CREATING PEACE PARK BETWEEN TURKEY AND GEORGIA

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Abstract

The political borders have been associated with various ecological issues such as biodiversity reduction and landscape fragmentation. The subject of borderland conservation has been generated to handle these problems around the international borders, which were introduced as “Peace Park” or “Transboundary Conservation Area” (TBCA). Turkey shares a huge valley known as Machakhel over its border with Georgia that has unique ecosystem, biodiversity and other historical and cultural values. This area is under various management strategies of two countries. Even though the idea of cooperation between two countries with the aim of the valley protection has been discussed for a long time, there is no research or evaluation performed about the possible ways. This article with suggestion of creation an international peace park over the border analyzes the current situation of the area based on the available report and documents. Biologic, socio-economic situations and planning approaches considered for both parts in Turkey and Georgia are surveyed in this article. This work makes a discussion about the challenges around the whole valley’s management under the category of TBCA and the potential achievements that it may provide for both countries.

Keywords: Peace Park, Political border, Conservation, Planning.

1. INTRODUCTION

Political borders have been associated with vast numbers of environmental issues, as most of the international borders are bounded by obstacles and fences. Human activities such as road construction and land filling over the borders have caused landscape and ecosystem fragmentation, biodiversity and habitat reduction (Cunningham, 2012, 373-382; Pouya and Taheri, 2017; 50-250). In these situations, in order to facilitate the animal movement and mitigate the environmental issues, it is suggested that the border obstacles are removed as solution. Borderland conservation was proposed and the idea of Transboundary Conservation Areas (TBCA’s) which is also known as peace park was introduced following the World Parks Congress in 2003.

According to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), a Transboundary Conservation Area (TBCA) is “an area of land or sea that straddles one or more borders between states or sub-national units, whose constituent parts are especially dedicated to the protection of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed cooperatively through legal or other effective means”. The first TBCA was established in 1932 as between the Glacier National Park in the USA and the Waterton Lakes National Park in Canada (Mayoral-Phillips, 2002; Cumming, 1999; 12-54). By the late 1990’s, 136 protected areas, adjoining 112 international boundaries in 98 countries were created (Ali, 2007; 30-250). In addition to TBCA’s, two other types of transboundary areas (Transfrontier Conservation and International Peace Parks) have been classified that are different in aims and definitions (Singh, 1999; 80-120).

TBCA was also developed in a variety of arrangements (Mayoral-Phillips, 2002; 2-10). However, Transboundary Protected Areas are mostly categorized based on their location in two groups; terrestrial and marine conserved areas. Waterton-Glacier International Peace Park, The Great Limpopo Transfrontier Park, “W” Transborder Parks, Kavango - Zambezi Transfrontier Conservation Area are the terrestrial cases and Binational Red Sea Marine Peace Park, Iona – Skeleton Coast Transfrontier Conservation Area, and Mnazi Bay-Ruvuma Estuary Marine Park are examples of the Marin TBCA (Portman, 2007; Davis, 2008; 1-6).

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TBCA or international peace parks also provides opportunities to improve the nations, countries, and communities’ relationships by involving them in the conservation and managements of cross border lands which will benefit all participates as well (Cunningham, 2012, Laverty, 2007; 72-96, Ali, 2007).

This article aims to investigate the cooperation between Turkey and Georgia by a transboundary park. Since early 2000th, World Wild Fund for Nature develops concept for establishing Georgia-Turkey cross-transboundary cooperation for sustainable resource use and biodiversity conservation. From Georgian side, Machakhela river valley (Machakhel in Turkish) is considered as the key area for development of transboundary activities. Machakhela is a small river that crosses border of Turkey and Georgia. The river’s upper part is located in Turkey which is known as Camili and middle and lower part of the river is in Georgia. The valley is valuable not only in biodiversity, but in view of culture and history (CBC, 2012). Even though idea of international cooperation and participation of two countries in order to conserve the area overt the political border has been discussed for a few, however, no survey and assessment has been performed about the possibility of the idea. This article makes attempt to analyze the management and planning strategies of two counties considered for the valley in order to create a transboundary peace park.

2. Materials And Method

The area which is proposed as Transboundary Peace Park in this research is a huge valley with three main landscapes of forest, mountain, and residents located over the international border of Turkey and Georgia; in the northeast of Turkey and southwest of Georgia (Figure 1). The Turkish part of the site has been known as Camili and the Georgian part is known as Machakhela. To analyze the current situation of each part, three main factors including biological assessment, socio-economic assessment, and planning approaches are considered. To get the information and data, it uses the secondary reports, available documents and internal sources. After the condition analyses, necessary planning phases are suggested to integrate and manage the areas as a whole under one main category of International Peace Park.

2.1 Camili Watershed Area/ Turkey

The Turkish part of the site is situated 25-30 kilometers from Georgia. It has been one of the oldest harbors conquered many times throughout history in the Black Sea. Since 1925, Camili has been included in Artvin Province of Turkey. There are six villages having both official Turkish names and unofficial Georgian names in the area. In 2005, Camili considered as the Turkey's biosphere reserve by UNESCO (Pirselimoglu et.al, 2008; 30-31).

2.1.1. Biological assessment of Camili

The Macahel (Camili) river basin with the area of 27,000 ha, on the eastern edge of the Black Sea region consists of Caucasian mixed temperate rain forest, high alpine meadows and Karcal Mountain. The river basin is rich in biodiversity and endemic species (71 endemic species). Karcal Mountains (3415 metres high) with its neighboring peaks enclose enclose the river basin on three sides. There are also three main valleys; the Ugur-Maral, Efeler and Duzenli valley in the area that Ugur and Efeler stream have various supporting branches. The land has a very steep land structure with various altitudes (from 400-500 m to 3500 m). The forests in the area have mainly kept their natural characteristics (Teksoz et al, 2016; 10-54).
Wildlife also is very rich in Camili. It includes mammals, diver birds species and insects. It is considered as a significant part of the bird migration way within the Black Sea Basin. There are large population of Bark beetles, Caucasian black grouse, Caucasian bee race, wolf, red fox in the area (Pirselimopglu et.al, 2008).

2.1.2. Socio-economic assessment

There are 6 villages (16.000 hectares; 1213 people; 268 households) named Kayalar, Camili, Efeler, Duzenli, Maraal and Uğur Villages in this geographically isolated basin. Numerous archaeological sites can be found within Camili, for instance, the Iremat mosque in Maral village, Tamara’s cave and an arched bridge at the entrance of Efeler village. Altogether, each village located within Camili illustrates notable architectural qualities and typical traditional style contain houses with four to six rooms and wooden balconies.

Natural condition of the area; harsh climate, land structure, and dense plants has limited the economic use of the sources in the area. The roads are mostly blocked by snow during the winter because of the geographical conditions of the Camili (Pirselimopglu et.al, 2008). Thus, income resources in the area are mostly bee-keeping and honey production, cattle-dealing, hazelnut, cor, and fruit growing which make the resident’s lifestyle traditional.

Cultural, ethnographic and historical values which the locals have produced for centuries (language, folklor, clothing, hand-craft, songs, cuisine, authentic production systems) in the area are precious values that can be interesting for the people living in the Turkey and Georgia.

2.1.3. Planning approaches

There are two projects considered for the area; “Biological Diversity Project” supported by World Bank and “Camili and Karagol Forest Ecosystem Protection and Development Opportunities Project” by The Research Association of Rural Environment and Forestry (RAREF). With the help of these studies, decisions for the area protection were made and Camili-Gorgit (Heba High Plateau) and Camili-Efeler (Findik High Plateau) Nature Conservation Areas (NCA) was established. However, since 2005, the whole Camili area (the part in Turkey) was registered as Biosphere Reserve (the only biosphere reserve existed in Turkey) by UNESCO (UNESCO, 2017).

Camili Biosphere Reserve

The Camili biosphere reserve area between Black Sea and the high mountains beyond, with a surface area of 25.222 ha is bordered with Georgia. It has mild and humid climate with subtropical oceanic character (İnandık, 1969). It was registered as one of the 20 Ecologic Regions by World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF that incudes the villages and nature reserve areas (Camili-Efeler ve Camili-Gorgit) (Figure 2). The rich seasonal precipitation in the area is drained by three Efeler, Uğur and Düzenli rivers (Kaymaz, 2012; 25-70; Özşahin & Kaymaz, 2013; 128-130).

The organizations responsible for the management plan are the Republic of Turkey, the Ministry of Environment and Forestry, Biological Diversity and Natural Resource Management Project, Camili Project Management, and the General Directorate of Nature Conservation and National Parks (UNESCO, 2017). The forests are under the authority of Directorate of Forestry and the Two Nature Reserves are managed by the Directorate of National Parks. Since 2004, the Turkish citizens have permission to visit the site, but the obligatory remained for foreign visitors. The requirement for a permission to visit the area and the difficulty to reach the area have limited the ecotourism activities and kept the ecosystem undestroyed (IUCN, 2007).
Figure 2. Camili Biosphere Reserve defined by UNESCO (2005): Surface area (terrestrial): 27,152 ha, Core areas: 2,237 ha, Buffer areas: 13,731 ha, Transition areas: 11,184 ha.

2.2 Machakhela/ Georgia

Georgia is in the west of the southern part of the Caucasus region and includes the main part of the region’s biodiversity, Caucasus ecosystems and its habitats with a huge number of globally threatened species (WFF, 2011). Machakhela valley is located in the south of Adjara/Georgia over the border with Turkey close to the existing Mtirala National Park and Kintrishi Nature Protected Landscape (Figure 3). Machakhela is considered as the Eco regional Conservation Plan for the Caucasus.

Figure 3. Machakhela is located in the south of the Adjara

2.2.1. Biological assessment of Machakhela

Machakhela valley with the area of 10,868 ha is habitat of the precious varieties of endemic plants. Machakhela River is a small trans-boundary river between Georgia and Turkey. Machakhela includes two landscapes: secondary fields (orchards, residential areas) and deciduous forest with evergreen sub-forest. 75% of the territory is covered with virgin forests and mostly with the Colchis forest communities (UNDP, 2016).

Around 200 species of vertebrates’ mammals, birds (Imperial Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle, Steppe Buzzard, Black Kite) amphibians, reptiles and fish are found on the proposed site in Georgia. Colchic forests provide an important habitat for large mammals, including European roe deer, brown bear, golden jackal, European lynx, wild boar, and wolf. Cultural and invasive vegetation covered in anthropogenic landscapes, while Colchian species grew in forests reserved for its wilderness and landscape (UNDP, 2015).

2.1.2. Socio-economic assessment

In the area, old traditions such as cultural and historical heritage including the medieval Tskhemlari Bridge, the Gvara Fortress (6th-7th century AD), different churches and monasteries, and other ethnographic
attractions such as an old wine press are well preserved. Popular ceremonies and celebrations are also part of the cultural activities in Machakhela region. The popular Machackala Festival holds in the second half of September (APA, 2017).

Eight villages are located in the area that many of local inhabitants have maintained their own farm, agriculture and local production which enables the area for tourism attraction.

Like Camili, Machakhela has specific geographic and climatic conditions. Main part of the site is mountainous. The lack of agricultural lands does not allow development of large-scale farming. Therefore, mostly small farming land is presented. Thus, industrial sector is more significant such as tea factories, inert material factories, building blocks manufacturing (Gvakharia, 2011; 2-205).

2.2.3. Planning Approaches

Georgia’s biodiversity is threatened by unsustainable logging of forests, over-grazing of pastures, poaching of wildlife, the cultivation of wetlands, the inappropriate development, mining and quarrying, and mass tourism. Georgia’s main strategy for the biodiversity conservation is to develop a network of protected areas.

The National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan with regard to Protected Area Development have been considered by the Georgia’s government since 2005, in which the Eco-regional Conservation Plan for the Caucasus serves as a guiding document. However, there are weaknesses in the policy framework as to the integration of environmental protection into national policies and communication between ministries with functions related to natural resources management (WWF, 2011).

The two Protected Area projects in the Machakhela including Mtirala National Park (area of 35,000 hectares; 20,000 hectares covered by forest), and Kintrishi Protected Area are two important conservation priorities in the Lesser Caucasus. Machakhela National Park that is recently established and is still underdeveloped joins on the south with the Camili Biosphere Reserve in Turkey (APA, 2017). Establishment of Machakhela PA consolidates the network of PAs in the region and fill the gap in the whole ecosystem. Furthermore, Machakhela National Park can create an excellent opportunity for transboundary cooperation with the aim of a better protection and integrated management of the huge area (Figure 4).

![Machakhela National Park](image.png)

Figure 4. Machakhela Valley crossed the border of Turkey and Georgia and links to the Camili Watershed Area

-Machakhela National Park

In 2015, Machakhela National Park was established with a total area of 7,359.44 hectares. The park was located in the gorge of the Machakhela River in the Adjara Region of Georgia. It supports the ecological corridor between the protected areas of south-west Georgia in particular, Mtirala National Park and Kintrishi State Reserve and the protected area of north-east Turkey in particular, Camili Biospheric Reserve (figure 5) (UNDP, 2016).
Regarding the Adjara Protected Areas as a potential for tourism development, it is important to address issues like the governance and participation of different administration levels, local communities, private sectors in decision-making and issues related to sharing revenue (UNDP, 2016). Objectives in Machakhela National Park in Georgia include:
- Conservation and protection of unique ecosystems;
- Tourism development;
- Creation of an ecological corridor between the protected areas of south-west Georgia and protected areas of north-east Turkey;
- Improve socio-economic conditions for local community;
- Promoting transboundary cooperation linking the Machakhela national park with the adjacent protected areas in Turkey.

Camili (the part in Turkish territory) has been defined as biosphere reserve by IUCN that covers two Nature Reserves inside the area. While, the part of Machaekhela Valley located in Georgia with the same ecological and natural characteristics as Camili has another management plan. Main land of this part has been considered as a protected area that should be complete the NPs network in Ajara region of Georgia besides two other National Parks existing in the area. Based on the Table 1 (Tablo 1), each categories of Biosphere Reserve and National park considers some specific objectives defined by IUCN. National parks and other kinds of protected natural areas are primarily concerned with conservation; however biosphere reserve aims to do research and sustainable development as well.

Table 1. The definitions and aims of Nature Park and Biosphere Reserve according to IUCN categories.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Definition (IUCN)</th>
<th>Primary Objectives (IUCN)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biosphere Reserve</td>
<td>A larger area of land that may cover multiple National Parks and reserves.</td>
<td>- To conserve genetic resources, species, and ecosystems;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It may also include the entire buffer and tourism zones and offers protection to</td>
<td>- To do scientific research and monitoring;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>not only the wildlife and flora but to the indigenous people as well.</td>
<td>- To promote sustainable development in communities of the surrounding region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Some controlled economic activities will be permitted in these areas - like</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>mining and farming.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>It protects large-scale ecological processes, along with species and ecosystems</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National park</td>
<td>It also provides a foundation for environmentally and culturally educational,</td>
<td>- To protect natural biodiversity along with its ecological structure;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and recreationally opportunities.</td>
<td>- To support environmental processes,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- To promote education and recreation.</td>
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3. Results And Discussion

Machakhela valley is a huge green area that its ecological and cultural qualities have made it truly valuable. This area is under threat from the incompatible management and conservation policies considered for its various parts, as the area crosses the political border of Turkey and Georgia. Conditional analyses of two parts ended up with recognition their existent potential and problems that are summarized in the Table 2.
Table 2. Summary of the Camili and Machekhela’s characteristics based on their values and limitations.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part</th>
<th>Values</th>
<th>Limitations</th>
</tr>
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| Camili (Turkish Part) | - Unique biodiversity and rich wildlife (carnivore species, endemic Caucasian species)  
                        - Various landscapes of rain forests, meadow and mountain  
                        - Rich water sources  
                        - Traditional and rural lifestyle  
                        - Numerous archaeological sites and historical monuments  
                        - Ethnographic values and authentic production systems  
                        - Specific architecture of wooden houses | - Cold and harsh winter  
                        - Limited income resources  
                        - No permission to do various activities  
                        - Inappropriate roads and hard transportation |
| Machakhela (Georgian Part) | - Caucasus region’s biodiversity  
                         - Precious flora (Colchian species)  
                         - Cultural landscape of farming  
                         - Pristine nature and majestic landscape  
                         - Festivals and popular programs  
                         - Anthropogenic landscapes  
                         - Possibility of doing industrial activities besides agricultural production | - Lack of land for farming  
                         - Unsustainable land use (logging of forests, over-grazing of pastures, cultivation of wetlands)  
                         - Poaching of wildlife  
                         - Mass tourism  
                         - Limited economy |

Machakhela NP shares its south border with the Turkish Camili Biosphere Reserve. After recognition the need for transboundary conservation by international organizations such as United Nation Development Program (UNDP) and International Union for Conservation of Nature (2013), the idea of establishing transboundary protected areas was mentioned (UNDP, 2016).

The management system of Camili should be open and adaptable to the community concerns; and the local circumstances. Camili management strategy in Turkey seems to care more about protection and less about the tourism opportunities. However, the Machakhella National Park in Georgia is more known for its touristic opportunities.

By considering the Machakhela Valley that covers whole of the areas including villages, Karcal Mountains, Camili Biosphere Reserve, Machakhela National Park as an international peace park between Turkey and Georgia, some issues as to both part can be alleviated. Some potential achievements that creating a Transboundary Protector Area (or an international peace park) would be:

- to harmonize natural resources management approaches to enhance ecosystem integrity and ecological processes; and facilitate wildlife migration;
- to promote the management of biological and cultural resources and encourage social and economic partnerships and stakeholders to do investment in the area with regard to protection strategies;
- to consolidate trans-national collaboration and co-operation in implementing ecosystems and cultural resource management;
- to promote tourism and eco-tourism through the removing the borders;
- to develop strategies that local communities can benefit from the peace parks; benefit from the increased eco-tourism to the area
- to give better knowledge of ecological and socioeconomic dynamics of the area by educational opportunities

All in all 6 main phases are suggested for establishing such a park in the site.

Phase 1 is to analyze;
- Natural environment, climate, topography, ecological systems and natural resource areas (wild life, vegetation, water surfaces) and geology and Landscape assessment;
- Cultural heritage;
- Socio-cultural economic environment, population characteristics, cultural structure, values, human migration, local participation, tourism, economic situation, settlement, infrastructure;
- Agriculture systems, capacity building, demand analysis, residents’ perception and preferences;
- Environmental quality problems, institutional structures, existing plan and policies, legal framework.

Phase 2 is to determine the formulation of the planning approaches such as environment -sustainable development approach carrying capacity, community participation approach- maximum participation of the
effected community in the planning process and constantly overlapping flexible approach that emphasizes constant observation and feedback to do corrections.

Phase 3 is to produce plans and suggestions related to management plans including associated programmers, to create geo-referenced base maps for the selected site, to carry out baseline surveys (Key Biodiversity Area, land use, socio-economic), and to delineate the external boundaries of Peace Park.

Phase 4 is zoning the area that defines areas with special protection (strictly and semi protected), areas with potential for tourism and recreation like cross border festivals, and multi-purpose protection area determined for protection tourism and recreation area.

Phase 5 is to integrated monitoring and witness the application of the plans and the realization after plan prepared according to the suggestions.

Phase 6 is to observe the situation conflicting with objective and plans produced after policies and suggestions, and to do necessary arrangement and feedback.

4. Conclusion

Cooperatively environment management is a really complex process that should evaluate various factors. Similarly, creating a common conservation area between nations or countries deals with various cultural and environmental issues and it takes a long time to achieve the expected results through the cooperative management. In the case of Turkey and Georgia, the main issue is not just the conservation approaches, however the cultural and economic challenges as to the residents living in the villages should be considered as priorities of the cooperative activates. The native people’s (as the main element of the place identity) issues of the both parts located in Turkey and Georgia and their expectations should have been studied through the process as well as the other items. The economic and cultural interaction of the villages’ residents located in both parts can improve the economy through the local trades and protect the traditional life styles of the residents by sharing the differences and consolidating the similarities.

REFERENCES


