservation trust fund called Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT) was established under a partnership between the Swiss foundation MAVA and German development bank KfW. It has financially facilitated conservation NGOs and protected area (PA) management bodies in the Prespa region. Sustainable financing is focused on identified lessons learned and gaps in conservation management. PONT works in cooperation with leading local NGOs and stakeholders in the region. Through the long-term support and core financing of the ecoregion PA bodies and the PrespaNet NGO network, additional funding has been attracted for planned projects and activities. This has enabled daily operations and key programme activities to be sustained as well as allowing for important conservation-based projects. The pooling of administrative services between three funds, through the shared service office Nature Trust Alliance, has led to a cost reduction which allows for more money to be allocated to the PONT grant programme and conservation objectives.

PONT strategy development with PrespaNet partners © PONT

Impacts

Through a partnership between MAVA Foundation and KfW (on behalf of the German government), the Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT) has sustainable financing for the PrespaNet partners (the three representative country-based NGOs) and 5 of the 6 protected areas in the Prespa region till 2030.

The core financing provided by the transboundary conservation trust fund called PONT enables the PrespaNet partners to leverage additional funding for planned projects. The funding allows the PrespaNet partners to run local offices and to work on their programmes in close cooperation with the protected area management bodies over a long period of time. For example, the Greek NGO partner, the Society for the Protection of Prespa (SPP) managed to increase its annual budget from 1991 to 2018, while decreasing the MAVA/PONT contribution from 80% to 64%.

The joint strategy for the transboundary area is based on 25 years of support resulting in agreed priority conservation and capacity development objectives. The long-term support for SPP by MAVA Foundation (being continued through PONT) has resulted in an increase of the population of Dalmatian Pelicans (1991: <200 pairs; 2007: >1,100 pairs) and other important species (e.g. Glossy Ibis; 1991-2006: locally extinct; since 2017: 13 pairs). Local people as stakeholders have increasingly been included in activities.

Pelican on the Greek side of Prespa © PONT

Story

Andon Bodjazi, director of Galicica National Park © PONT

Andon Bodjazi, the Director of Galicica National Park, illustrates the importance of broad participation in protected area management planning. During the establishment of the management plan for Galicica National Park, a representative stakeholder council was established and consulted on the preparation of a management plan. All the villages located in and at the edge of Galicica National Park were involved in the zonation process and understood its contents. At a later stage the government of the FYR of Macedonia tried to alter the management plan of Galicica National Park to create a ski resort and access road. These developments threatened the World Heritage Status of the Lake Ohrid Region of which Galicica National Park is a part. The Galicica National Park authority by itself was not able to halt these plans, however together with the civil society and communities, they were stopped.

The previous management plan for Galiccia National Park was supported by KfW. Now the KfW helped to establish the Prespa Ohrid Nature Trust (PONT) and funding from PONT will be used to update the management plan for Galicica National Park and the implementation thereof.

This includes funding for the consultation with communities. This is the first thing Andon Bodjazi will set-up before starting the update of the management plan. Through the help of the local communities and local partnerships he feels much stronger to achieve his ambitions and goals. PONT helps him to work on these partnerships in the long-term.

Another ambition Andon Bodjazi has, is to slowly but surely make Galicica National Park independent from timber logging for the payment of staff salaries. As the government doesn't provide any funding for the management of Galicica National Park he is dependent on logging each year to pay the costs for the management. With the help of the long-term sustainable co-financing by PONT, for the running costs of implementing the management plan he will be able to reduce the logging volume. Gate entrance fees and tourism activities, together with the support by PONT, will in a couple of years hopefully be enough to manage the national park in partnership with the local community.

Resources

Documents

Conflict assessment in Wider Prespa Area | PDF 1,29 MB
Transboundary Prespa - Review of Conservation Efforts | PDF 1,86 MB
PONT brochure | PDF 1,56 MB
PONT focus and strategy | PDF 1,81 MB

Links

PONT website
SPP website
MES website
PPNEA website

Videos

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RfobeHkYB50

Prespa Lake, Albania © PONT