



Balkan Peace Park (BPP)

2000 - 2006

General Overview

Cross-border peace parks are natural areas along the borders of two or more countries, equally protected in symbiosis, where each of the parties benefits, without compromising interests or territorial integrity.

There are more than 600 peace parks in the world. In the Balkans, the idea to establish a peace park came as a need and reflection of socio-economic and political developments. At the end of the 20th century, development (especially during the second half of the 1990s) brought socio-economic and political instability in Albania; while interethnic tensions and the 1999 war in Kosova were associated with nature overexploitation and degradation along the bordering area between Kosova, Montenegro and Albania. Irrational and centralized development policies affected and left deep marks in the western Balkans. As a prevention of and a reaction to these negative developments, civic society, environmental associations in the region of western Kosova, south-eastern Montenegro and the north of Albania, as well as a number of peace activists from Colgate University in the USA and Bradford University in the UK—have been developing and promoting the establishment of the BPP. Thus, for more than half decade, these individuals and organizations have been advocating for the creation of a Balkan peace park to the local and international public.

The latest achievement toward the establishment of the BPP is the networking and empowerment of environmental NGOs in the three-border region, recognized as the “Balkan Peace Park Coalition” (BPP Coalition). The BPP Coalition was established as a result of the regional meeting held in Rugova, Kosova,—one of the areas to be included in the Peace Park—in August 2006, and was supported by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports (MCYS) of Kosova and Kosovo Open Society Foundation (KFOS). The Coalition is currently comprised of six NGOs from Kosova, Montenegro and Albania, and is characterized by transparency and openness to foster wide cooperation with all sectors of society in the cross-border zone. Thus, the BPP Coalition aims to transform this initiative into an inclusive social movement.

Since the year 2000, the associations in the cross-border area, in collaboration with the BPP Committee in the UK, have initiated and implemented a series of multiethnic regional and international activities, including three conferences, three cross-border treks, a number of individual, bilateral and multilateral meetings and workshops with the purpose of exploring the area’s benefits with respect to recreation, conservation and research. There have been a number of regional and international exchanges, including hosting groups of foreign students, who have visited the area or have interned with associations in the region to assist with BPP related activities. A number of presentations, press conferences, articles, studies and publications, film documentaries and exhibitions have been presented to the public in the Balkans, the USA, Canada, the UK and elsewhere.

Along these lines, the BPP Coalition has held meetings with individuals and organizations from various levels of the three countries, and subsequent support for the BPP has been gained. Support from each of the local authorities of Kosova, Montenegro and Albania has been shown, along with practical support from a number of sectors of the government of Kosovo, including MCYS, the Ministry of Environment and Spatial Planning, as well as a number of donors: KFOS, German Technical Cooperation (GTZ), etc. Such involvement reaches the highest level of interest and support, as there is significant institutional, as well as financial and technical support for the Balkan Peace Park movement.

The financial and technical support, interest and involvement of international organizations addressing environmental issues, culture, peace, cooperation and development aspects, such as REC, UNEP, OSCE, IUCN, GTZ, the American Embassy in Albania, etc. has also been growing.

The joint actions of the BPP Coalition on the ground and the Balkans Peace Park Project Committee in the UK have gained a number of achievements, in spite of the challenges, which they have faced. Together they are committed to continuing their activities until the cross-border Peace Park in the Balkans becomes established and is widely recognized.

To present their unique vision, the BPP Coalition, with presence of the BPPP UK Committee, organized the conference called: "Balkan Peace Park: Strategic Cooperation between Civic Society, Local Authorities and International Institutions." The aim of it was to raise awareness, document in depth the chronology of past and present, and articulate the vision for future developments which, as presented in this event, aim for an inclusive social movement leading to establishment of BPP. The conference goal was to attract the attention of local and central authorities in each of the three countries, and the community of donors and other actors interested in the Balkan Peace Park idea and development. The conference brought together some 80 participants from Balkans and abroad, composed of members of civic society and local authorities. At this conference Mayors of 6 cross-border municipalities, which the proposed BPP area is part of their territories (Peje and Decan in Kosovo, Rozaje and Plava in Montenegro, and Shkodra and Bajram Curri in Albania) jointly signed the "*LETTER of GOOD INTENT*" as the first act showing their gratitude, interest, recognition and good will to support and cooperation among each other and with all engaged parties in BPP movement, which is an open door for further development in the region, formalization of the process, and gaining support of central governments of Prishtina, Podgorica and Tirana and international relevant institutions. YET, both civic society through the Coalition and the six municipal authorities, as well as the BPPP committee and other partners have to maximize their efforts, expand the support base, and play their role in order to materialize the dream of BPP.

The Balkan Peace Park Coalition held its first Annual Meeting in November 2007 in Rugove, Kosova.

The Vision, Mission and Strategic Goals of the Balkan Peace Park

Vision

Cultivation and promotion of peace, harmony, mobility, cultural and natural diversity, local sustainable development and prosperity of communities inhabiting the border area between Kosova, Montenegro and Albania.

Mission

The Balkan Peace Park between Kosova, Montenegro and Albania offers the only chance to keep this Alpine zone in its most natural state with high biodiversity. The BPP region is considered the last untouched natural area in Europe, and is an important means to promoting and facilitating peace and free movement, ending cross-border and interethnic tensions, and creating a neutral zone without landmines and army installations. This is a precondition for peace, cooperation and sustainable development in this area of the Balkans.

Strategic Goals

- To protect the diversity of natural, cultural and spiritual heritage in the border region of Kosova, Montenegro and Albania;
- To promote peace and harmony among people and nature and to enable free movement beyond the natural and political boundaries of this region;
- To enable local sustainable development based on organized family-rural eco-tourism, organic/alternative local agriculture and farming, renewable energy, handcrafts, use of low technical equipment, rational use and good management of natural resources, cultural exchanges, and socioeconomic and political cooperation for security and prosperity in the mountains and valleys of the three country border zone