Collaborative Management of National Parks: The Case of Retezat National Park, Romania

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The managers of protected areas now recognize that protected area management needs to take a cooperative and collaborative approach with local stakeholders in order to share the responsibility for management (Lane 2001; Kothari et al. 1996; Leikam et al. 2004; Bramwell & Lane 2000). It is socially and politically unacceptable to exclude from a protected area local stakeholders who live close to or within that protected area without providing them with viable economic alternatives, nor is it acceptable to exclude them from the decision making process (Leikam et al. 2004). The participation of stakeholders in the process of information sharing and decision making is a crucial precondition for tourism planning to evolve with minimum negative impacts (Bramwell & Lane 2000). However, involving a broad range of stakeholders in the planning process is not an easy task. It can be extremely challenging and time-consuming to reach consensus on the many, often incompatible interests of the stakeholders. Nevertheless, stakeholder collaboration can generate many potential benefits such as 'political legitimacy': collaboration processes are more legitimate and equitable than traditional approaches to planning, as the former encourage sharing and participation, in which the beliefs and advice of non-experts (e.g. local community members) are as equally valid as those of 'experts' (Bramwell & Sharman 1999; Hall 1999; Healey 1997). Furthermore, by sharing the ideas, resources and expertise of stakeholders, the group creates "something new and valuable together – a whole that is greater than the sum of its individual parts" (Shannon 1998; Taylor-Powell et al. 1998, in Lasker et al. 2001, 184).

This paper reports on a study of the collaborative management of Retezat National Park (RNP), which is located in the western part of Romania. RNP is Romania's oldest national park (established 1935) and was one of the country's first parks to implement a model of collaborative park management (Stanciu 2001). To examine this collaborative management project, a framework focusing especially on process-related issues (i.e. working processes, relationships and capacities) that may shed light on collaborative management processes was developed.

This paper provides insight into the dynamics of stakeholder collaboration in protected areas, with the aim of guiding other researchers who are engaged in the examination of collaborative management initiatives in protected areas.

Study area

RNP covers an area of 38,000 ha, of which 1800 ha are under strict protection in what is known as the Gemenele Scientific Reserve. Within RNP, there are more than 20 peaks that are higher than 2000 m; the highest – at 2509 m – is the Pelegea peak. In 1979, RNP was declared an International Biosphere Reserve under the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2004).

Until 1999, there was no special management body in place to plan and implement management activities (Stanciu 2001). However, in 1999 the RNP Management Plan was established to create a park management infrastructure by adopting a collaborative planning approach. For this, two new management bodies were established in 2003: the Scientific Council and the Consultative Council. The membership of the Scientific Council includes representatives of governmental, scientific and administrative institutions whose role is to approve and evaluate the activities of the RNP management. The membership of the Consultative Council includes representatives of key stakeholders; it too plays an advisory role, yet in contrast to the Scientific Council it does not have any formal authority to influence decisions taken by the RNP management. The study reported on here examined collaborative management within the Consultative Council but not within the Scientific Council. For a thorough analysis of the collaborative management of RNP, stakeholders of the Scientific Council should have been included in the study.

Examining collaborative management

Including local stakeholders in the management of protected areas is becoming increasingly commonplace. "This new paradigm, or co-management, decentralizes the decision-making power from solely government agencies to one of shared governance with local communities" (Lane 2001, in Leikam et al. 2001,1). However, "co-management arrangements are not an end in themselves – they are formed to achieve other goals, with the implicit or explicit recognition that by acting together partners can accomplish more than by acting alone" (Caplan & Jones 2002, 1).

Stakeholders can be involved in many different ways in the management of protected areas. Arnstein's well-known 'ladder of participation' (1969) is subdivided into eight rungs of participation, ranging from non-participation to citizen's control. However, many people criticize Arnstein's ladder as it implies that the "higher rungs of the ladder are more desirable than the lower" (Byrne & Davis 1998, 13). On the other hand, Borrini-Feyerabend's continuum (1996), for example, stretches from full control of a protected area by a governmental organization to its full control by local people. In this participation spectrum, there is no 'right place' for co-management: "the collaborative management processes and agreements should fit the needs and opportunities of each context" (ibid., 22).

Once a collaborative management approach has been selected and implemented in a protected area, monitoring must be carried out to ensure that action plans stay on track (Frey 2000), to promote participants' learning about the programme and its per-

formance (Binnendijk 1996) and to help keep the collaborating partners involved in the process (Frey 2000). A review of the literature indicates an abundance of studies on collaboration in protected areas. Various studies (e.g. Endicott 1993; Mattessich & Monsey 1992; Long & Arnold 1995) examined conservation collaboration; many of these studies present procedural frameworks and guidelines for collaboration, and identify many factors that influence collaborative management processes. These processes depend not only on formal institutional structures on which partnerships are established, but also on the personalities, motivations, involvement, communication, skills and power of each individual involved (Ladkin & Betramini 2002; Lasker et al. 2001).

However, the majority of such studies focus on analysing formal institutional structures and the impacts and achievements of the shared goals of the collaborative group (Ross et al. 2004). These approaches also concentrate primarily on 'tangible' outcomes (e.g. improvement of the biophysical environment). Much less attention is paid to how such collaborative arrangements work in their own way (Bellamy et al. 2001), with a focus on the more intangible aspects of collaboration at the process level, in which issues such as access to information, relationships, and level of trust and respect among stakeholders are taken into account. As co-management arrangements are not an end in themselves, the present research should have made a direct link between the measurement of intangible aspects of collaboration and the measurement of tangible outcomes and impacts in terms of, for example, nature conservation or socio-economic development around the RNP. In other words, ideally one should be able to link processes of collaboration with the results of that collaboration. This, however, was beyond the scope of the research.

Collaborative management framework

There is a lack of concrete frameworks to assist in the analysis of the process level of collaboration, which is surprising as "it is just as important for the partnership to work well from the point of view of all parties, as for the outcomes to be achieved" (Ross et al. 2004, 53). In order to develop a framework for analysis, criteria were identified that are supposed to have some bearing on collaboration (stakeholder's involvement, communication, etc.). In this respect, four frameworks were very useful for this study. Lasker and colleagues (2001) provided a framework identifying 19 determinants that influence the level of synergy in partnership arrangements; the determinants form a framework consisting of 5 categories (resources, partner characteristics, relationships among partners, partnership characteristics, external environment). Second, Mattessich and Monsey (1992) identified 20 factors influencing collaboration and grouped them into 6 categories (environment, membership characteristics, process and structure, communication, purpose, and resources). Third, Toupal and Johnson (1998) identified eight characteristics of public and private partnerships. Fourth, Borrini-Feyerabend (1995) set out indicators of collaborative management processes; these indicators provide a means to analyse the process by which collaborative management was established in a protected area. These four studies form the basis of the framework presented in this paper.

To develop a comprehensive framework, the four sources were mutually compared. For example, in Mattessich and Monsey (1992) the factor "appropriate cross-section of members" was identified, whereas Lasker and colleagues (2001) identified the factor 'heterogeneity of partners.' Although different concepts are used, the content is highly similar as both relate to a cross-section of stakeholders. Similar factors were then selected for incorporation into the framework for this study. The factors that did not overlap were independently analysed and, based on our own judgement, either accepted or rejected for inclusion in the framework. This resulted in the identification of 21 factors to examine collaborative management processes in protected areas. The factors were then subdivided among five dimensions: external environment, stakeholder characteristics, relationship and communication, process and structure, and resources. Together they were put in the framework presented in table 1. The main reason to develop this framework was to provide a list of factors when examining collaborative management processes in protected areas.

Study method

The purpose of the study was to develop and apply a framework consisting of criteria for examining the collaborative management of protected areas. A case study approach was adopted in order to assess the practicability of the framework and to examine the collaboration at RNP. Qualitative research was executed to elicit detailed information regarding attitudes towards and opinions and values of collaboration in the case of RNP. As the co-management framework consists of factors like 'mutual respect, understanding and trust' or 'involvement', these concepts were translated in an extensive list of interview questions (see Van Hal 2006). Twenty-one semi-structured interviews were conducted in April–June 2006 with key stakeholders of the Consultative Council. Although the Council comprises 25 members, not all could be interviewed due to the members' lack of time or lack of interest in participating in this study. Nevertheless, the 21 respondents interviewed represented an appropriate cross-section of RNP community interest (i.e. environmental protection agency, county council, mayors of local communities, cabin owners, NGOs, etc.). The interviews were based on a flexible semi-structured interview format, which allowed for questions to emerge from the information offered. The flexible nature of the interview style facilitated informal conversations and provided a deeper insight into issues such as trust and power among the stakeholders. Each interview lasted 45–90 minutes. The first eight interviews were taped with a voice recorder. However, it seemed that the use of the voice recorder influenced the answers as respondents seem to speak more openly when the voice recorder was stopped. Therefore, the remaining thirteen interviews were not taped. Instead, extensive notes were taken during the interview sessions. Immediately after each conducted interview the interviews were transcribed. Data of the resulting transcripts were organized on the basis of themes, concepts and related features, allowing identification of a broad pattern for the concepts and themes that emerged (Medeiros de Araujo & Bramwell 2002). Local reports and other documents provided antecedent data to supplement, verify and substantiate the empirical findings (Cutumisu 2003).

Study findings

The following are the findings in relation to the five dimensions of the collaborative management framework (see table 1). These dimensions are external environment, stakeholder characteristics, relationship and communication, process and structure, and resources.

Table 1. Collaborative management framework for protected areas

Dimensions	Factors	Literature references[1]
External environment	- A history of collaboration and corporation in the community	2,3
	- Community support	2,3,4
Stakeholder characteristics	- Appropriate cross section of stakeholders	2,3
	- Involvement	1,2,3,4
Relationship and communication	- Open and frequent communication	2,3,4
	Awareness on power and its influence on the collaboration process among stakeholders	2
	- Ability to compromise	3,4
	Acceptance that conflict can sharpen stakeholders' discussions on issues and can stimulate new ideas and approaches	2
	- Mutual respect, understanding and trust	2,3,4
	- Established formal and informal communication links	1,2, 3
Process and structure	Confidence and satisfaction with the decision making process and partnership decisions taken	2
	- Shared vision	3,4
	- Feeling of ownership	3
	- Openness to a varied ways of organising itself and accomplishing its work	3
	- Clear understanding of roles, rights and responsibilities	1,3,4
	- The roles and responsibilities match the particular interests and skills of each stakeholder	1,2,3
Resources	- Sufficient funds	2,3,4
	- Availability of space, equipment and goods available	2,3
	- Skilled convener	1,4
	- Availability of analysis and documentation	2,3

[1]The following four sources form the basis of the collaborative-management framework developed in this study;

1. Borrini-Feyerabend, G. (1996) Collaborative management of protected areas: tailoring the approach to the context. IUCN –The World Conservation Union.

2. Lasker, R., Weiss, E., Miller, R. (2001) Partnership Synergy: a practical framework for studying and strengthening the collaborative advantage. In the Milbank Quarterly Vol. 79, No. 2 2001. Milbank memorial fund. Published by Blackwell Publishers. Malden MA, USA and Oxford, UK.

3.Mattessich, P., Monsey, B. (1992) Collaboration what makes it work: A review of research literature on factors influencing successful collaboration. Amherst. H Wilder Foundation. St. Paul, MN.

4.Toupal, R., Johnson, M. (1998) Conservation partnerships: indicators for success. NRCS Social Sciences Institute University of Arizona.

A. External environment

One set of issues when examining the collaborative management of protected areas is the 'external environment.' These external factors are "beyond the ability of any partnership to control" (Lasker et al. 2001, 196) and are divided into two levels: the history of collaboration, and community support. First, collaboration is more likely to succeed in communities that have a history of working together: "A history of collaboration or cooperation exists in the community and offers the potential collaborative partners an understanding of the roles and expectations required in collaboration and enables them to trust the process" (Mattessich & Monsey 1992, 15). In Romania, there is no or only very little history of collaboration. The country used to have a 'super-centralized' (Popescu 1993) planning and control system (i.e. a Communist regime). This top-down system may have affected involvement and trust in collaboration processes. Interviewees confirmed that Romanians have lost their confidence in collaboration: "Since the Communist regime, many [Romanians] have become suspicious and distrustful and have lost their confidence in collaboration" and "For cooperation, you need to have some trust in each other, and that is a difficult aspect as [since the Communist regime] nobody trusts anyone any more."

Second, having broad-based community support is essential for the sustainability of the partnership (Goodman et al. 1998; Mattessich & Monsey 1992; Lasker et al. 2001). Interviewees generally considered the community support to be 'satisfactory.' According to many respondents, most external parties (e.g. the general public) perceive RNP positively, because they are confident that "RNP brings them economic benefits." However, the local landowners had some 'problems' with the RNP management. All interviewees mentioned that land owners feel restricted by the laws and rules of the Romanian government and the RNP management, which prohibit woodcutting and limit sheep grazing: "The landowners feel they no longer have control over their own land, because woodcutting is not allowed and sheep grazing has been regulated too strictly" and "Conflicts on limitation of sheep grazing remain between the park management and local landowners."

B. Stakeholder characteristics

An examination of the collaborative management of protected areas should also consider the people involved. People more than any other aspect of collaboration influence the processes of collaboration: "Strip away the rhetoric and the theory, and the concept of partnership is all about people that are collaborating together on one common goal" (Long & Arnold 1995, 109). What is needed is an appropriate cross-section of stakeholders. This means that the collaboration group includes representatives of each segment of the community that will be affected by the activities of the collaborative group: "Partnerships need to identify and actively engage partners with a sufficient range of perspectives, resources and skills to give the group a full picture of the problem, to stimulate new, locally responsive ways of thinking about solutions, and to implement comprehensive actions" (Lasker et al. 2001, 191).

Many relevant key stakeholders groups are represented in the Consultative Council (local communities, forest directorate and forest districts, mountain rescue teams, school inspectors, environmental protection agency, cabin owners, NGOs, etc.).

Respondents said that the inclusion of many stakeholders has resulted in "more open and frequent communication" and that Council meetings contributed to 'an increased understanding' between the stakeholders.

Another critical factor in collaboration is the involvement of stakeholders (Lasker et al. 2001; Mattessich & Monsey 1992; Toupal & Johnson 1998). According to Roberts and Simpson (1999, 1), "in many former socialist countries of Central and Eastern Europe the concept of developing wider involvement in decision making processes remains inherently problematic." This may be the result of Romania's Communist history: it would not be "unreasonable for people who used to be limited in local decision making to be slow to respond positively to calls for active participation" (Turnock 1996, in Roberts & Simpson 1991, 319). In this study, 'involvement' was measured by assessing the interviewee's participation in RNP activities (e.g. 'hiking days') or attendance at least two out of three Council meetings, by the way they maintained contact with the Council members and the RNP management at and outside regular meetings, and the way they expressed that they 'felt' committed to RNP in general. Surprisingly, involvement did not seem to constrain collaboration in RNP; 19 of the 21 respondents said that meetings were often extremely well attended by the stakeholders and that many of them participated in and/or co-organized RNP activities (e.g. a mountain rescue event). Sixteen respondents even underlined their willingness to be more involved with RNP management activities.

C. Relationships and communication

A third set of issues when examining collaborative management processes in protected areas is related to the relationships and communication between the stakeholders. It is generally acknowledged that building relationships is one of the most daunting and time-consuming challenges a team faces (Kreuter et al. 2000). Ideally, "collaborative group members must interact often, update one another, discuss issues openly, and convey all necessary information to one another and to people outside the group" (Mattessich & Monsey 1992, 16). The character of the dialogue is likely to be a major factor in whether there is mutual understanding and learning across the differences among stakeholders (Forster 1993; Friedmann 1992; Innes 1995, in Bramwell & Sharmann 1999, 398). The interviewees stated that they felt very confident about the internal communication in the Council, and emphasized that there was "honest and open communication among stakeholders" in which "it is possible for each member to give their opinion and advice." Several mentioned that through the Council, stakeholders now "understand and have better contact than ever before." However, all interviewees reported their dissatisfaction with the frequency of communication with the RNP management, and many complained that they were not being kept up to date with the latest park developments. Two respondents explained: "I only get information from the park management when I specifically ask for it" and "The park management rarely informs the Council about recently taken decisions or recent activities."

Some interviewees said that if the poor communication with the RNP management continued, they would leave the Council: "I am just getting more and more annoyed by the 'communicative skills' of the park management." Power differences

can also seriously influence collaboration since they limit "who participates, whose opinions are considered as being valid, and who has influence on the decisions made" (Israel et al. 1998, cited in Lasker et al. 2001, 193).

'Power differences' were examined by asking interviewees who has the power to take final decisions, by requesting examples of successful and unsuccessful decisions taken by park management, and by asking whether the interviewees felt that they were 'heard' by the other stakeholders. Data from the semi-structured interviews indicated a fair distribution of power among Council members; all but one respondent mentioned that power is shared by the Council as a whole: "The voting system that we apply for taking final decisions ensures that each stakeholder has equal power, as the most votes count." Furthermore, interviewees once more mentioned their ability 'to speak freely' and to influence the Council's decision-making process.

However, there was less satisfaction regarding the attitude of the park management towards the Council: according to many (17) of the interviewees, the RNP management regularly takes decisions without the Council's approval. The following example illustrates this point. Four hydropower companies are located within the park area. These companies existed long before the Communist period, and the Romanian government allows them to carry out their activities in RNP. However, the RNP management tried to evict the hydropower companies from the park area because their activities disturb the natural flora and fauna in RNP. This was against the will of most Council members (16), who stated that such activities harm the environment only minimally and that the hydropower companies create a lot of employment. According to one interviewee, the hydropower companies "account for almost two thirds of the employment in this area." As a consequence, Council members did not feel that the RNP management was listening to them, because they simply continued their attempts to evict the hydropower companies from the park area. One Council member complained: "The example of hydropower companies and many other examples clearly show that our opinions are not taken into consideration," and "the RNP management has such a 'conservation ethic'; it only takes their own concerns into consideration."

Third, the degree to which collaborative stakeholders are able to compromise is also likely to have a strong influence on collaboration. This factor concerns whether cooperating stakeholders accept that collaboration is likely to produce qualitatively different outcomes and that they are likely to have to modify their own approach (Bramwell & Sharman 1999). "Participants who are more likely to accept these principles become more receptive to alternative ways of thinking and new types of policy proposals" (ibid., 379). RNP's stakeholders underlined the importance of reaching compromise, yet considered compromise a 'time-consuming task.' Several respondents criticized the efficiency of the decision-making process: "Some meetings get extremely boring because issues are discussed too extensively, even if there is already a compromise." Nonetheless, according to some, compromise is often reached since stakeholders have a shared vision, namely nature conservation: "We are connected through our shared vision of nature conservation and sustainable development and can mostly find a compromise that largely suits each stakeholder."

Fourth, the acceptance of conflicts plays a role: "Rather than being considered an obstacle to planning, conflict should be considered 'acceptable' as conflict may provide opportunities for mutual learning" (Daniels & Walker 1996, 12). Within the Council, stakeholders said that they did not have any 'real' conflicts that were worth noting. Various respondents said that "discussions and debates exist in almost every group and should not be avoided." However, interviewees again mentioned the complicated relationship with the RNP management, because the interests and opinions of the Council are not always taken into account in the RNP's final management decisions. Again, interviewees referred to the discussion about whether or not to evict the hydropower companies from the park (see also the factor 'Awareness of power and its influence on the collaboration process among stakeholders').

Fifth, mutual respect, understanding and trust influences collaboration: "Mutual respect, understanding and trust means that collaborating stakeholders share an understanding and have respect for each other and their respective organizations; how they operate, their cultural norms and values, limitations and expectations" (Mattessich & Monsey 1992, 15). To work closely together, stakeholders who are involved in collaboration need to be confident that other stakeholders will follow through on their responsibilities and obligations and will not take advantage of them (Lasker et al. 2001). In addition, "Respect is also critical as it is difficult to imagine how a partnership can achieve success unless its other stakeholders appreciate the value of the others' contribution and perspectives" (Lasker et al. 2001, 192). Data obtained from the semi-structured interviews with RNP's stakeholders were quite contradictive. On the one hand, it seemed that the stakeholders respected, trusted and understood each other; this could be concluded on the basis of direct questions put to the respondents (e.g.: With which members do you prefer to collaborate? With whom do you least prefer to collaborate?). The stakeholders did not seem to have particular preferences and indicated that they were able to collaborate with all the other stakeholders.

On the other hand, data from direct questions (e.g.: What is your opinion about the existence of trust, respect and understanding within the RNP area?) revealed distrust and suspicion among stakeholders in the RNP region. Interviewees once again mentioned that Romania's history negatively affects trust in collaboration. Although some respondents denied the existence of 'distrust,' the majority (18) stated that there is little trust among RNP stakeholders. One interviewee even stated that nobody in the Council trusts anyone else in the Council: "I don't trust them and they don't trust me. It negatively influences the collaboration atmosphere." And: "Trust is a heavily loaded concept, as we Romanians generally do not have confidence in each other."

Interviewees said that 'distrust' exists throughout the country, and therefore should not be interpreted as a 'regional issue.' In addition, interviewees mentioned hat 'trust in collaboration' has slowly increased among Council members, but were not able to give an example of this.

Finally, channels of communication must exist on paper so the information flow occurs: "The types of information that partnerships need go beyond statistical data to include the perspectives, values and ideas of different stakeholders as well as information about the community assets" (Lasker et al. 2001, 190). By disseminating information, cooperating stakeholders can stay involved in the collaboration process

(Petrova et al. 2002). At RNP, it seemed that formal and informal communication links are quite well established. Regular meetings and annual workshops stimulate ongoing communication between Council members. Furthermore, these members are kept up to date by means of a monthly email that informs them about Council developments, and they meet informally during community or park activities. However, the communication with the RNP management is in contrast to the satisfactory communication between Council members: all respondents reported that they were dissatisfied with the frequency of communication with the management (see also 'Open and frequent communication').

D. Process and structure

Another set of issues to consider when examining the collaborative management of protected areas is related to the process and structure of the collaboration: structures (e.g. administration, management, governance) are likely to have a strong influence on collaboration (Lasker et al. 2001). Structures "affect the ability of partnerships to actively engage an optimal mix of partners, create an environment that fosters good working relationships among partners, and combine the perspectives, resources and skills of different partners" (ibid., 191).

First, there should be confidence in and satisfaction with the decision-making process and the decisions taken: "when stakeholders support and have confidence in the process they are likely to be calm and positive towards the run-up towards the taken decision" (ibid.). Almost all the interviewees said that they were satisfied with the decision-making process in the Council. Final decisions are put to the vote; interviewees experienced this as an 'honest' system. Compromise is reached to the extent that such is possible. Interviewees were very satisfied with the decision-making process, as they could 'state their opinions openly' and all members 'listened and respected each other's opinions.' However, several interviewees criticized the efficiency of the decision-making process.

The interviewees were pleased with the decision-making process in the Council, but were very dissatisfied with the decision-making process of the RNP management. As mentioned earlier by Council members (see also 'Relationships and communication'), the RNP management takes final decisions that do not always have the support of the Council (e.g. in the case of evicting the hydropower companies). One interviewee said: "We're often asked for our opinions, but these are often not taken into account in the end."

Second, stakeholders should be committed to a shared vision. Results indicate that stakeholders have one main vision, namely nature conservation: "We collectively strive for natural protection of RNP." Although the Council members have a common goal, they all keep their individual stakes, such as 'gaining economic benefits for their cabins' or developing children's activities for the local schools.' Members reported that having a common vision positively influenced the collaboration, as it 'really added to the feeling of being one unity.'

Third, members of a collaborative group should feel 'ownership' of the way the group works and of the results and products of its work. To achieve this, "operating principles should aim to promote a certain feeling of ownership about decisions

and outcomes: inter-agency working groups, participating in regular planning and monitoring the collaborative effort can solidify ownership and ongoing commitment" (Mattessich & Monsey 1992, 12). There seemed to be a sense of ownership among the RNP's stakeholders. According to the interviewees, the Council serves as a 'network' in which members collectively "strive for nature protection and economic development in RNP." This 'feeling' may have been stimulated in 2000 through several interactive working groups that were created for the implementation stage of the Management Plan. But again, the interviewees were not positive about 'ownership' regarding decisions taken by the RNP management (see also 'Awareness of power and its influence on the collaboration process among stakeholders').

Fourth, flexibility is an important factor in collaboration. "Monitoring the group to ensure it remains flexible is important, since groups often tend over time to solidify their norms in ways which constrain their thinking and behaviour" (Mattessich & Monsey 1992, 12). In RNP, flexibility seems warranted because the management structure is evaluated each year. In those evaluations, stakeholders "critically reflect on management progressions in RNP, and set new goals and actions for the next year."

Fifth, in collaboration processes there should be a clear understanding of roles, rights and responsibilities: "In order to involve all relevant stakeholders in co-management, especially local communities, roles and responsibilities need to be defined and clarified; otherwise, the roles and responsibilities for implementing ad funding participatory mechanisms, as well as, the delegation of power will remain unclear" (Barborak et al. 2002, 30).

However, at RNP there are no specific management agreements in place that define and clarify the roles, responsibilities and rights of each stakeholder. The Council plays only an advisory role in RNP issues and developments, and legally does not have any other rights. Therefore, this factor was not investigated. Although insight was gained into the willingness to have designated roles, rights and responsibilities for each member, the majority (16) of the interviewees said that they were not interested in having own specific rights, roles and responsibilities.

E. Resources

A fifth set of issues is related to the available resources, since financial and human input are necessary to develop and sustain a collaborative group (Mattessich & Monsey 1992, 17): "stakeholders should have a perception that sufficient resources are devoted to collaboration in order to ensure that progress is not interrupted by lack of resources" (Jamal & Getz 1995, in Bramwell & Sharman 1999, 401). RNP obviously lacks funds, since many proposed projects could not be realized: "The RNP management and we [the Council] wanted to build a hotel that would meet the EU accommodation standards, a hotel that could then well serve as an example for local communities. However, due to a lack of funding, this plan could not be realized."

The Council depends financially on the RNP management, which each year grants the Council a certain amount of money to finance its activities. In turn, the RNP management depends mainly on international donors, although the state and the National

Forest Administration (NFA) also provide some funds (Stanciu 2001). According to the interviewees, the RNP management is active in grant writing and fund-raising activities.

Second, partnerships must have enough space, equipment (computers, stationery) and goods (Lasker et al. 2001). The interviewees unanimously reported that they were satisfied with the availability of space, equipment and goods.

Third, there should be a skilled convener: "The convener is a neutral person or organization that can build consensus to the objective of the co-management plan and the interests of its stakeholders: the convener must have organizing and interpersonal skills, and carry out the role with fairness" (Mattessich & Monsey 1992, 34). A skilled convener is granted 'legitimacy' by the stakeholders in the collaboration involved. At present, RNP has no designated convener. According to the respondents, the Consultative Council and the Scientific Council were playing this 'outsider's role.'

Fourth, analysis and documentation capacities are critical to provide partners with materials that "synthesize their ideas and help them to make timely decisions and also to evaluate the functioning and process of the partnership" (Lasker et al. 2001, 194). Sufficient information seemed to be available within the Council. However, many respondents complained about the provision of information by the RNP management to its stakeholders. The respondents want information letters or bulletins to be distributed on a monthly basis: "In this way, people would remain up to date about the developments within the Retezat region."

Conclusions

The study reported on in this paper first developed a framework for examining collaborative management processes in protected areas; the development was based on criteria derived from a comparison of four existing frameworks. The resulting framework consists of five dimensions: external environment, stakeholder characteristics, relationships and communication, process and structure, and resources.

Based on this framework, the study then examined the collaborative management of RNP. The framework allowed the identification of a number of issues that have an effect on that collaborative management.

Collaborative management of RNP

The application of the framework revealed several aspects that affect the collaborative management of RNP. For example, the Consultative Council included representatives of many relevant key stakeholder groups, and there was willingness among these stakeholders to be involved in the RNP management activities.

Bringing stakeholders together in the Council resulted in more open and more frequent communication, and increased the understanding between the stakeholders. This may also be attributed to the formal and informal communication systems that distribute information to all Council members. Within the Council, stakeholders were aware of the need for compromise, and in most cases negotiation led to a compromise that largely suited each stakeholder. They were also satisfied with the decision-making process and system: each stakeholder said that he or she had the ability to

speak freely and to influence decisions. Finally, the availability of sufficient space, equipment and goods stimulated the collaborative management of RNP.

However, other aspects were identified that hampered collaborative management. Although communication among the stakeholders represented in the Council was satisfactory, the relationship between the Council and the RNP management was fairly problematic, as Council members' voices were not always heard. Council members did not feel that they could influence decisions made by the RNP management and felt that the latter made decisions without the support of the Council. In the present management structure, the Council does not have any formal authority to influence decisions. However, the voices of Council members were not heard in an informal way either. In addition, stakeholders expressed their dissatisfaction with information distribution towards local communities and wanted to be more informed about developments within RNP.

Suspicion and distrust among the RNP's stakeholders also constrained collaborative management; this may be attributed to Romania's post-Communist context, which may negatively affect trust in collaboration. This is a problem, because collaborative management completely fails without trust and sincerity (Roberts & Simpson 1999). Two other stakeholder conflicts were also identified: one related to the landowners, the other to the hydropower companies. Another problem is related to a lack of funding, as a result of which several projects could not be realized.

To overcome constraints, it is recommended to provide Council members with the formal authority to influence the decisions of the RNP management. Formal agreements should be developed and implemented in the RNP management plan. This may help increase stakeholder's formal decision-making power. Appointing a skilled convener may be helpful in this process. To increase trust and respect among RNP's stakeholders, it is advised to organize team-building activities and workshops on collaboration. However, it should be noted that trust takes time to develop and sufficient time should be provided, especially when considering Romania's post-Communist character. Consequently, landowners and hydropower companies should be included in these activities in order to improve the current conflict situation with the RNP management. Last, to improve RNP's financial situation, it may be useful to actively involve the Council in RNP's fundraising activities.

Evaluation of the framework for examining collaborative management processes

The study also developed a framework for examining collaborative processes. Although more studies and case studies should be executed to validate the practicability of the proposed framework in this study, the framework stimulated a wide-ranging examination of collaborative management, based on an assessment of the external environment, stakeholder characteristics, relationship and communication, process and structure, and resources. Nevertheless, the proposed framework can only serve as a guideline for other researchers. In individual cases, different factors may play an essential role: a particular factor (e.g. a national park's history) that may seriously affect collaboration in one protected area will not necessarily be very influential in another protected area. Investigating collaboration processes by means of this framework also requires longitudinal research; as collaboration processes take time,

so should research into these processes. To gain insider perspectives on collaboration the researcher should 'go native' and be involved for a longer period of time and not just conduct field research for a couple of weeks, as in this case.

The framework also pays little attention to the power relations that underlie collaboration. Although the present study did pay some attention to power relations and the influence on collaboration processes, it is essential to put more emphasis on power, as the case study at RNP once more confirmed that power relations can seriously influence collaboration.

Finally, application of this framework does not automatically reveal the successfulness of collaboration (or the lack of such), as that also at least partly depends on the outcomes of this collaboration in terms of tangible impacts (nature conservation, socio-economic development, etc.). The assessment of outcomes was beyond the scope of this research project, but should be included in follow-up projects in order to be able to link processes of collaboration with the results. It is only by examining these two aspects that proper insight will be gained into the successes and drawbacks of collaborative management approaches in protected areas.

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