

PEACE PARKS

Are they a romantic ideal?

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Park be limited to protected areas, or can it include ecological areas that have partial conservation status?

The existing definition of 'Peace Parks' suggests two important criteria: the first an ecological one (to maintain biodiversity), and the second one of political stability (to promote conflict resolution between countries). While the focus is on conflict between countries, perhaps this notion can be extended to include conflict between governments and communities, or communities and other stakeholders. Increasing conflict between different user-groups should be an additional consideration in the definition. Perhaps a third criterion, that has been overlooked, is that of social and economic considerations that impinge on the sustainability of TFCAs. This is important because when the idea of Peace Parks was first suggested in 1990, when Anton Rupert met Joachim Chissano of Mozambique, ecotourism and benefits to communities seemed to be central to the marketing of the idea.

Of all the criteria, the most contentious is whether TFCAs can lead to political stability and economic development. The irony that emerges is that the early discussions between a private South African philanthropist and the head of State of Mozambique (indeed, the very notion of creating a Peace Park between Mozambique and South Africa) was only possible as an aftermath of the settlement of war between Frelimo and Renamo, suggesting that Peace Parks are only possible if conditions for peace are first met. These conditions are the creation of democratic government, resolution of land disputes and approaches to alleviate poverty and ensure sustainable livelihoods.

The second irony, is that the Kgalagadi (which is widely regarded as the first Peace Park) lies between two countries that have not been at war. It has been created entirely because of ecological necessity, and not political stability or economics. What is also interesting about the Kgalagadi is that different legal regimes across the borders influence the manner in which community issues are being dealt with;

evident in the different ways in which the two countries are dealing with the issue of the indigenous rights of the San.

What these ironies illustrate is the possible inconsistencies that can arise if the same concept were to be applied loosely to other TFCAs that have different political, ecological and historical differences. Whether the Kgalagadi TCFA now automatically translates into a Peace Park is open to question. On which criteria? Perhaps this could be one of the case studies for IUCN's WCPA to test the appropriateness of the definition and when best to confer the title of Peace Park.

The third criterion (social and economic considerations that impinge on the sustainability of TFCAs) begs the question to what extent suggested economic benefits from proposed peace parks have been subject to any form of rigorous analysis. Because TFCAs are confined to a protected area, ecotourism has been the preferred option, as it is perceived to be less environmentally damaging. This may be so, but this does not mean that the option is financially sustainable or will contribute to economic spin-offs. Economics of TFCAs require a far more sophisticated set of eyes taking into account a detailed cost/benefit analysis. Tourism is a notoriously fickle industry. Recent developments in Zimbabwe demonstrate how political disturbance in one country can have dire consequences for the tourism industry throughout the region. We should therefore hedge our bets on the ecotourism miracle as the driver of local economic development.



San children, eager to pose in 'traditional dress' despite the freezing cold, selling necklaces, bangles, bows and little bottles of desert sand on the side of the road near the entrance to the Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park. Photo: C. Voget.

It is clear that the concept of Peace Parks raises more questions than previously imagined, and the suggestion that the WCPA develop a framework for its application is welcomed, as it will allow open discussion on the matter, in particular to answer the question 'When should a Peace Park be declared, and what are the conditions that need to be satisfied before such a declaration is made?' ❧

Imagine a continuous mass of land, in which wildlife and human travellers can freely roam, from the Kruger National Park to the northern parts of the Zambezi and further, and eastwards towards the borders of Maputo. One has the pleasure of uninterrupted travel with no border posts, and splendid flora and fauna to view. This is the sort of image that Transfrontier Conservation Area Initiatives (TFCAs) conjure. TFCAs are not new. The Kgalagadi Transfrontier Park has been mooted for more than thirty years. What is perhaps new is the idea of tagging onto trans-boundary conservation areas the notion of 'Peace Parks', which is being promoted by the Peace Parks Foundation. This notion is meant to excite the imagination of an audience that is predominantly European, who are seeking adventures across seamless savannas without the hindrance of border posts and niggly exit and re-entry visas. There is no doubt that we need to promote and ensure peace in southern Africa, but do TFCAs offer us that avenue, and can all TFCAs justifiably uphold the notion of peace, or for that matter, are they the only means to regional peace?

The concept of Peace Parks was developed by the World Conservation Union (IUCN) in the 1980s. The description of a TFCFA is defined as 'a region which embraces the land of more than one nation, unifying fragmented ecological habitats and promoting environmental and political stability'. Since then the concept of Peace Parks has been applied in different ways by different people leading to a concern about its loose application. Recognizing that the concept needed a more rigorous platform to give it international legitimacy, the Peace Parks Foundation asked the IUCN's World Commission for Protected Areas (WCPA) to facilitate a process to apply Peace Parks.

In March a meeting was held between the WCPA and the IUCN's Commission for Environmental Law where a panel of international experts was chosen. The specific tasks of the panel were to develop a draft Peace Parks definition and to draft guidelines for trans-boundary protected area co-operation, a code for trans-boundary protected areas in times of peace and armed conflict and a proposal for a global peace parks initiative, including the establishment of a Peace Parks Council. Initially, this council will be made up of the four founding partners: IUCN, WWF, the Peace Parks Foundation and the University of Peace in Costa Rica.

The word 'park' raises questions about its exact confines. Should such a word conform to the conventional protected area scheme? Should a Peace