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Case Study 12: Governance of natural areas in the Alpine
Adriatic area: Trilateral Nature Park Goričko-Raab-Örség

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1. Introduction to the case

The trans-border characteristic of natural areas

The thematic focus of the case study is on the natural areas and their governance within the transnational framework of the Alpine Adriatic area. Natural areas form an intrinsic component of the respective territory, crossing all kinds of administrative borders, from the municipal through regional and national borders. As Price (1999) notes, this relates particularly to mountain regions and the fact that, while their highest ridges often form administrative boundaries between both nations and sub-national administrative entities, such boundaries divide ecosystems.

The case study investigates the evolution of the efforts for a coordinated protection and management of natural areas in the transnational context. It does so with the help of the analysis dealing with the Goričko-Raab-Örseg trilateral nature park, connecting natural areas in Slovenia, Hungary and Austria.

This trans-border characteristic of natural areas adds several layers of complexity to the task of their governance, including effective protection and management. First, legislative frameworks, which strongly influence governance of natural areas, change across national borders, in some cases also across regional borders. Second, competences of different administrative levels with regard to protection and management of natural areas change across national borders. And third, competences of different policy sectors are typically also different on different sides of national borders.

Governance of natural areas in the Alpine Adriatic area

The need for a coordinated approach to the protection and management of natural areas began to gain ground in the Alps most notably with the founding of the International Commission for the Protection of the Alpine Regions (CIPRA, since 1990, the International Commission for the Protection of the Alps; Price, 1999) in 1952, quite a few years before the global environmental movement took off during the 1960s and early 1970s. In its founding documents, CIPRA called for a convention to protect the Alpine environment and its natural resources. The process took a considerable length of time (CIPRA, 1992) and the convention was finally signed only in November 1991. The Alpine Convention is a framework convention in which the Alpine countries accept general principles and obligations, leaving their more detailed implementation to be defined in protocols which are to have greater policy content. Although doubts exist about its effectiveness, the convention has led to the recognition that many issues cannot be solved only through national legislation; coordinated regional approaches and initiatives are essential to solve common problems (Price, 1999).

Cooperation in the Alpine Adriatic area evolved more or less simultaneously with the cooperation leading to the Alpine Convention. Alpine-Adriatic has never been a very clearly defined concept. It refers to the area in the eastern part of the Alps, touching the Mediterranean in the south and the Pannonian plain in the east, in which the Germanic, Romanic, Slavic and Finno-Ugric language groups and cultures meet. Carinthia in Austria, Slovenia, initially a federal unit within Yugoslavia, and Friuli-Venezia Giulia in Italy started to cooperate under the term "Alps-Adriatic" in the 1960s. In mid 1960s intense diplomatic contacts between heads of regional governments have started to develop

(Valentin, 2006). In 1965 this resulted in the setting up of Working Groups for culture, science, transport, tourism, water management as well as spatial planning and landscape protection. In 1969, when Croatia was also included in the cooperation, the initiative became known as the “Quadrignon”. After the Austrian region of Styria and the Italian region of Veneto also joined the cooperation during the mid 1970s, the Working Community of the Eastern Alpine Regions, which soon became known as the Alps-Adriatic Working Community (AAWC), was formally founded at the meeting in Venice in November of 1978. Its membership changed quite often, but most of the time it included also other regions in the north of Italy, in eastern Austria as well as regions in the south-western part of Hungary. Although protection and management of the natural areas have not been at the core of cooperation, it has nevertheless formed an important part of cooperation all along (Price, 1999).

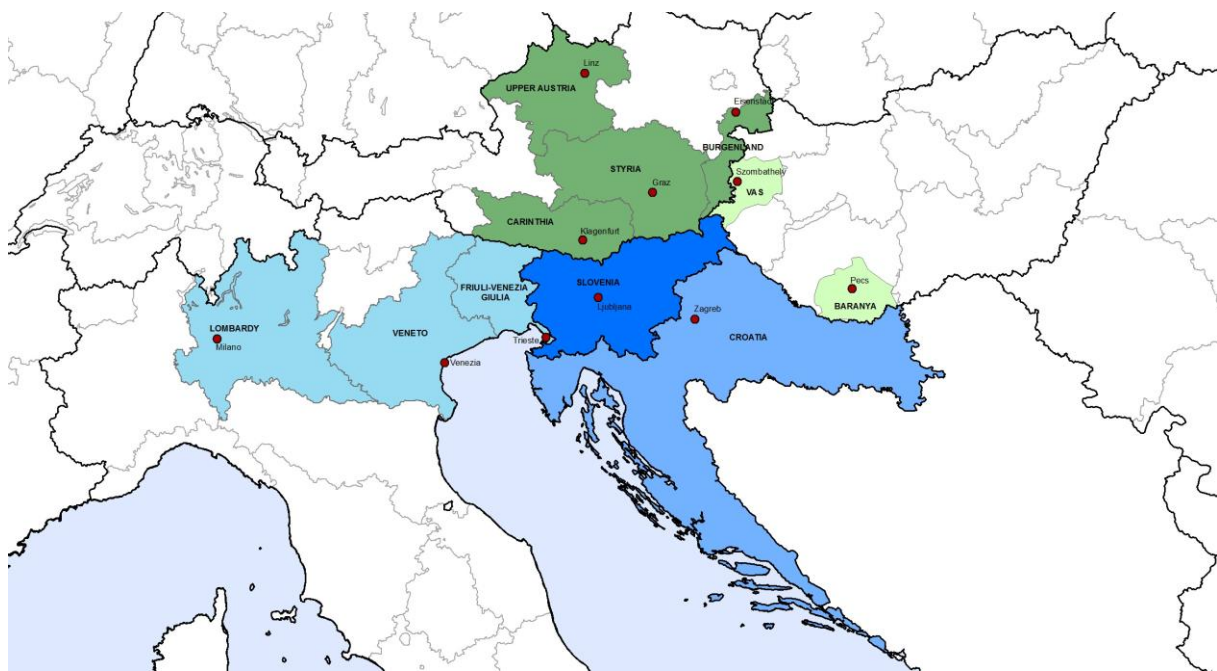


Figure 1: Alps-Adriatic Working Community in 2010.

During the early 1990s the circumstances for cooperation have changed substantially. The fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989 and major political, social and economic changes in Central and Eastern Europe, the emergence of new independent states and the war in Yugoslavia have thoroughly transformed the context for cooperation in the area. During that period the role of the EU for cooperation also began to grow, in particular after 1995, when Austria became an EU member state, and Slovenia and Hungary started the accession process.

Through the Interreg initiative and pre-accession programmes external funding for cooperation was also available for the first time, which gave a boost to cooperation initiatives. Price (1999) thus notes that a number of what he calls Interreg regions have been designated along the boundaries between EU member states and the non-member states, which would require a more thorough study of the objectives and activities of all of these overlapping regions with regard to nature protection. More than a decade later Price et al. (2011) observe that in the last two decades the number of Euroregions (or Euregios) and similar cross-border cooperation structures has multiplied.

Trilateral Nature Park Goričko-Raab-Órség

Trilateral Nature Park Goričko-Raab-Órség is one of these cooperation structures that emerged in the last two decades with the aim to coordinate protection and management of natural areas across borders. As Dešnik and Domanjko (2011) explain, the idea of establishing the park emerged in the early 1990s at one of the workshops aimed at developing a vision for the area after the fall of the Iron Curtain. An interviewee (Interview J 2013) recalls that the workshop, which was organized in Austria, built also on informal personal contacts, established through decades of cooperation within the Alpine Adriatic area, like many other projects funded by Interreg and cross-border cooperation (CBC) programmes¹. But in contrast to the cooperation within the AAWC, which was limited to the officials, mandated from the administrations of member regions (Price, 1999), initiatives funded by Interreg and CBC programmes involved also private and independent non-governmental actors.

Goričko Nature Park in Slovenia is protected under the Slovenian Act on Nature Protection, and has been assigned the IUCN protected area management category V. Órség National Park in Hungary, assigned IUCN category II, is protected under Hungarian law, while Raab Nature Park in Austria is protected under Burgenland law and has no assigned IUCN category. The entire trilateral nature park covers an area of 105,200 hectares (Dešnik and Domanjko, 2011).

	Goričko Nature Park	Raab Nature Park	Órség National Park	Total
State	Slovenia	Austria	Hungary	
Established	2003	1998	2002	
Place of Authority	Grad	Jennersdorf	Őriszentpéter	
Employees (2010)	11 regular + 2 project + 1 EU social fund + 7 public service	1.5 regular + 1 project	35 regular + 3 project + 5 short-term	
Area (ha)	46,200	15,000	44,000	105,200
IUCN category	V	none	II	
Natura 2000	96%	none	100%	
Inhabitants	25,000	10,000	16,000	51,000

Table 1: Comparison of facts between the three parks (Source: Dešnik and Domanjko, 2011).

Since the last of the three parks was formally established in 2003, the main challenge became management of the trilateral park in a coordinated way, as there are different protection regimes in all three sites (Dešnik and Domanjko, 2011). In a formal manner, this challenge was first addressed with the elaboration of the Memorandum of Understanding, describing the tasks of all three parts. The first version of the document was publicly signed on 21 May 2006, the second version on 24 May 2009. A number of common objectives as well as specific activities were agreed in the Memorandum,

¹ Interreg here refers mainly to the INTERREG IIA (1994-1999) programmes Austria-Slovenia and Austria-Hungary, as well as INTERREG IIIA (2000-2006) programmes Slovenia-Austria, Slovenia-Hungary and Austria-Hungary. CBC here refers to Phare CBC programme, which was launched in 1994 and was in 2007 replaced by the Instrument for Pre-Accession Assistance (IPA). Phare was one of the main pre-accession assistance instruments for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

including joint fund-raising for the implementation of common goals, developing a joint management plan and establishing a joint trilateral park authority.

Relation to Europe 2020

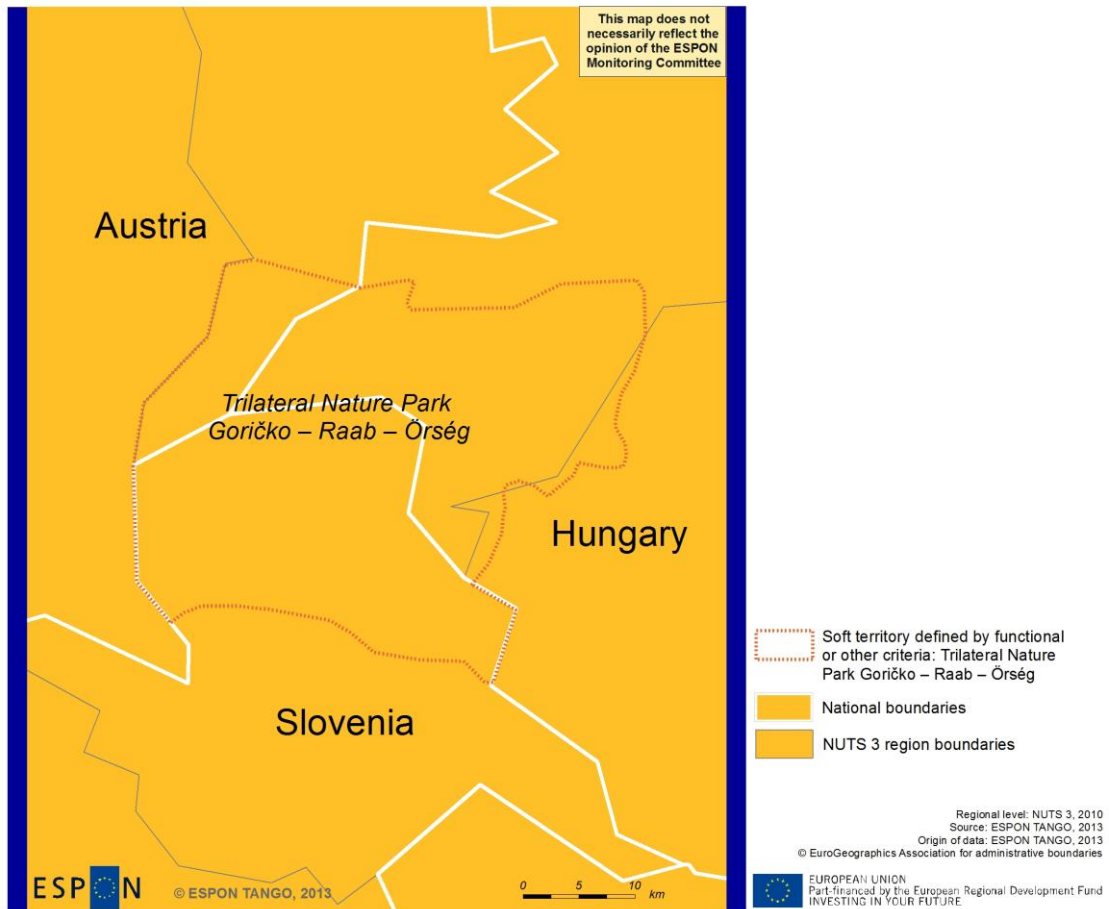
Since Slovenia and Hungary joined the European Union in 2004, more than 96% of Goričko Nature Park and the whole of Órség National Park became part of Natura 2000, while Raab Nature Park is not designated as a Natura 2000 site. However, the Natura 2000 site in Goričko extends over the border into Austria and is connected to the South Styria Natura 2000 site (Dešnik and Domanjko, 2011). Natura 2000, an EU-wide network of nature protection areas established under the 1992 Habitats Directive, is the centerpiece of EU nature & biodiversity policy. It is comprised of Special Areas of Conservation (SAC) designated by Member States under the Habitats Directive, and also incorporates Special Protection Areas (SPAs) which they designate under the 1979 Birds Directive (EC, 2012a). Recently, the update of EU biodiversity policy was formulated in the document “Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020” (EC, 2011).

EU thus became very important for coordinated management of the trilateral park, going beyond Interreg and cross-border cooperation programmes, and involving in particular EU nature & biodiversity policy. This links the efforts for coordinated management of the trilateral park directly to the Europe 2020 Strategy, as biodiversity policy is one of several policy areas supported by the “Resource Efficient Europe” flagship initiative, together with climate change, energy, transport, industry, raw materials, agriculture, fisheries and regional development. The reasoning behind this flagship initiative is focused on efficiency, as increasing resource efficiency is seen as a key to securing growth and jobs for Europe, bringing major economic opportunities, improving productivity, driving down costs and boosting competitiveness (EC, 2012b). The economic reasoning behind biodiversity policy is further stressed also in the resolution on the new biodiversity strategy by the European Parliament (EC, 2012c), stating that each year we lose 3% of GDP due to the loss of biodiversity.

From the point of view of territorial governance another passage in this EP resolution is of particular interest, stating that “the real key ... is not this new strategy, but, rather, the forthcoming reforms of the common agricultural and fisheries policies and the multiannual financial framework”. It thus clearly addresses the need for integrating different policy sectors, which is a key dimension of territorial governance, for efficient biodiversity policy at the EU level. Relevant policy sectors in the case of trilateral park include also agriculture, tourism, forestry as well as rural development.

In further chapters we will explore how different dimensions of territorial governance are addressed in the case of Goričko-Raab-Órség trilateral nature park.

CASE STUDY AREA 12: TRILATERAL NATURE PARK GORIČKO – RAAB – ÖRSÉG



2. Integrating policy sectors

Three separate parks

Despite the ambition, set in a Memorandum (2006), for a joint trilateral park authority the Trilateral Nature Park Goričko - Raab - Örség for now doesn't operate like one park entity but rather like three separate ones, each following its own national policy system and governance culture.

Goričko Nature Park in Slovenia is protected under the Slovenian Act on Nature Protection (RS, 1999) as a landscape park. This category of protection is the lowest in line of three level hierarchy of protected areas, starting with the national park at the top and followed by the regional park. The landscape park's main concern and focus of work is nature conservation. It is established by the national government after gaining support of local authorities, the municipalities. The park authority is established by the national government and in practice subordinated to the ministry, responsible for nature protection. It is supposed to prepare a ten years management plan which is accepted by the government on a national level.

The nature park in Austria works as a form of landscape protection area that is designated and established by regional administration (Landesregierung) and is aimed to fulfil four functions: nature protection, tourism, education and regional development (Interview G, 2013). Park Raab was established in 1998 and works on a territory of seven municipalities. Raab Park works on a basis of a yearly plan, prepared by the park staff and accepted by the board of mayors, who are supervising the work of the park authority through monthly meetings. The head of the park authority explains that the park's main role is in tourism rather than nature protection (Interview G, 2013).

Örseg National Park (Örsegi Némzeti Park in Hungarian) in Hungary officially works as managing authority on a park territory. Until 2006 the park used to be also a nature protection authority on a county level and was overseeing an area substantially larger than park itself. Nevertheless, the Örseg park still proceeds with the work of legal authority because the new official authority has no professional expertise to take over its work (Interview F, 2013). This means that the park works also as a representative of the public interest for nature protection and participates in the system of spatial planning and development on a county level.

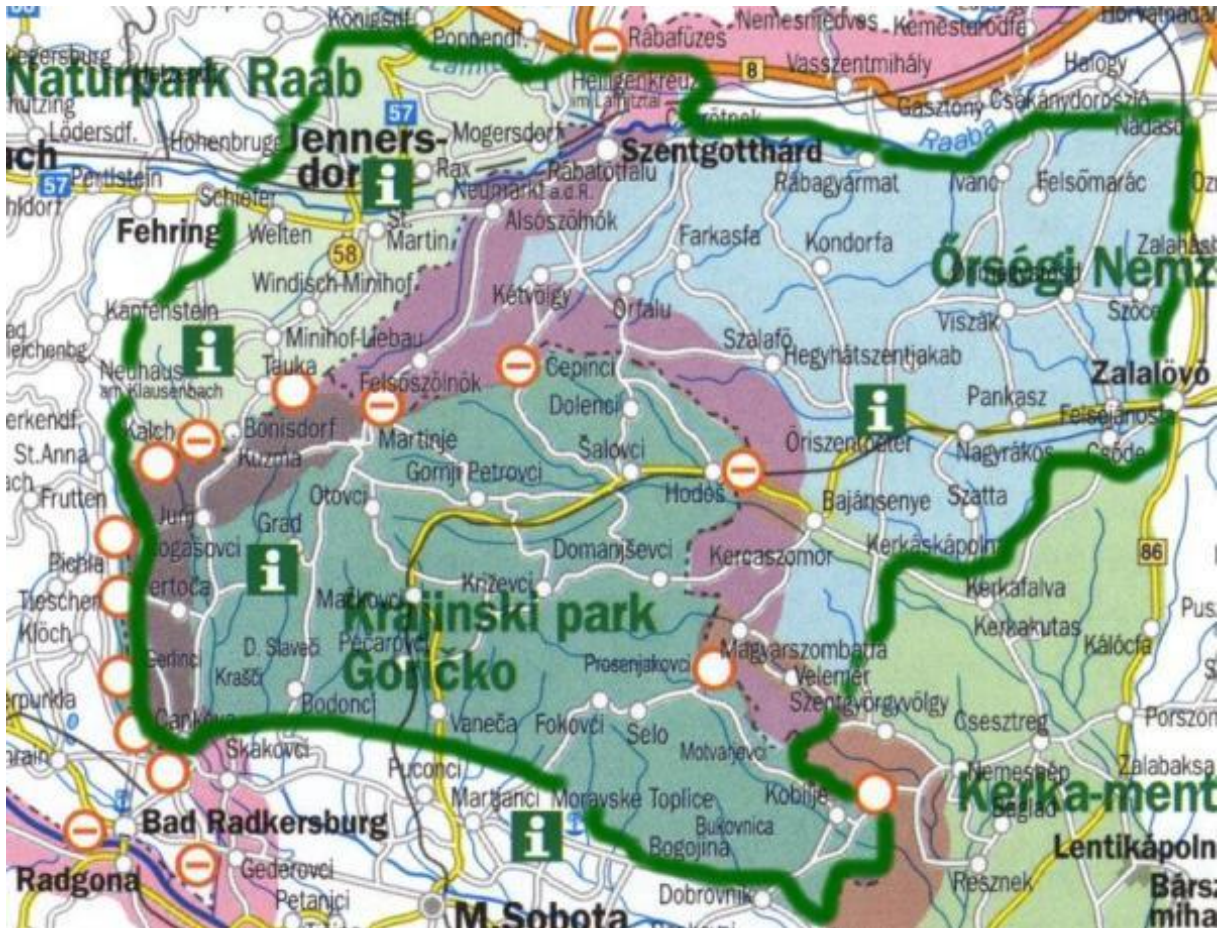


Figure 2: The Trilateral Nature Park Goričko - Raab – Örség.

Public Policy Packaging

As mentioned above, relevant policy sectors in the case of trilateral park include nature conservation and biodiversity, agriculture, tourism, forestry as well as rural development. The main actors in relation to cross-sectoral integration are first of all the managing authorities of all three parks, which have a key role in relation to the mentioned policies in the trilateral park. As they operate in the framework of national policies, other key actors are national administrations, mostly the ministries responsible for the above mentioned policy sectors in the three countries involved, in Austria and Hungary also regional administrations. Other actors include municipalities, non-governmental organizations, farmers and agricultural industry as well as tourism organizations, for instance.

Cross-sectoral integration in the case of trilateral park happens within administrations, such as national administration, as well as between administrations on different sides of administrative borders. It is taking place through formal and informal processes, further investigated below.

There are considerable differences in the ways cross-sectoral coordination works across the three countries. In Slovenia, some formal procedures exist both for coordination between policy sectors as well as for coordination across governance levels. So, for instance, when some legislation is being prepared at one ministry, other ministries should agree with the new legislation and negotiations take place in case of disagreement until a satisfactory solution is found. Nevertheless, all interviewees in Slovenia noted that this does not always work perfectly for various reasons. The

director of the park authority noted that from their point of view informal ties between responsible officials are more important for effective coordination, and trust between them is crucial (Interview B, 2013). This was confirmed also by the director of the regional development agency (Interview A, 2013) as well as by the official from the Ministry of the Agriculture and Environment, who noted that formal and informal procedures overlap and complement each other (Interview H, 2013). He also noted that cross-sectoral integration is effective, when interests of specific policy sectors match.

On the other hand policy packaging across governance levels works mostly through conformance to higher levels. Policies of the park must conform to the national regulations with regard to e.g. Natura 2000, which again conform to EU Habitat and Birds directives. The same goes for municipalities, which have to conform to national regulations when they are preparing their spatial plans. Both representatives of municipalities, a mayor and an official, noted that a lot of negotiations are needed during this processes (Interview I, 2013) and that often conflicts between different sectors at national level are revealed through this process (Interview C, 2013), such as conflicts between nature protection and agriculture. Both also noted that informal channels are crucial and much more efficient than formal channels for effective coordination. Informal channels work through personal contacts between officials at local and national level, sometimes also through political level.

In Austria an important actor in matters of biodiversity and nature conservation is also a non-governmental organisation Nature and Biodiversity Conservation Union (Naturschutzbund). It is carrying out specific tasks for the regional and national governance level, cooperating also with the park authority in specific projects. The park authority is in continuous formal and informal contacts with municipalities, forming the park. Continuous but less intense contacts exist also with the regional level, especially in relation to tourism, while there are almost no contacts with the national level. As a general rule, the manager of the park authority noted that informal contacts work better when dealing with issues in general, but formal procedures are necessary for precise agreements (Interview G, 2013).

In Hungary the park authority has a strong role in formal procedures and decision-making, serving also as a responsible national institution for nature protection at the county level. It is thus involved in formal policy-making at the national level through procedures, in which the county level is involved, in fields of nature protection, forestry, agriculture and water management. Some informal contacts with officials at the national level are nevertheless helpful (Interview E, 2013). Formal procedures are also more important at the county level, where the park authority is preparing mandatory guidelines for the 10-year plans in fields of forestry, agriculture and water management. Less formal contacts are at work in relation to tourism, where the park authority has no formal role and cooperation is mostly project-based.

Despite the differences, similarities also exist in terms of mechanisms for coordination of public policies in all three countries. In Slovenia and Hungary, and to some extent also in Austria, participation of actors in the formulation of some sort of plans was considered beneficial for coordination between public policy sectors. The director of the Mura regional development agency saw the planning process through which the National Spatial Plans for infrastructures of national importance are formulated as a tool to communicate the plans with the sub-regional level partnerships and municipalities (Interview A, 2013) and align the plans with the regional development point of view. On the other hand lack of participation in the planning process is causing

lack of coordination between levels. The park authority, which is not formally involved in such processes, can neither play a mediating role between the national and local level nor include its own point of view in the plans, which was seen as a problem from both the park authority (Interview B, 2013) and one of the municipalities (Interview I, 2013).

Other kinds of planning processes were also mentioned as useful tools in this respect. The official from the Ministry of the Agriculture and Environment saw an opportunity for aligning agriculture and biodiversity policies in the Natura 2000 management plans (Interview H, 2013), and this was reiterated also by the official of the Órseg National Park (Interview F, 2013). Both also noted that funding could help in this respect. In Hungary the park authority (in the role of county administration) is involved in the process of preparation of 10-year plans in the field of forestry, which is seen as beneficial for coordination between nature protection and forestry policies (Interview F, 2013).

In Austria the act, establishing the park, served a similar role. A lot of negotiations with different sectors, mostly at the level of the region (Land), have taken place at the time when the act was being prepared. Much of the informal communication with various actors, such as agriculture chambers, farmers and the general public was carried out personally by the mayor of Mogersdorf at that time (Interview G, 2013).

Cross-Sector Synergy

As one would expect, the nature protection and biodiversity policy sector is the dominant one in the trilateral nature park. Nevertheless, the situation differs a lot in the three countries. In Hungary, the focus of the park is very clearly on nature protection, which is emphasized by the role of the park authority as county administration in this field, and the fact that the whole of the park is also Natura 2000 area.

Quite to the contrary, in Austria, the focus of the park is tourism, coupled with agriculture and rural development (Interview G, 2013). This is primarily due to the fact that the park authority has been formally founded by the municipalities, which need a direct value of the park. Nature protection is an important issue in the Raab Nature Park, of course, but it is not the responsibility of the park authority.

In Goričko Nature Park in Slovenia, the rationale behind establishing the park is nature protection, like in Órseg National Park, but the park itself has fewer formal competences with regard to this and the sector is not as dominant as in Hungary. Apart from nature protection agriculture policy sector seems to be also equally important in the park (Interview I, 2013) and quite often in conflict with it (Interview B, 2013).

The conflicts among sectors at the national level are often felt most on the local level, which was emphasized by both representatives of municipalities in Goričko Nature Park (Interview I, 2013; Interview C, 2013). Both named the conflicts between nature protection and agriculture sectors as most pressing, as already mentioned. Interestingly, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the municipal spatial plan was mentioned as a means to deal with the conflicts, and the external expert, preparing its main part – the environmental report – was identified as an efficient mediator between both policy sectors (Interview I, 2013).

Despite the mentioned conflicts, the official from the Slovenian Ministry of the Agriculture and Environment didn't consider Natura 2000 as a source of conflict from the agriculture point of view, and saw management plans for Natura 2000 areas as a very promising tool for exploiting synergies between policy sectors (Interview H, 2013). The representative of one municipality stressed that a lot of meetings and negotiations with sectors are needed to find satisfactory solutions for the local people (Interview I, 2013).

In Austria, synergies between tourism, agriculture and nature protection are sought by the park authority through developing regional products, such as local food products or tourist destinations based on nature protection (Interview G, 2013).

Most evident barriers for cross-sectoral integration were identified between policy sectors at the national level. In Hungary, very few management plans for Natura 2000 areas are actually implemented, because they cannot pass the inter-sectoral negotiations at the national level (Interview F, 2013). In Slovenia, several interviewees stressed that there is no systematic cross-sectoral coordination (Interviews A and B, 2013) and that coordination at the regional and local level is sought for each project separately (Interview A, 2013). It was emphasized that barriers to cross-sectoral integration typically don't appear at the level of the officials, but at the level of politicians (Interview B, 2013).

Sometimes barriers can be overcome through some intermediary, such as regional development agency, which doesn't have own competences in the policy fields in question (Interview A, 2013), or external experts, preparing spatial plans or environmental reports for SEA, as already mentioned.

Features of (good/bad) territorial governance

- Promoters: Conforming with higher levels concerning nature protection, agriculture, cohesion policies

Policies of the park must conform to the national regulations with regard to e.g. biodiversity, which conform to EU Habitat and Birds directives; this is a success factor for common governance, as EU directives are considered to be transferable across EU

- Promoters: Cross-fertilisation between policy sectors through informal contacts

Positive influences exist in particular between nature protection, agriculture and tourism; they build mostly on good and bad experience and know how; much cross-fertilization happens informally, through joint projects and people involved;

- Inhibitors: Conflicts and competition between sectors

Conflicts between nature protection and agriculture exist as well, but trends are positive; differing across the three countries

3. Coordinating actions of actors and institutions

Governing capacity

In relation to governance of natural areas in the case study area, park authorities are key institutions used to coordinate between actors and institutions in all three countries. But their roles, their competences in relation to the different governance levels, as well as their organization and capacity differ considerably between the countries. While in Austria it is primarily a platform for coordination between local actors and institutions, in Hungary it serves primarily as an authority at the county level, and in Slovenia it is a mixture of both roles.

The park authority of Naturpark Raab in Austria is established as an association by the participating municipalities, with the intention to manage the protected area in a way that would give added value to the local community (Interview G, 2013). As an association the park authority is managed directly by the municipalities through monthly meetings of its board, consisting of mayors of all municipalities. The board defines the work plan and takes care of its implementation. Also, the park authority is funded mostly by the participating municipalities. Its staff is small, including 3 part-time employees, less than 2 full-time employees in total. The park authority is thus a firmly local institution, having regular contacts with regional level in the field of tourism and less with nature protection, and practically no connection to national level (Interview G, 2013). Although limited in resources, it seems to function very effectively as a platform for coordinating local actors, contributing to protection of natural areas through the focus on sustainable agriculture and specific projects.

In Hungary, as already mentioned, the park authority of the Órseg National park effectively has the role of the county authority in relation to nature protection. It is legally responsible for nature protection and management of the park area, for overseeing the protected area in a wider region and for issuing of permissions for all interventions and land use changes in protected areas of the county. It has a staff of 32 permanent employees, around 50 project-based staff and 50 to 60 more people working within the system of public works (Interviews F and E, 2013). It is primarily a county (sub-regional) level institution, but includes municipalities as partners in many projects. The cooperation is generally satisfactory and the municipalities have an incentive to cooperate with the park authority in particular when EU funds are available. The cooperation with national level, on the other hand, is mostly limited to the formal procedures described above.

In Slovenia, the park authority can be seen also as a platform connecting national with the local level. Formally, the park has been established by the government decree on the basis of the national law, giving it competences mostly in relation to nature protection, with some task related also to tourism as well as local and regional planning (Goričko Nature Park, 2005). The board of the park consists of 5 representatives of national level, 5 representatives of municipalities and 1 representative of the general public (Interview B, 2013). But there are also inconsistencies with regard to this mediating role. The park authority is, for instance, not recognized as a stakeholder in the planning processes for infrastructures of national importance (Interview B, 2013). This is seen as a problem also from the point of view of the municipality, which would prefer a stronger role of the park authority in the national programming and planning processes, and to be the voice of the people living there at the national level (Interview I, 2013).

Another important platform for cooperation between actors and institutions in the Pomurje region (NUTS3 level), in which the Goričko Nature Park is situated, is Mura Regional Development Agency (Mura RDA). It has been one of the initiators of the park in the mid-1990s, seeing it as an opportunity to capitalize on the well preserved natural environment in Goričko (Interview A, 2013). The coordination with the 27 municipalities in the region is carried out through 5 sub-regional partnerships on the one hand and on the other hand directly through yearly meetings of the regional board, composed of mayors of all municipalities. Specific plans and projects are debated also at the municipal board meetings (Interview A, 2013). Coordination with the national level is carried out primarily through the ministry, responsible for regional development, but also through direct informal contacts with the politicians from the region (Interview A, 2013). Mura RDA often serves also as a lead institution in various EU projects in relation to Goričko Nature Park, having institutional capacity to carry out complex administrative tasks with this regard. One of such on-going projects is the “Upkač” project, aiming at preserving the biodiversity of orchards in Goričko Nature Park and Örség National Park. The park authorities are partners in the project, which is led by the Mura RDA.

Territorial cooperation

The main challenge of the trilateral park remains its coordinated management as, formally speaking, the trilateral park currently does not exist as an entity, as already mentioned. It is a cooperation structure composed of three parks with different protection regimes in all three countries. The capacity to carry out coordination across borders is thus of crucial importance for the effective governance of natural areas in the Trilateral Nature Park Goričko-Raab-Örség.

As Dešnik and Domanjko (2011) explain, cross-border cooperation, in the beginning encompassing all three countries, and the possibility to apply for EU funds were crucial from the very beginning. Cross-border cooperation facilitates the exchange of experiences and ideas between actors across borders, both at formal and informal levels, building trust among these actors. The main partners involved in cross-border cooperation are the managing authorities of all three parks and the municipalities within the three parks. During the implementation of cross-border projects, additional partnerships were built at the local, national and transnational levels, involving partners from all relevant sectors: municipalities, ministries, research institutions, foundations, schools, universities and NGOs (Dešnik and Domanjko, 2011).

All interviewees also stressed the importance of territorial cooperation. The representative of the Örség National Park (Interview F, 2013) emphasized the importance of informal cooperation, enabled through joint projects, building trust among actors, enabling common understanding of challenges as well as development of common products. The issue of trust was stressed also by the director of the Goričko Nature Park (Interview B, 2013), who mentioned also the importance of personal meetings between key actors in an informal setting.

Dešnik and Domanjko (2011) also point to the importance of territorial cooperation projects for overcoming language and cultural barriers, which were a problem in the beginning. Communication barriers have been overcome by training, especially in English, on the one hand, as well as regular visits, workshops and assistance received from experts from other countries on the other hand.

A few problems were mentioned in relation to territorial cooperation as well. One representative of the Örség National Park (Interview E, 2013) mentioned that the big differences in the human

resources of the park authorities make cooperation with the Raab Nature Park difficult. Another Örség National Park representative (Interview F, 2013) pointed out that cooperation of all three parks was much easier before 2007, when all three parks were part of one cross-border programme. This has changed later, when separate cross-border cooperation programmes were formed for bilateral cooperation across borders.

In relation to this the representative of the Raab Nature Park (Interview G, 2013) emphasized that cross-border cooperation does not need to be funded by the European Union. Cooperation between Raab and Goričko Nature Parks is thus mostly based on informal coordination of own projects, funded by various other sources, such as national, municipal or private. The resources needed for coordination are thus either included in own projects or funded indirectly by other projects.

Summing up on the issue of territorial cooperation, Dešnik and Domanjko (2011) stress that future cooperation, based on past experiences in a widely branched partnership network is the best assurance for stable, sustainable, socially and economically fair governance of the natural areas across borders.

Leadership

The leadership in the Trilateral Nature Park is not very evident. Due to big differences in the institutional and cultural context of the three countries as well as very different organizational contexts of the three parks formal and centralized types of leadership, with a single person or institution taking a lead role, would not be easy to implement. Only very recently, in November 2012, a more intense cooperation of the heads of the park authorities began, based on the Memorandum of Understanding, signed in 2006 and again in 2009, which is described in detail below.

Nevertheless, the trilateral park has slowly taken shape starting from scratch during the last two decades with slow but decisive steps all in the same direction in all three countries. This is a clear sign of a shared vision and the ability to secure its implementation. There is no clear evidence though that this shared vision and the steps towards its implementation were formulated from the beginning. It is more likely that they emerged as a result of a continuous cooperation between actors in the area, through a decentralized process, in which there is no central source of complete information and knowledge. Dešnik and Domanjko (2011) stress that territorial cooperation facilitates the emergence of a common vision for the area, addressing nature and landscape protection in the three countries. If this decentralised visioning process can be considered in terms of leadership, we might only talk about a 'soft' and decentralized leadership model.

Despite the widely perceived importance of informal cooperation across borders, the need for a more formalized cooperation platform has also been clearly expressed. Dešnik and Domanjko (2011) explain that a common cross-border management plan of the trilateral park, which could integrate nature and landscape protection goals with sustainable development of the region and the wellbeing of local communities, would be important due to the varying status and capacities of the protected areas, and the need to comply with the requirements of Natura 2000 network and other EU policies. The director of the regional development agency (Interviewee A Interview A, 2013) stresses that informal cooperation is crucial for the formulation of common goals, but formal frameworks are needed for keeping the commitment to these goals.

Based on this a Memorandum of Understanding was developed as a first step towards a more formalized cooperation within the trilateral park. The document was written in all three languages and the first version was publicly signed on 21 May 2006 in Windisch-Minihof (Austria) at the celebration of European Parks Day. On 24 May 2009, the renewed Partnership Agreement was signed in Öriszentpéter (Hungary). It states the following objectives, which were agreed between the three parks:

- working together on the protection and preservation of natural and cultural values;
- planning and organising common events and tourism activities;
- common design of printed materials, web pages, and joint promotion of the park;
- education in nature and environmental protection, environmental and forests schools;
- maintenance of habitat restoration;
- cooperation with the European Green Belt initiative.

The Memorandum of Understanding also identified specific activities:

- representing the park region with common goals at the local, regional and EU level;
- involving the local population and NGOs in active nature protection;
- involving people in tourism development and raising public awareness about regional values;
- preserving and transmitting social and ethnic traditions, exchanging experiences of traditional forms of agriculture, economy and the traditional handicrafts, in collaboration with the local population;
- preserving common landscape values with typical folk architecture and collect documentary material;
- introducing the maintenance of landscape protection in development programmes;
- providing mutual support in the preparation of projects and submission of project applications to calls for governments and the EU;
- joining the studies of fish populations in cross border rivers;
- joining research and surveying of population of River otter (*Lutra lutra*);
- conducting joint monitoring of potential impacts of the waste incinerator near Monošter/St. Gothard (HUAT border) if the Austrian government decides on its construction.

Additionally, joint fund raising is envisaged for the implementation of the partnership's goals, in addition to developing a joint management plan and establishing a joint trilateral park authority. Due to the presence of a well preserved cultural landscape and cultural heritage, plans are in place to nominate the site for UNESCO World Heritage status.

Based on the Memorandum, the intense formal cooperation between the park authorities only began in November 2012 (Interviews B and G, 2013). Since then, the heads of the park authorities have met each month.

Subsidiarity

Relevant actors in relation to trilateral nature park are distributed across national, regional and local level in the three countries, in particular administrations on all levels. However, the competences and responsibilities of administrative levels are considerably different in the three countries.

The municipalities are in charge of spatial planning in all three countries (Fabbro & Haselsberger, 2009; Kiss & Szoboszlai, 2005), and the local level can also include protected areas in the local plan. The sub-regional level, often coinciding with NUTS3 units, appears relatively under-developed in Austria and Slovenia, without competences in nature protection. In Hungary, on the other hand, the sub-regional level is the traditional type of local authority, and the county local government is the middle-level local government, established through direct election (AER, 2012). Although the new Law on Local Self-Governments, adopted in 2011, fundamentally changed the roles of counties, coordination of duties in connection to the protection of natural environment is still one of the obligatory competences of counties (AER, 2012).

This formal distribution of powers has not been questioned much in the interviews. Perhaps most doubts remain about the role of the sub-regional level in Slovenia. The view that this level should have more competences in relation to spatial planning was reiterated more than once (Interviews A and B, 2013). Both municipalities also stressed that there is a problem of bad coordination between different sectors at the national level (Interviews I and C, 2013), and that neither Mura RDA nor Goričko Nature Park can play a role of the intermediary effectively under current circumstances. The potential of common municipal administrations, that serve several municipalities in specific fields was also stressed in this respect (Interview C, 2013).

Features of (good/bad) territorial governance

- Promoters: Previous collaborative experiences
- Inhibitors: Big differences between parks in three countries

Informal contacts and decades of experience of actors involved with cross-border cooperation are crucial for governing capacity. Connections and trust, needed for cooperation, are a legacy of previous collaboration, mostly through joint projects, either trilateral or bilateral, and the people involved.

- Promoters: Pragmatic decentralized leadership model

Park works under "soft" pragmatic leadership model, which takes into account big differences in governance cultures between countries and balance between the three parks. Cooperation works without evident leadership, taking into account different modes of organization, methods, and cultures of the three countries.

4. Mobilising Stakeholder participation

Stakeholder participation is a key component in relation to nature protection. Although the policies, aimed at protecting natural environment, have typically gained strength in European and national policy-making through popular support, and well-preserved natural areas are highly regarded by the general public, concrete nature protection measures are often perceived as imposed from above and disturbing to the local population and economy. Involving key stakeholders early in the process of designation and management of protected areas is thus crucial for securing wide ownership of protection measures.

As participatory practices depend on different democratic cultures, ideas, principles as well as obligations and rules across the three countries, stakeholder participation takes place in very different contexts in the three parks. We can trace these differences back to the beginnings of each park. While the Órseg National park in Hungary and Goričko Nature Park in Slovenia have been formally established by national governments, Raab Nature Park in Austria has been established by the regional administration. As mentioned in the previous chapter, this difference is even more emphasized with regard to park authorities. While in Hungary and Slovenia park authorities base their legitimacy in national laws, in Austria the park authority is firmly tied to the municipalities that have established it.

Democratic Legitimacy

Key stakeholders in all three parks are the park authorities, as they are coordinating management of natural areas in the trilateral park. Other stakeholders can be considered in relation to them. In Hungary the park authority has a very strong formal role in the national policies, as already mentioned, giving it also a strong position in relation to other stakeholders. This involves on the one hand other stakeholders at the national and the county level in relation to cross-sectoral coordination, and on the other hand stakeholders at the local level. These include first of all municipalities, but also tourist and agriculture organisations, farmers and other residents of the park. As the park authority has a strong legal basis the need to secure democratic legitimacy among these stakeholders was not so evident in the beginning. This resulted in conflicts with residents after the park has been established with its current protection status in 2002, despite the fact that the local residents were previously in favour of establishing the park (Interview F, 2013). This is now slowly changing, as the park is offering more and more services for farmers and local residents.

In Austria the starting position was a radically different one. Although the park is declared by the regional government, in relation to the national law, the initiative for the establishment of the park came from the local level (Interview G, 2013). In the preparatory phase the agreement between local stakeholders was gained, involving again municipalities, farmers' and tourist organisations, and the association that is managing the park authority was established. Securing democratic legitimacy in this context is rather self-evident and it seems to function well. As the park authority is effectively managed by the mayors of all municipalities forming the park, it works through a combination of representative and participative democracy.

In Slovenia the park was established by the national government, but with the agreement of the municipalities within the park. The agreement was reached and signed by the mayors as formal representatives of the local municipalities. Some of the stakeholders, mostly regional or local

representatives of different sectoral administrations, were also involved in the preparatory processes. Democratic legitimacy should be ensured through the representatives of the national and local level in the board of the park, each having 5 representatives in the board of 11. Nevertheless, the park is now commonly perceived as imposed by the state and an obstacle to development among the local residents, especially farmers (Interview C, 2013). The director of the park authority considers this is also a problem of communication at the level of municipalities, and the flow of information at the local level (Interview B, 2013).

Interestingly, lack of popular support for the park in Slovenia can also be the consequence of the inclusion of the vast majority of the Goričko Nature Park into Natura 2000 network, as mentioned by the representative of the Slovenian Ministry of the Agriculture and Environment (Interview H, 2013). He pointed out that due to time pressure during the EU accession the process of designation of Natura 2000 areas in Slovenia lacked public debate, and the residents of the designated areas were not included in the process at all. This resulted in wide-spread opposition to Natura 2000 in general.

Public Accountability

Public accountability is again difficult to consider in the transnational context of the trilateral park, as decisions are taken in each country separately. In all three parks accountability of park authorities and their decisions is clearly addressed and ensured through some kind of supervisory bodies, although their roles and composition differs. In Austria the board is composed of 7 mayors of municipalities that established the association, which is managing the park, and 2 members of the public. The board meets every month and all key decisions are effectively taken by the board (Interview G, 2013). This arrangement seems to be quite satisfactory for most stakeholders.

In Slovenia the board consists of the representatives of the national and local level, as well as one representative of the general public. Its role is a more supervisory one, but it includes the adoption of all key documents of the park, such as annual work programmes and financial reports (Interview B, 2013). The chairman of the board is the representative of the ministry, responsible for nature protection. Besides, the park also has a small advisory board, which oversees the expert quality of the activities.

On the Hungarian side the supervisory role of the national level is even more emphasized than in Slovenia. Besides that, public accountability as addressed through the Council of the park, having a more advisory role. It consists of 7 members, representing professional institutions and organisations at the county and regional level.

Transparency

Due to lack of formal decision-making processes the need for transparency is less obvious at the transnational level. Nevertheless, some of the less formal events of the trilateral park serve as participatory mechanisms, in particular regular half-yearly meetings of the three parks, which are publicly announced and well documented (Interview D, 2013).

Other mechanisms can be considered separately in each park. In Slovenia the park authority secures transparency through publication of annual work programmes and reports as well as posts about all important meetings and events on the web site. Even more importantly, various stakeholders are

involved in the work of the park through cross-border and transnational projects, in which the park authority takes part, either as partners or as beneficiaries.

At the national level stakeholders can be formally involved in various policy-making processes through public consultations. As these are often too short and late in the decision-making process, a more effective way can be through various platforms, such as associations of municipalities, Regional Development Agencies or Local Action Groups, which are typically involved in an earlier phase, at least in relation to agricultural and rural development policy. The representative of the Slovenian Ministry of the Agriculture and Environment notes that stakeholders participate more actively in decisions, which have a more direct impact on their work (Interview H, 2013). As already mentioned, the park authority is on the other hand not recognized as a stakeholder in relation to planning of infrastructures of national importance in its territory, which was considered as a problem by both the park authority (Interview B, 2013) and by one of the municipalities within the park (Interview I, 2013)

At the local level, an interesting participatory practice was mentioned by the mayor of the municipality of Puconci (Interview I, 2013). The municipality has regular meetings with the representatives of each village in relation to the preparation of the municipal budget. Besides, the citizens' assembly gathers in each village at least once a year to discuss key problems and decide on the funding priorities.

In Austria the park authority does not mention any specific participatory procedures, but stresses that most of their work is field work in direct communication with local residents and farmers (Interview G, 2013). The park authority is also constantly open to suggestions by local stakeholders. Any proposal is first evaluated by the park authority and the decision about it is then taken by the board of mayors.

On the Hungarian side, there are no systematic consultations with the local stakeholders (Interview E, 2013), but often forums are held to discuss specific thematic issues in relation to the park. In the past these forums have not been very well attended, as people were not accustomed to participation, but recently this is starting to improve (Interview F, 2013). Trust among stakeholders, needed for effective participation, is being strengthened with the help of services that the park authority has set up for farmers and local population, such as consulting on the funding opportunities and training. More than 100 rangers have been trained in the last few years, 3 of them got employed by the park authority, and many others became regular collaborators (Interview E, 2013).

Features of (good/bad) territorial governance

- Promoters: Tolerance for different participative cultures

Different participatory practices in the three countries depend on different democratic cultures, ideas, principles and also obligations, rules. Different procedures are in place and stakeholders have different expectations. Nevertheless, quite significant differences in the participatory cultures seem to go along well. Also, transparency is important for each park separately, but specific practices differ.

5. Being adaptive to changing contexts

Reflexivity

Social learning is a rather central issue in relation to the 'soft' and decentralized leadership model exercised in the trilateral park, where coordination of actors on different sides of the borders emerges through a continuous process of interaction, adaptation and learning. Social learning can be considered as a mechanism for the construction of collective knowledge, needed for effective coordination across borders, and joint cross-border projects seem to be crucial in this respect. One representative of the Örseg National Park (Interview F, 2013) thus mentions joint projects, in which both Nature Park Goričko and Örseg National Park take part, as the most important mechanism of coordination. They contribute both to strengthening of informal ties between actors on both sides of the border and also to expanding common knowledge. As an example the project "Landscape in harmony" was mentioned, funded by the cross-border cooperation programme Slovenia-Hungary, promoting sustainable use of Natura 2000 habitats in Órség and Goričko. The natural, economic and social potentials of the three Natura 2000 sites were surveyed, and the results were recorded in a sustainable land use strategy, including guidelines for a nature-friendly grassland management as well as a butterfly atlas of the cross-border natural area. In this way the project contributed both to formal collective knowledge and to social learning.

Although no common institution has been formed so far, park administrations informally coordinate applications for new joint projects in a way to build on the formal knowledge and experiences of previous projects (Interviews F and D, 2013). These are thus integrated also in identification of new goals and their implementation, which is an important aspect of collective learning.

At the national level in Slovenia the representative of the Slovenian Ministry of the Agriculture and Environment (Interview H, 2013) mentions institutional learning within the national administration in relation to the trilateral park. Formerly, the department responsible for rural development at the Ministry for Agriculture tended to distribute information on rural development policy strictly hierarchically both within administration and in the external communication. This practice has changed in the last years when it turned out that the flow of information was not satisfactory and top hierarchical level turned out to be a bottleneck for effective functioning of the department. Most information is now distributed as widely as practically possible, enabling a more dynamic functioning of the department as well as more feedback on the development and implementation of the rural development policy. This enables also better horizontal coordination between policy sectors, in particular agriculture, rural development and nature protection. Still, the representative of the ministry (Interview H, 2013) also stresses that this learning experience is not a systematic practice within the ministry, but is instead largely depending on the individual leadership style within the department.

Adaptability

Despite the fact that the trilateral park is a relatively recent structure, it seems to follow a rather stable course of development towards more coordinated governance of cross-border natural area, as already mentioned. This course has not changed much in the years of the crisis either, which seems to be a sign of adaptability to changing contexts. Indeed, the interviewees mostly confirmed the

observation that the crisis does not have much of an impact on the trilateral park, but pointed out to several other possible weaknesses in terms of resilience.

The representative of the Raab Nature Park in Austria (Interview G, 2013) thus stressed that on the Austrian side the park is considered more as a project than as an institution. The association, managing the park, has been founded with a clear mission, which is to give added value to the local communities in terms of tourism and rural development. If the municipalities, forming its board, would not recognize the need for its existence anymore, the park would be closed down. Such a possibility formally exists, but it would take around 5 years to carry it through. Nevertheless, there are so far no signs that this could happen soon, as it is fulfilling its mission successfully. In Hungary and Slovenia, on the other hand, the parks are largely dependent on the decisions made by the national level. The director of the Goričko Nature Park (Interview B, 2013) thus pointed out that the park still does not have a permanent management plan, because it is waiting for the approval at the national level for several years now.

On the other hand Interviewee A (2013) stressed that the regional development agency has managed to remain rather independent from political changes at the national or local level, through careful governance policy. In the ownership of the Mura RDA, which is a non-profit company, the state, the municipalities of the region and the private sector each own around one third. This ownership structure, together with thoughtful governance rules of the agency, designed to prevent a majority influence of one type of actors, ensures that the RDA remains a stable regional institution. Another source of stability is its financing model, which diversifies sources of financing as much as possible. Still, much of its funding comes from various European Union funds, which may present a long-term danger as well.

Features of (good/bad) territorial governance

- Promoters: Social learning across borders through informal contacts

Social learning is mostly happening through joint projects, on the basis of know-how of the people involved. Informal contacts and soft leadership model are also working in favour of flexibility and adaptability.

6. Realising place-based/territorial specificities

Territorial Relationality

Geographically, the trilateral park includes low hilly landscapes on the western side of the Pannonian plain between the Raab, Krka and Ledava Rivers. It can hardly be more evident than in this case study that the territory is a social construct. The area of the trilateral park is a sum of areas of the three parks, which have all been established in the peripheral areas of their countries. All three border regions faced virtually the same problems, such as elderly and undereducated population, small farms with little prospects in traditional farming, abandoned fields, no industry and large infrastructure, long distances from national centres, a depopulated landscape with a high degree of daily migration and a large number of abandoned houses (Dešnik and Domanjko, 2011).

The defining element of the trilateral park are the borders, which have divided the area for many decades. As the director of the regional development agency (Interview A, 2013) noted, it was this peripheral situation in all three countries, that directly or indirectly contributed to the well-preserved natural areas.

On the Hungarian side of the borders, this contribution is quite direct. Dešnik and Domanjko (2011) explain that after World War II, the border between Hungary and Slovenia (part of the former Yugoslavia) was protected by barbed wire, with a ploughed strip of 40 m wide on the Hungarian side, mine fields, watchtowers and border guards. Similarly, the border between Hungary and neutral Austria was protected by a barbed wire fence with a 60 m wide ploughed strip on the Hungarian side, partly mined, and a service road along the border with watch towers. A double barbed wire fence with electric alarm and a raked area of 8–10 m in between to perceive traces of fugitives stood 2 to 3 km from the borderline. The area between the border and the double fence was called the 'border-belt', which even nearby inhabitants could enter only after receiving official permission. This contributed to very limited cultivation of the whole area, and the 40-60 m strip was left intact since the fall of the Iron Curtain in 1989, presenting an experiment in renaturation.

The trilateral park is also part of the European Green Belt initiative spanning 13,000 km of land behind the former Iron Curtain, from the Barents Sea in the north to the Adriatic and Black Seas in the south, which is a global symbol for transboundary cooperation in nature conservation and sustainable development (Ullrich and Lang, 2007). With the vision of becoming the backbone of an ecological network, the European Green Belt initiative is a symbol of cross-border cooperation in nature conservation and sustainable development (Vasiljević and Pezold, 2011).

Territorial Knowledgeability

As explained earlier, construction of collective knowledge, both formal knowledge and informal one, such as experiences, is one of the key mechanisms through which a shared vision emerged and new objectives are being formulated. Cross-border cooperation was crucial for the construction of knowledge about the park. Dešnik and Domanjko (2011) explain that there was no previous research into the state of nature in the Goričko area. Cross-border cooperation enabled the exchange of data, as well as research about the area.

Features of (good/bad) territorial governance

- Promoters: Existing shared territorial knowledge across borders

Territorial knowledge is shared largely through joint projects, but is based on common ideas, principles, and philosophy. To some extent it also depends on more formal methods and techniques, especially in relation to evaluations.

- Inhibitors: Time needed for developing common territoriality

Actors are well aware of territoriality in each part of the park, while the common territoriality of the trilateral park is only developing very slowly, through common knowledge about the area and the exchange of data and experiences. These processes take a lot of time.

8. Conclusions

Natural areas form an intrinsic component of the respective territory, crossing all kinds of administrative borders, from the municipal through regional and national borders. The case study investigates the efforts for a coordinated protection and management of natural areas in the transnational context with the help of the analysis dealing with the Goričko-Raab-Örseg trilateral nature park, connecting natural areas in Slovenia, Hungary and Austria.

Trans-border characteristic of natural areas adds several layers of complexity to the task of their governance:

- Legislative frameworks, which strongly influence governance of natural areas, change across national borders, in some cases also across regional borders.
- Competences of different administrative levels with regard to protection and management of natural areas change across national borders.
- Competences of different policy sectors are typically also different on different sides of national borders.

Trilateral Nature Park Goričko-Raab-Őrség is a cooperation structure that emerged in the last two decades with the aim to coordinate protection and management of natural areas across borders. The idea of establishing the park emerged in the early 1990s building partly on established cooperation networks within the Alpine Adriatic area. The defining elements of the trilateral park are the borders, which have divided the area for many decades. It was this peripheral situation in all three countries that directly or indirectly contributed to the well-preserved natural areas.

Despite the ambition for a joint trilateral park authority the Trilateral Nature Park Goričko - Raab - Őrség for now doesn't operate like one park entity but rather like three separate ones, each following its own national policy system and governance culture.

In Goričko Nature Park in Slovenia, the rationale behind establishing the park is nature protection, like in Őrseg National Park, but the park itself has fewer formal competences with regard to this and the sector is not as dominant as in Hungary, where the park authority serves also as county administration in the field of nature protection. Quite to the contrary, in Austria, the focus of the park is tourism, coupled with agriculture and rural development.

There are thus considerable differences in the ways cross-sectoral coordination works across the three countries. In general, it tends to be rather formalized in Hungary, a bit less in Slovenia and more informal in Austria. Despite the differences, similarities also exist in terms of mechanisms for coordination of public policies in all three countries. In Slovenia and Hungary, and to some extent also in Austria, participation of actors in the formulation of some sort of plans was considered beneficial for coordination between public policy sectors.

The conflicts between policy sectors at the national level, most pressing between nature protection and agriculture, are often felt most on the local level, which was emphasized by representatives of municipalities in Goričko Nature Park. Interestingly, Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA) of the municipal spatial plan was mentioned as a means to deal with the conflicts, and the external expert,

preparing its main part – the environmental report – was identified as an efficient mediator between both policy sectors.

Park authorities are key institutions coordinating actions of actors and institutions in all three countries. But their roles, their competences in relation to the different governance levels, as well as their organization and capacity differ considerably between the countries. While in Austria it is primarily a platform for coordination between local actors and institutions, in Hungary the park authority serves primarily as an authority at the county level, and in Slovenia it is a mixture of both roles.

The main challenge of the trilateral park remains its coordinated management as, formally speaking, the trilateral park currently does not exist as an entity. It is a cooperation structure composed of three parks. The capacity to carry out territorial coordination is thus of crucial importance for the effective governance of cross-border natural areas. The main partners involved in territorial cooperation are the park authorities of all three parks and the municipalities within the three parks. During the implementation of cross-border projects, additional partnerships are built at the local, national and transnational levels, involving partners from all relevant sectors: municipalities, ministries, research institutions, foundations, schools, universities and NGOs.

The leadership in the trilateral park is not very evident. Nevertheless, the park has slowly taken shape starting from scratch during the last two decades with slow but decisive steps all in the same direction in all three countries. This is a clear sign of a shared vision and the ability to secure its implementation. It is likely though that the vision emerged as a result of a continuous cooperation between actors in the area, and was not known from the beginning.

Despite the widely perceived importance of informal cooperation across borders, the need for a more formalized cooperation platform has also been clearly expressed. Based on this, a Memorandum of Understanding, which was first signed in 2006, was developed as a first step towards a more formalized cooperation within the trilateral park. Cooperation between the park authorities, based on the Memorandum, has taken shape only very recently.

No common participatory practices exist in the three countries. There seems to be more emphasis on formal processes and representative democracy in Hungary, more on informal processes in Austria and again a combination of both in Slovenia, with some interesting aspects of direct democracy in one of the municipalities. Nevertheless, quite significant differences in the participatory cultures seem to go along well.

Social learning is a rather central issue in relation to the 'soft' and decentralized leadership model exercised in the trilateral park, and joint cross-border projects seem to be crucial in this respect. They contribute both to strengthening of informal ties between actors on both sides of the border and also to expanding common knowledge. Park administrations informally coordinate applications for new joint projects in a way to build on the formal knowledge and experiences of previous projects. These are thus integrated also in identification of new goals and their implementation, which is an important aspect of collective learning.

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- List of interviews (Date and Place, name of person and affiliation)

Interview A: Danilo Interviewee A, director, Regionalna razvojna agencija Mura d.o.o., interviewed in Murska Sobota, Slovenia, 15 January 2013

Interview B: dr. Bernard Goršek, director, Krajski park Goričko, interviewed in Murska Sobota, Slovenia, 15 January 2013

Interview C: Robert Recek, Municipality of Dobrovnik, interviewed in Dobrovnik, Slovenia, 15 January 2013

Interview D: Stanka Dešnik, Krajski park Goričko, interviewed in Murska Sobota, Slovenia, , 16 January 2013

Interview E: Jenő Horvath, deputy director, Órségi Nemzeti Park, interviewed in Óriszentpéter, Hungary, 16 January 2013

Interview F: Istvan Szentimrai, Órségi Nemzeti Park, interviewed in Óriszentpéter, Hungary, 16 January 2013

Interview G: Karl Kahr, Naturpark Raab, interviewed in Jennersdorf, Austria, 16 January 2013

Interview H: Boštjan Kos, Ministry of the Agriculture and Environment of the Republic of Slovenia, interviewed in Ljubljana, Slovenia, 17 January 2013

Interview I: Ludvik Novak, mayor and Svetlana Luthar, Municipality of Puconci, interviewed by telephone, 17 January 2013

Interview J: Margarita Jančič, retired, formerly responsible for international cooperation at the Ministry of Infrastructure and Spatial Planning of the Republic of Slovenia, interviewed in Ljubljana, Slovenia, 25 January 2013