

Developing Collaborative Management in Retezat National Park, Romania

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I. Introduction

Romania still possesses a remarkable diversity of landscapes and biodiversity, together with high value cultural and traditional features in most of its regions. The largest area of the Danube Delta (the second largest wetland in Europe) can be found on its territory, and the Carpathian Mountains support an internationally significant area of pristine, natural and semi-natural forests and high-mountain habitats.

Changes in land ownership and the use of resources (particularly forest products, grazing and tourism), which have been and continue to be associated with the transition from a command economy to a free market, can have major negative impacts on the ecosystems and associated landscapes.

There are 18 national and natural parks and biosphere reserves in this country and more than 800 regional and local protected areas. However, Romania does not possess a nationally functioning system of protected areas. The institutional capacity for conservation and protected area planning and management is now at the beginning of its development, including the development of the first models of park management systems at the Retezat National Park, Piatra Craiului National Park and at Vanatori Neamt Forest Park.

For the three parks mentioned above, financial support is given through a GEF grant, through the Romanian Biodiversity Conservation Management Project (BCMP). Based on the models developed through this project, the Romanian Government intends to extend management practices to the other protected areas in the country.

Park Administrations from the three model parks started their activities with a clear understanding that participatory management approaches have to be adopted for an efficient management system.

II. Short description of the Retezat National Park Biosphere Reserve

The Retezat National Park (RNP) covers an area of about 38 thousand ha in the Southern range of the Carpathians. It is a very representative site for this European mountain range that was declared as one of the Global 200 eco-regions. WWF's Global 200 aims to conserve the most outstanding ecosystems in the world and the Carpathians have been identified as one of these regions.

Forests cover 52% of the area and are well preserved, with more than 30% of these old-growth and at least 50% natural forests.

The alpine area (48%) is covered by dwarf-pine (*Pinus mugo*) and cembra pine (*Pinus cembra*) (28%) and alpine meadows (14%), the remainder consisting of stone edges and peaks, and slopes covered with scree and stones.

The rich flora of the alpine area was one of the main reasons for the Retezat to be declared a national park. More than 1,100 species are listed as a result of the baseline survey. Some of the species are quite rare, e.g., *Dianthus glacialis* (a pink), *Draba siliquosa* (a whitlow-grass), *Pedicularis exaltata* (a louse wort), *Primula halleri* (bird's eye primrose), *Astragalus australis* (a milk-wetch), *Erigeron uniflorus* (an alpine fleabane), *Artemisia eriantha* (a wormwood), *Nigritella nigra* ssp. *rubra* (black vanilla orchid), *Leontopodium alpinum* (edelweiss). The Retezat is considered to be a genetic centre for the species of *Hieracium* (hawkweeds) (257 taxa) and *Poa* (meadow grasses) (31 taxa). Amongst the 62 endemic taxa, the most widespread are *Draba dorneri* (a whitlow grass), *Rubus retezaticus* (a blackberry), *Festuca pachyphylla* (a fescue), *Trifolium retezaticum* (a clover), *Hieracium borzae* (a hawkweed), *Hieracium nigrilacus* (a hawkweed), *Draba simonkaiana* f. *retezatensis* (a whitlow grass), *Papaver alpinum* ssp. *corona-sancti-stephani* var. *retezaticum* (a poppy).

The most representative species of a rich fauna are the large carnivores: bear (*Ursus arctos*), lynx (*Lynx lynx*), and wolf (*Canis lupus*). One hundred sixty eight bird species are regular in the park, of which 80 are breeding. The very rare golden eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*) became the symbol of the Park.



Bucura Valley Photo by Erika Stanciu



Bucura Lake Photo by Erika Stanciu

III. Main management issues and management responsibilities in the past

The main management objectives for the Retezat National Park are biodiversity conservation and public awareness raising and education. The Gemenele Scientific Reserve, part of the national park, is an area dedicated for research, under the co-ordination of the Romanian Academy.

The National Park was legally established in 1935, but no special attention was given to an integrated management of biodiversity conservation and there was no special management body in place to plan and implement management activities.

Some management measures, mainly related to the use of natural resources in the Park, were established and implemented by the land administrators:

- Following their nationalisation in 1948, forests (and for a few years the alpine pastures) were managed by the state agency for forestry through its local forest units. Forest management on the area of about 10,000 ha of the Park (initial size, extended in 2000 to over 38,000 ha) focused on preventing illegal harvesting and forest fires, as well as illegal hunting and fishing. Grazing was allowed only in prescribed areas for local people's livestock.

Today forests are still managed by the forest districts. In the scientific reserve and in the special conservation areas of the park no timber harvesting is allowed, not even the so called "sanitary cuttings".

- Eight local councils are the administrators of the alpine pastures. The right to use the alpine pastures was given in 1922 to 23 villages. One major threat to the park's value in the last years was arising from intensified grazing activities in the alpine area. After 1990 an increased grazing activity brought to some of the pastures sheep flocks with a number of animals that exceeded the carrying capacity. Some of these livestock came from distant communes, and not from the villages that originally had been granted grazing rights in the area.

Communities are located outside the Park area, but they are using natural resources from the Park area. Traditional agriculture practices are still in use and some of the traditions are alive, features that add a substantial value to the area. Numerous cultural/historical monuments and small nature reserves can also be found in the close vicinity of the Park. Planning for sustainable tourism activities should be part of local development programs and should consider area outside the Park, where local communities are present. Local development programs will have to consider sustainable use of the natural resources from the park in a way that it is consistent with conservation objectives.

Every summer the beautiful landscapes draw tourists to these mountains. In the last few years, before the Retezat National Park Administration was established, some isolated educational and monitoring activities on tourism were undertaken by NGOs. They have also organized activities to clean camping areas and tourist trails. However, the NGO activities were not planned and coordinated. NGO activities are now continuing with the help and under the coordination of the Park Authority.

Although the area has been well preserved due to its remoteness and careful management of some natural resources following legal declaration of the national park, the new socio-economic environment brought in new threats. With these, the need to coordinate activities in the Park area in order to meet conservation objectives has obviously increased.

IV. Governance type in the Retezat National Park

The Retezat National Park Administration (RNPA) was established in November 1999 as a subunit of the National Forest Administration, a para-statal organization that administrates state forests in Romania.

At the very beginning of its activity, in March 2000, the RNPA brought together major stakeholders and initiated the establishment of two new management bodies: the Scientific Council and the Consultative Council. These bodies were officially recognized through ministerial orders in 2002, after the new legal framework was in place for protected area management in Romania.

Present legal requirements for protected area management in Romania are found in Law 462/2001, which establishes protected area regimes and requires that all national parks (IUCN Category II) and protected landscape areas (IUCN Category V) establish “special management structures”, i.e., park administrations and consultative councils. The same law establishes that the management activities in all these protected areas will be coordinated and supervised by a scientific council.

The Retezat National Park can be considered an example of a co-managed protected area. Formal decision making authority, responsibility and accountability rests mainly with one agency, the Retezat National Park Administration (ultimately the National Forest Administration), but the law requests that management activities are discussed and consensus on main decisions obtained through the consultation of the stakeholders represented in the Consultative Council. Major conservation decisions are also influenced by an independent body, the Scientific Council. The Management Plan and the Park Regulations are subject to approval of the Romanian Academy and the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Forestry and Environmental Protection.

The Global Environmental Facility (GEF), the Romanian Government and the National Forest Administration support Park activities through the Biodiversity Conservation Management Project.



Horses at the Galesu Lake Photo by Richard Hoffman

V. Governance Regime in the RNP

A short description of Retezat National Park's management issues should give a hint as to the complexity of land ownership/administration rights and of the different interests that are present.

As a result of an analysis of the different stakes related to the RNP and Park activities, the Park Administration identified a list of stakeholders, as presented in Annex 1.

One of the most important questions in this analysis was "Who will be affected by Park activities?" The obvious answer is: land owners and administrations, i.e. local communities and the forest directorate/districts. At present, most of the key stakeholders have been included in a structure that has only a consultative role regarding Park activities, though serious thought has been given to the idea that in the future they will have to become part of the decision making process and derive benefits from the Park's presence and activities in the area.

Stakeholders have been brought together in two different councils:

1. The Consultative Council, with 25 members, representatives of local and county level stakeholders including: local communities, Forest Directorate and forest districts, mountain rescue teams, School Inspectorat, Prefecture, County Council, Environmental Protection Agency, cabin owners, NGOs and others. As indicated in its name, this council has a consultative role. At the half-year meetings, the RNPA informs council members on accomplished and planned activities and asks for comments/opinions, especially on areas of activities that are going to affect the different stakeholders. For controversial issues, solutions are proposed so that all stakeholders can reach consensus on final decision and next steps. These meetings are also important as they allow short "training sessions" on the importance of biodiversity conservation, sustainable resource use and other areas of interest.
2. The Scientific Council, with 12 members, brings together specialists from the different areas of biodiversity conservation. These specialists are either independent scientists or representatives of the Ministry of Agriculture, Food, Forestry, Waters and Environmental Protection, Romanian Academy, MAB UNESCO Committee, National Forest Administration, Universities and/or NGOs. This committee is supervising the Park activities and represents the link to the Ministry and the Romanian Academy, the main decision makers in the area of biodiversity conservation and protected area management in Romania.



Stakeholders in the Management planning process

Photo courtesy of the Retezat National Park Administration.

In October 2002 the Consultative Council decided to have a more autonomous status in relation to the RNPA. Though the first meetings of the Council were requested and organized by the RNPA, in October 2002 the council members decided to elect a leading committee to help further develop the activity of the council. In March 2003 the Consultative Council meeting was entirely organized by the leading committee of the council, with very little support from the RNPA. Working groups will be set up within the Consultative Council to address specific issues related to park management activities, based on the interest of each of the stakeholders.

It was also decided that for an efficient cooperation between the Consultative Council and the Scientific Council, one representative of each of the councils will be present at the meetings of the other council.

An analysis of the governance regime in light of activities developed in the nearly three years since the co-management started to be implemented allows a fair evaluation of how far the “principles of good governance” developed by the UN have been met.

As participation is one important part of the five principles of Good Governance, a *Participation Ladder* adapted for evaluating a collaborative management system is proposed for use in the analysis of participative management activities in the Retezat National Park:

- Collaborative Management (CM) – the main Stakeholders, included in a formally organized structure, have the possibility to develop and approve by consensus proposals for protected area regulation and management, that are then submitted to the decision making authority;
- Involvement (Inv) – Stakeholders become actively involved in activities/projects at the initiative of the park administration or based on their request. They have a sense of ownership of project activities;
- Participation (Part) – Stakeholders participate in activities/projects, but they do not have a strong sense of ownership;
- Consultation (Cons) – Stakeholders are consulted and their views are recorded. The park administration might change approaches/decisions as a result of the consultation, but the stakeholders do not have a role in decision-making;
- Information (Inf) – the park administration provides information to the stakeholders, but stakeholders cannot influence the activity/project;
- Persuasion (Pers) – the park administration tells the stakeholders what is going to happen, explains the reason why the decision was taken, but does not necessarily seek agreement from the stakeholders;
- Full control (Contr) – the park administration is in full control and carries out the work without any contact with the stakeholders.

Examples of main activities in the Retezat National Park and the level of participation of different stakeholders are presented in the following table:

Activity	Participant Stakeholders	Levels of Participation	Details
Development of the Retezat National Park Management Plan	Consultative Council Scientific Council Independent specialists	Inf Cons Part Inv CM	Workshops and working groups were organized, comments were incorporated.
Development of the RNP Regulations	Consultative Council Scientific Council Individuals	Inf Cons Part Inv CM	Workshops were organized, agreements were reached and reflected in the Regulations.
Grazing management	Communities County level decision makers	Pers Inf Cons Part Inv CM	Inspections were organized together with community members on the alpine pastures. Grazing contracts are based on agreements between the RNPA and local councils and reflect grazing related provisions from the Park Regulation. Local councils have the final decision on contracts.
Small Grants Program	Communities	Inf Cons Part Inv CM	Main benefits: training sessions organized for project development skills for community members; facilitation process lead to the identification of Initiative Groups in communities and to the establishment of community NGOs that should become the leading groups in community development.
Study tour for local community members in an area where rural tourism is thriving	Communities Mass media	Inf Part	Community members had the opportunity to see that traditional handicraft can become a source of income and small, local pensions are valued by visitors. Mass media helped disseminate the lessons learned.
Press conferences with the participation of decision makers and with field visits	Decision makers	Inf	Important part of the lobbying component.
Quarterly Newsletter for communities and children	Communities Children (schools)	Inf	Information on the Park, local communities and on RNPA activities is offered to the target groups.
Educational activities (outdoor, interactive activities, literary and drawing contests, photo exhibits and	Schools Young artists from the Art School Decision makers Media	Inf Part Inv	These activities have an important impact on participants and significantly contribute to the image of the Park as a leading agency in biodiversity and landscape

others)		conservation.
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Considering the other United Nations Principles, the analysis shows the following:

Five Principles of Good Governance	The United Nations Principles on which the five principles are based	
1. Legitimacy and Voice	Participation Consensus orientation	For participation see previous table. Dialogue is fostered in the meetings of the councils. Rules are established together with stakeholders. Trust among stakeholders – needs further development.
2. Accountability	Accountability Transparency	Semi-annual reports are presented to stakeholders, presenting all activities of the RNPA. Newsletters are edited with information for the general public. Transparency needs improvement.
3. Performance	Responsiveness Effectiveness and efficiency	Management planning and activities seek to serve the interests of all stakeholders, but the conservation objective is considered a leading one. Results meet the needs of stakeholders to some extent and resource use is adequate in some areas of the national park, but further work is needed to meet this principle.
4. Fairness	Equity Rule of Law	No special attention was given to this issues yet. However, in the future the role of women in local communities could be improved through park activities and more consideration could be given to the very few gipsy communities at the edges of the park.
5. Direction	Strategic vision Embracing complexities	Representatives/leaders of the stakeholders participated in the development of a strategic vision, but further work is needed to have a broader participation and a good understanding of this vision. The historical, cultural and social complexities are not fully understood and taken into account.

VI. Key strengths and weaknesses of the collaborative management system

An important step in the long process of developing a collaborative management system is to have a realistic analysis of the key strengths and weaknesses. The SWOT analysis presented in Annex 2 outlines these strengths and weaknesses and also presents opportunities and threats for the future development of co-management practices. As highlighted in Annex 2, one of the weaknesses that can be addressed by the RPMA is related to the lack of understanding and commitment to biodiversity conservation and Park objectives among most of the stakeholders.

A motivated and very active team, with skills in communication techniques, can help very much to overcome this weakness. Lack of financial and human resources at the RNPA level can hinder this process, considered as very important by our team.

Although the RNPA does not have sufficient human and financial resources for community development programs, the park administration tries to launch activities with the aim of raising interest for and supporting, at least to some extent, community development activities. The RNPA is very much aware that without prosperous communities it will be difficult to achieve Park objectives. The Small Grant Program developed in a participatory way with local community representatives and with financial support from the BCMP is a good example for community development activities fostered by the Park team.



Children in the big school of nature Photo courtesy of the Retezat National Park Administration

VII. Key issues for the future development of collaborative management practices

The SWOT analysis brings up a few key issues relevant for the future of collaborative management practices in the RNP.

Annex 3 outlines the level of interest that stakeholders have in the main areas of activity related to the management of the national park. Green squares indicate the present level of interest (at least as officially declared).

Although quite promising among some of the stakeholders, the level of interest in biodiversity and landscape conservation and also in management planning and implementation is very low, if not almost nonexistent.

Natural resource management is of real interest, especially for land owners and administrators, but it is not necessarily associated with the need for sustainable use (except maybe among state forest administrators, the forest districts, who have management plans incorporating provisions for sustainable forest management).

Visitor management and maintenance of tourism infrastructure are on the interest list of only two of the stakeholder groups, mountain rescue teams and cabin owners. However, with the right strategy and action plan these can offer alternative income possibilities. Of course, potential negative impacts also have to be considered when talking about this area of activity for a national park, but an efficient plan to address hopes and concerns can be developed only if all stakeholders accept their roles and become active in implementing commonly agreed plans.

Education and public awareness activities are of real interest to universities and schools. These stakeholders started to discover the benefits of educational programs only after the first activities were developed together with the RNPA. There is a need for increased interest in this area from the different stakeholders if an efficient network for raising awareness and for educational programs is to be established. In this area of activity we are not talking anymore only about biodiversity and landscape conservation, but also about awareness raising and education on traditional and cultural values of the local communities.

Community development is an important area to be considered in close relationship to Park activities. Although communities are not located in the Park area, the fact that they are using natural resources from and around the park, and that most of them will be affected and/or benefit from Park presence and activities, make this area of activity a very important one. Furthermore, the area is designated as a Biosphere Reserve under the MAB UNESCO program. Promoting activities that will lead to a more clearly defined development area outside the Park boundaries should help to foster programs that initiate and support sustainable natural resource use even outside the Park and a sustainable development for local communities.

Financial support for conservation activities is given, for the time being, mostly from an international donor, with input from the state and the National Forest Administration. For a

real collaborative management, financial commitment should increase at the state level and some financial support should be given from other stakeholders as well. However, stakeholders are not going to be able to contribute before significant changes in the economic environment help to increase the budget of local communities and other stakeholders. Some of the Park activities are supposed to contribute to local development.

In Annex 3 the red squares show an evaluation of how the interests of different stakeholders in various Park activities will need to increase if an efficient collaborative management is to be further developed in the future. The RNPA has a key role in raising awareness of the key stakeholders with respect to the important role they should play in the management of the national park.

The Consultative Council is a first step to achieving efficient collaborative management. Decision makers are grouped in the Scientific Council, where most of the stakeholders are not represented. However, the comments/suggestions coming from the Consultative Council are seriously considered by the RNPA and the Scientific Council and incorporated in decisions. A good example is the development of the Park Regulations that include rules for resource management. For the alpine pastures areas were excluded from grazing, but only after an agreement was reached with the local communities and endorsed by the Consultative Council.

In order to reach an efficient co-management level in the Retezat National Park, a real need must be addressed to further develop participatory activities, to build up trust and cooperation between the various stakeholders, and to encourage stakeholders to come with initiatives/projects to improve the park management and take an active role in the park activities and local development.

Only a competent and efficient park management body, one that brings in constantly innovative ideas and processes, will be able to further develop the collaborative management system in the Retezat National Park. This management body, the RNPA, should be provided with sufficient human and financial resources and allowed to develop and implement activities without the constraints of a hierarchical system that moves decision making for all park activities to a different level than the park management level.

VIII. Conclusions and lessons learned

The RNPA has recognized the importance of an efficient collaborative management system for the future of the Park and for a sustainable development of the area as a whole, including local communities.

However, to achieve the goal of establishing a collaborative management system for the RNP, there is a need for:

1. a motivated, competent team with very good skills for lobbying activities, negotiations, awareness raising activities, communication and with the possibility to plan and decide on park management activities together with the Consultative and the Scientific Councils;
2. maintaining the strategic vision developed for the area and raise awareness, obtain acceptance and support for this vision from the key stakeholders;
3. developing the capacity of all key stakeholders for active involvement in conservation activities. This entails a strategic plan to raise interest and motivate

- stakeholders, with efficient activities for lobbying and awareness raising with different target groups and training programs for stakeholders in areas relevant to sustainable resource use and collaborative management;
4. programs and projects jointly developed with stakeholders to achieve both Park objectives and sustainable development objectives.

Apparently time-consuming, participatory management systems, if efficient, actually reduce implementation time periods and could significantly increase efficiency for the different activities, as it should prevent major conflicts during implementation.

Why does the title of this paper refer to the “development” of collaborative management in the RNP? The development of a co-management system is at the very beginning and it will be a long process. There are no specific management agreements in place with clear rights and responsibilities for each of the stakeholders. The Management Plan was approved in June 2003. Provisions from the Management Plan on responsibilities and involved parties will hopefully form the basis of future agreements with stakeholders on their specific role in the Park management.

We are also aware that passive members in the Consultative Council can not help to develop agreements with clear responsibilities. Next steps towards a collaborative management in the RNP will have to address issues related to the level of interest in Park-related activities among the different stakeholders and will have to encourage stakeholders to have an active role in the Park management.

However, from the very beginning of its existence, the RNPA has tried to establish a participatory management system for Romania’s first national park, a system that can hopefully serve as a future model for other protected areas in our country.

The legal framework for protected area management in Romania encourages the development of co-management systems that should support conservation objectives and bring benefits to the main stakeholders. Using this management model will allow the development of efficient and successful management systems in protected areas as models for sustainable development of the society in a healthy and stable natural environment.

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