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**SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT AND
TRANSBOUNDARY CO-OPERATION
IN MOUNTAIN REGIONS**

The Alpine and the Carpathian Conventions



L'Harmattan

EXPERIENCES AND PROJECTS OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN MOUNTAIN REGIONS INVOLVING THE LAZIO SYSTEM OF PARKS

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SUMMARY: 1. Introduction. – 2. Activities of International Cooperation of the Lazio Protected Areas. – 3. International Cooperation on Mountain Regions. – 4. Final Remarks.

1. Introduction

Lazio is one of the twenty first-level administrative, or local government units (called “Regions”) that make up Italy. Located in central Italy, the Lazio Region covers approximately 17,200 km², with a population of around 5 million people. Its territory, encompassing the country’s capital Rome and several other smaller towns, is characterized by coastal plains and hilly landscape along the coast, and by several mountain groups in the interior: these include portions of the broader Apennine chain, which runs across most of the Italian peninsula, as well as some lower, detached mountain groups closer to the coast. These mountains harbour a rich biodiversity, as well as cultural heritage, with several scattered villages with diverse cultural traditions and plenty of monuments or archaeological remains.

Several protected areas have been established in Lazio, and many of them are centred on the mountain groups of the region. In addition to several state parks and reserves, some of them only partially falling within the boundaries of the region, and which are placed directly under the responsibility of the State for their management, Lazio has developed, over thirty years, an extensive and complex system of regional PAs, which includes more than 70 regional parks, regional reserves and natural monuments. These PAs are established, within the general framework given by the national law on PAs, under the provisions of the last regional framework law, approved in 1997. A distinctive character of the regional PAs is the involvement of local government authorities, and especially municipalities, in their management.² In most cases the management of these PAs is entrusted either to an ad-hoc authority, which has on its board representatives from local administrations, or to the municipalities supported by a local unit embedded within their administration.

¹ A.R.P. – Regional Parks Agency – Lazio.

² For a discussion of local authorities involvement in management of regional PA see for example G. TALLONE, *The Role of Regional Parks in the Italian Legal System: a Short Outline*, in G. Tamburelli (ed.), *Biodiversity Conservation and Protected Areas – The Italian and Ukrainian Legislation*, ISGI-CNR, Giuffrè, Rome, 2006.

In addition to being among the pioneering regions that approved in the 1970s a specific framework law on PAs and established its first regional PAs, Lazio was also one of the first regions in Italy to address the issue of establishing and managing its PAs as a system rather than as separate units. This was not only applied to the long term target of ensuring representativeness and protection for the most important natural, cultural and landscape features within its territory, a goal still not really accomplished, but primarily to the management and promotion of sites and activities. An effort has been made in particular to develop system-wide policies and programs promoting a coordinated and integrated approach to many issues, from strategies to promote public awareness to staff training. In addition to that, and to pursue a systemic approach in the management of its PAs, the region has been the first in Italy to establish, among other things, a specialised agency, the Regional Parks Agency (A.R.P.).

This approach has promoted cooperation between PAs in the region on various issues, with initiatives targeting and involving different sites in coordinated activities, such as the marketing and promotion of tourism facilities or local produce for the benefit of residents around PAs. Of course important issues that are tackled with this approach include those related to the conservation and monitoring of biodiversity. Recently for example, some PAs have started to plan, in a coordinated fashion, monitoring activities on some species, as a relevant part of programs that will also be coordinated with those of PAs beyond the administrative boundaries of the regions. These are part of a broader initiative which extends also beyond the boundaries of the region, based on the assumption that the conservation of these species cannot be achieved with isolated efforts.

2. Activities of International Cooperation of the Lazio PAs

Interactions between, and cooperation by, PAs is nowadays extending beyond the region boundaries. In recent years, several of the Lazio regional parks and reserves have in fact started to develop relationships and linkages with PAs, local institutions or grassroots organizations in other countries. For the last two years, the Regional Parks Agency has started to collect information on these initiatives, with the objective of getting an overview of what initiatives are taking place and of what could be the future developments. A preliminary reconnaissance of the initiatives and projects was carried out in 2006, and later updated, allowing one to get an initial overview of the involvement of the regional parks and reserves of the Lazio system in activities of international cooperation.

So far, about 10 PAs have reported to be involved in some kinds of exchange or cooperation project, with linkages being established either with counterparts or with other local actors (for example NGOs, local authorities, etc.) in European, African, or Latin American countries. Initiatives range from a simple exchange of visits of staff

or community representatives to more complex, even though usually small, decentralised development cooperation projects. The reasons and factors behind the start up of these initiatives are various, but in most cases they take their origin from contacts established by officials of the PA staff; sometimes it is another civil society entity, for example a local NGO, based in the PA territory, that promotes the establishment of a link with counterparts, and finds in the PA management body an active and willing partner. Another factor that may have contributed so far to the development of these initiatives is the fact that Rome hosts a large number of NGOs involved in development cooperation, and with the prominence today given to the relationship between development and environmental conservation, some of them have naturally looked to parks as possible actors to enhance partnerships in their activities.

3. International Cooperation on Mountain Regions

Not surprisingly, considering the fact that many of the parks and reserves of the region are located in mountainous parts of the region, there are several instances of cooperation projects initiated by PAs located in mountain regions, or targeting mountain areas of other countries. In this paper we briefly present and discuss a few of these initiatives as they provide interesting examples of linkages and cooperation partnerships established between PAs focused on mountain regions.

The first interesting example of international cooperation is the involvement of a large reserve at the northernmost corner of the Lazio region (Monte Rufeno Regional Nature Reserve) in a broader cooperation project targeting the Udzungwa mountains in Tanzania. Such projects (see Box 1) show how the involvement of a small PA can be instrumental in addressing some issues likely to be critical in ensuring that conservation efforts are successful in the long term, and that were in need of attention or not yet adequately addressed in efforts by other partners.

Box 1. A cooperation project with the Udzungwa Mountains National Park, Tanzania

In the heart of Tanzania, the Udzungwa are part of the Eastern Arc Mountains and represent one of the most important areas of Eastern Africa in terms of biodiversity. With diverse landscape forms and climatic conditions this mountain group hosts, within a relatively restricted area, an amazing variety of habitats, and a wealth of plant and animal species. The rainforests of the area in particular have revealed to be a very important ecosystem, supporting many endemic species, some of them discovered only recently. Moreover, the mountains have a fundamental role in terms of ecosystem services for nearby regions, representing an important water reservoir for large rural areas.

To protect the biodiversity and natural resources of the area, the Tanzanian Government established in 1992 a National Park. This park has developed over the last few years a distinctive partnership with one of Lazio's largest regional reserves, the Monte Rufeno

Nature Reserve, which is centred on a forest-rich mountain group in the northernmost corner of the region. In full agreement with TANAPA, the Tanzania National Parks Agency, a partnership proposal was formalised in 2003 directly linking the two protected areas and other actors. The partnership brings together the Monte Rufeno Reserve, and groups of museum institutions in Italy including the Museums of an Italian University (University of Perugia) and the Trento Natural History Museum, that has carried biodiversity research in the Udzungwa Mountains for several years.

Facilitated by the contacts developed over many years of research by the staff of the museums, the involvement of the Rufeno Reserve was instrumental in identifying two possible areas of intervention that had yet to receive proper attention, and that were however considered at the same time as issues in need of priority attention in Udzungwa and as activities of particular interest for a joint and parallel implementation by the two parks: the development of a database for monitoring the biodiversity of the area, and the support to the Mangula village primary school in Udzungwa through a twinning with the school of the main village of the Rufeno Reserve.

As far as the first activity is concerned, and with the overall goal of ensuring better management and conservation of the biodiversity resources, the initiative enabled the Rufeno Reserve to provide the Udzungwa park with a baseline equipment for storing and analysing data from monitoring activities. Moreover, the two parks agreed to apply the same tools and protocols, including hardware and software, making thus possible, also on a remote basis thanks to improved communication tools, a continuous exchange of information and experience between the technical staff.

The activities targeting the school started from the common concern over the role of environmental education and awareness in conservation. The municipality of Acquapendente, the main village in the Rufeno Reserve, which is not only responsible for the local school but is also the body entrusted with the day to day management of the reserve, was fully committed to the initiative, as it was the school staff. It was therefore possible to provide the Mangula village school with some basic infrastructure and equipment, such as a new canteen, bathrooms, books and a computer for environmental education activities. These efforts are in a twinning between the two schools that, in addition to providing the framework for developing specific programs on environmental education with the help also from the staff of the museums and protected areas, promotes mutual knowledge and broadens perspectives and cultural exchange between school students and staff.

by Massimo Bedini, Monte Rufeno Regional Nature Reserve.

A similar approach is also found in a project promoted by the small reserve of Monterano addressing the situation of park rangers in an area ravaged by conflicts and where the effectiveness of law enforcement is critical for the conservation of outstanding biodiversity resources that extend across three countries (Box 2).

Box 2. *Supporting the Virunga National Park and its rangers*

Covering 8000 km² in the Democratic Republic of Congo, along the border with Uganda and Rwanda, the Virunga National Park is the oldest national park in Africa. Encompassing a variety of habitats, from wetlands to savannah to mountain or primary forests, the park, which is also a World Heritage Site, represents, together with the adjacent parks in Rwanda and Uganda the last stronghold of the endangered mountain gorilla, as well as a key area for other forest species such as elephants and okapi.

Poaching, illegal logging for charcoal production, fishing, mining for coltan (a mineral ore used in electronic products) and endangered species trade, as well as decades of armed conflict, are posing everyday threats not only to the park and its outstanding natural resources, but also to the park staff. More than 600 rangers are reported to have been killed while on duty since 1994, with severe consequences on their families, which are left without any form of support and, suddenly finding themselves deprived of their only source of income, are unable to satisfy the most basic needs.

Together with a small group of organizations and NGOs (including the International Ranger Federation, the Italian Association of Park Guides and the Italian Federation of Parks and Reserves), the Monterano Regional Reserve, a small reserve in the Northern sector of the Lazio region, has embarked in a project to provide vital support to the Virunga rangers and their families. The project stems from an earlier initiative of the Monterano reserve that was successful in raising funds for the Virunga rangers's equipment by selling handcrafts and local products at the reserve visitor centre. This first initiative was instrumental in establishing close contacts with the Virunga rangers, as well as in promoting information and awareness among the community of Monterano and nearby villages on the issue through meetings and school visits.

Developed through the direct contacts established between the Virunga rangers and the Monterano Reserve staff, the new project, which is going to be supported by additional funds from the decentralised cooperation program of the Lazio Regional Authority, is aimed at ensuring that rangers' orphans can attend schools, as well as at promoting the development of sustainable employment opportunities for rangers' widows.

Moreover the project, together with other initiatives, is promoting national and international recognition of the role of the rangers, also by advocating for the recognition of subsidies in favour of their families. This with the hope that better working conditions, and a more stable situation, would contribute to the rangers' effectiveness and motivation in ensuring the conservation of the park heritage, especially within a context where illegal activities can be very profitable and therefore difficult to contrast.

by Francesco Mantero, Monterano Regional Reserve.

Another example (Box 3) comes from the initiative of one of the largest regional parks in Lazio (Parco Regionale Monti Lucretili), that together with an Italian NGO, embarked in a cooperation initiative targeting an area in Uruguay identified as a

priority site for the establishment of a park. In addition to providing support to facilitate the declaration of the proposed PA and to the planning the first infrastructures for visitors, taking advantage of the experience of its staff, the Lucretili Park is also trying to promote new ways of spreading environmental awareness in both parks.

Box 3. Promoting the establishment of a new protected area in Uruguay: the project of the Lucretili Regional Park

The Lucretili Regional Nature Park is one of the largest parks in Lazio. Not far from Rome, and often appreciated for its natural resources by town dwellers, it encompasses a large groups of mountains, and its territory is overlapped with those of several villages. Recently the park embarked in an international cooperation initiative in the area of Rincón de Perez in Uruguay, a portion of the Quegay Mountains characterised also by forests and wetlands that has been targeted for the creation of a park. The initiative, which is still at its beginning, is implemented in collaboration with several Non Governmental Organizations, one of them (called ReOrient) based in Rome and particularly active in the field of sustainable tourism.

The first aim of the project is to facilitate and support the establishment and start up of a new protected area, through information and awareness activities targeting both the local community and the authorities as well as by providing technical support for the preparation of the first planning tools and documents supporting the declaration and management of the area. In this context, the involvement of the Lucretili Park is instrumental in providing guidance on technical issues, and it is also hoped that will be of help in the initial development of staff skills.

The project is then expected to support the implementation of the first management actions in the field, that will include the development of infrastructures that should serve the visitors. To this end, a small team of the Lucretili Park already participated in identifying needs and opportunities for rehabilitating or constructing small scale structures that could be of use by tourists for nature-based activities. The project will also work to promote ecotourism and sustainable tourism, by identifying opportunities for developing nature-based or adventure tourism itineraries that may also link the area to the capital Montevideo and to broader tourism circuits, but also through the promotion of local produce and handicrafts that could be marketed locally to visitors.

Another component of the project includes activities on education and public awareness targeting schools, a topic on which the Lucretili Park has been particularly active. Within this context, the Lucretili Park will not only support awareness campaigns, but will also attempt, through web-based technologies, to establish long-distance links between schools of the two areas.

by Luigi Russo, Monti Lucretili Regional Park.

A final example, even though it refers to an initiative still in its early stages, is that of a small group of PAs in the Lazio system that is developing a network of partnerships with a series of PAs in Ukraine. This represents an example of initiatives that could involve not single sites on their own, but groups of sites in the two countries, an approach that may translate into good potential for enhancing future synergies and potential benefits of future cooperation initiatives.

4. Final Remarks

The cases presented here provide a brief overview of the recent international cooperation activities involving the Lazio system of parks. What has emerged so far is the fact that parks and reserves are more and more open to partnerships beyond the boundaries of the region and of the country, even though most of these initiatives still represent isolated efforts, which, while perhaps are well integrated into the context of the project are not yet integrated into a common strategy. In many cases however, the involvement of a park or reserve in a cooperation project as a full partner has been shown to add some value to the initiative. For example, coming from or working in close contact with communities living in mountain areas, the park staff involved in these activities has sometimes been able to act as a better interpreter of the needs and attitudes of residents, bridging gaps, establishing communication channels or proposing solutions that perhaps to other project partners were less obvious.

Even though the heterogeneous character of the initiatives carried out so far by the Lazio parks has positive implications, fostering initiatives well rooted in the local context of the partners and thus in line with decentralised cooperation principles, reflections on the opportunity to develop a more integrated and coordinated approach to international cooperation activities for the Lazio system of parks have already started. The Regional Parks Agency may be well positioned to act as a key actor in this process, promoting the systemic approach already applied to other aspects of the development of the PA system. This may not only represent an opportunity to exchange and mutually learn from strategies and best practices developed at the system level, but would also be in line with the Convention on Biological Diversity Programme of Work on Protected Areas as well as with the latest recommendations of the relevant working group,³ which, in addition to highlighting the need to promote the development of integrated networks of parks and reserves, stresses the need for enhancing partnerships between PA systems as a tool to promote the achievement of the programme of work targets.

³ CBD COP 9 Decision IX/18.