



Benchmarking of national parks on Curonian Spit – LT/RU

1. Policy Objective & Theme

- SUSTAINABLE USE OF RESOURCES: Preserving coastal environment (its functioning and integrity) to share space

2. Key approaches

- Integration
- Participation
- Knowledge-based
- Ecosystems based

3. Experiences that can be exchanged

The results of the study allow to state that once the methodologically coherent basic management and planning foundations are laid at the very early development stage of neighbouring cross-border protected areas, then these coherent foundations support the common transboundary cooperation framework in the long-term. This common framework is resilient to any further deviations in protected area conservation and management and various impediments, particularly, if a close cooperation and coordination is pursued by the staff of both parks on key management issues. It is critically important precondition for meeting fundamental transboundary cooperation criteria, which are identified by the EUROPARC as Primary Standard Criteria (particularly, sharing the common vision) and Primary Field of Work (nature and landscape conservation compatibility with the guidelines and recommendations for the application of the IUCN Protected Area Management Categories in Europe). If coherent basic management and planning foundations are absent at the early development stage of neighbouring protected areas, then it is advisable to establish a joint team of the national park staff and external experts, which, with the help of the EUROPARC experts, should facilitate management coherence of both national parks in order to achieve a European trans-boundary protected area status.

4. Overview of the case

The Curonian barrier spit separates the Curonian Lagoon from the Baltic Sea. Politically it is divided between Russia and Lithuania. *Kurshskaya kosa* national park was established on the Russian side of the spit in 1987, and *Kuršių nerija* national park on the Lithuanian side followed in 1991. The advantage for the management coherence of both national parks is that the Lithuanian and Russian expert teams, which had developed initial master plans for both parks in the early 1990s, applied identical functional zoning, forest management and dune conservation approaches. These approaches had been developed in the late 1980s by Lithuanian spatial planning and forest management experts (Kavaliauskas, 1995; Riepšas, 1995) in close cooperation with their Russian counterparts. Moreover, in 2000, the whole Curonian Spit was included into the UNESCO World Heritage List as a single internationally important cross-border cultural landscape. This initial situation provided a good framework for continued close cross-border coherence of the Curonian Spit management. Yet, existing differences in the nature conservation approaches between the European Union and the Russian Federation cause certain deviations in the national park management approaches on both sides of the border. The benchmarking study provides a useful tool to accomplish the objective comparison of the current management performance in both national parks and to assess the qualification of the Curonian Spit as a European trans-boundary protected area.

5. Context and Objectives

a) Context

The Curonian barrier spit lies to the west and northwest from the Curonian Lagoon. It separates the lagoon from the Baltic Sea. Politically it is divided between Russia and Lithuania. *Kurshskaya kosa* national park was established on the Russian side of the spit in 1987, and *Kuršių nerija* national park on the Lithuanian side followed in 1991. The length of the Curonian spit is 98 km and the width varies from 380 m to 4 km. Modern landscapes of the Curonian Spit resulted from dramatic changes that took place during the 17th-19th centuries. In that time, ancient forested parabolic dunes that prevailed since the mid-Holocene were completely destroyed by drifting sand and replaced by mobile barchans. Until now, the dune landscapes of the Curonian Spit are the most dynamic in the Baltic Sea area.

According to the national legislation in Russia and in Lithuania, both national parks are protected by the state. The national parks establish a set of regimes on the territory depending on their natural, historical, cultural value. These are: (1) strictly closed zone – strict nature reserve (Rus. *zapovednik*, Lit. *rezervatas*), (2) protected zone – managed nature reserve (Rus. *zakaznik*, Lit. *draustinis*), where strictly regulated visits are allowed; (3) restricted ecotourism zone. The protected zone (2) currently encompasses more than a half of the area in both national parks on the Curonian spit. This area mainly covers the coastal fore-dune, the forested areas of the dune ridge and the accumulative sand plain (*palve*).

After the extensive forestation programme of the 19th century, there are four strips of the migrating barchans dune ridge still left on the spit. The total length of these is 30,6 km, 20,9 km on the Russian side and 9,7 km on the Lithuanian side. All four strips are protected as strict nature reserves within the national parks. Approximately 50 km of the formerly mobile barchans are covered by 100-year old dwarf Mugo pine plantations. Now they form an exotic dune scrub landscape, which in time became one of the landmarks of the Curonian Spit. These forested barchans are protected as managed reserves in both national parks. The areas in and around eight settlements of the Curonian Spit are designated as restricted ecotourism zones where a limited development of leisure facilities is permitted.

In 2000, the whole Curonian Spit was included into the UNESCO World Heritage List as a single internationally important cross-border cultural landscape. This situation provided a good framework for continued close cross-border coherence of the Curonian Spit management. Yet, existing differences in the nature conservation approaches between the European Union and the Russian Federation cause certain deviations in the national park management approaches on both sides of the border (Povilanskas, 2004). Therefore, there is a critical need to secure the initial coherence of the national park management on both sides of the border. The benchmarking study provides a useful tool to accomplish the objective comparison of the current management performance in both national parks and to assess the qualification of the Curonian Spit as a European trans-boundary protected area.

b) Objectives

1. To compare current nature conservation and forest management approaches and performance in the *Kuršių nerija* and *Kurshskaya kosa* national parks.
2. To make a preliminary assessment whether both national parks qualify for the EUROPARC certificate of a European trans-boundary protected area.

6. Implementation of the ICZM Approach (i.e. management, tools, resources)

a) Management

Differences in nature conservation approaches between the European Union and the Russian Federation are mainly related to different management paradigms – integration in the European Union and segregation in the Russian Federation. EU Bird and Habitat directives emphasize designation of NATURA 2000 areas and application of landscape and habitat conservation and management measures there. These measures are supported by Structural and other funds. The better part of the Curonian Spit on the Lithuanian side is subject to the EU Habitat Directive, which prescribes an integrated approach towards the management of the NATURA 2000 series. Meanwhile, on the Russian side, the

Soviet nature management paradigm is still continued, which emphasizes spatial division of different functional zones. Such approach renders it meaningful in one instance to make a drastic structural interference into the recreational zones, in yet another, to maintain very strict regulations for the use of and access to protected zones (Roepstorff & Povilanskas, 1995). Lithuanian nature conservation system, which was built on the Soviet paradigm, currently tries to accommodate both approaches. The long-term goal of the implementation of the trans-boundary approach in the habitat conservation of the Curonian Spit is to ensure the coherence of habitat and landscape conservation policy on both sides of the border, both, in Lithuania and in Russia. For this aim, it is necessary to compare the current management performance in both national parks and to assess, whether the Curonian Spit qualifies as a European trans-boundary protected area.

b) ICZM tool

Out of 40 different valuation tools, currently used to assess the management performance of the protected areas worldwide 31 are only used in Europe (Leverington et al., 2010). For the Curonian Spit, the most suitable management assessment technique is provided by the 'Trans-boundary Parks - Following Nature's Design' initiative, which is developed by the EUROPARC Federation, as it directly addresses the issues of the trans-boundary coherence in the protected area management.

The verification and certification of trans-boundary protected areas by EUROPARC is based on a set of clear, universal criteria and indicators, which have been approved by the European Commission's DG Environment. Ten out of the fourteen Basic Standards must be achieved before certification can be achieved: All four Primary Criteria, three out of five Secondary Criteria, all the criteria from the Primary Field of Work and two out of four Secondary Fields of Work must be fulfilled. The protected areas must also demonstrate how they involve local communities in the trans-boundary cooperation and how the socio-cultural differences of the cooperating parties are acknowledged and respected (EUROPARC, 2010). EUCC Baltic Office has conducted a preliminary screening of the trans-boundary coherence in the management of both national parks on the Curonian Spit in 2008 using a scorecard approach. The management of the study was based on series of interactive workshops with the national park stakeholders on the Curonian Spit on both sides of the border.

7. Cost and resources

Complete costing is not available

8. Effectiveness (i.e. were the foreseen goals/objectives of the work reached?)

Our preliminary results show, that both parks could meet minimal criteria, which are necessary to qualify as a European trans-boundary protected area.

The Basic Standards Criteria:

1. Primary Criteria

- 1.1. **Vision – 5 (excellent).** The vision of both national park administrations is nearly identical and the wider benefits of trans-frontier cooperation for the entire protected area are recognized by all partners.
- 1.2. **Fields of Work – 3 (moderate).** Many, but not all fields of work of the cooperation are determined jointly and are set within the frame of a mid-term work plan.
- 1.3. **Official Agreement – 4 (good).** Official cooperation agreement is signed and supported by the UNESCO World Heritage status, although not always respected.
- 1.4. **Staff – 3 (moderate).** Staff with responsibility for cooperative activities meets regularly to discuss management, evaluate progress and exchange knowledge and experience, but a joint steering committee is absent.

2. Secondary Criteria

- 2.1 Guiding Rules for Cooperation – 1 (bad).** The rules that guide cooperation and ensure permanent exchanges of information, the running and documentation of joint meetings, joint decision-making and dispute settlement are missing.
- 2.2 Exchange of Data – 4 (good).** Many, but not all fields of work of the cooperation are determined jointly and are set within the frame of a mid-term work plan.
- 2.3 Foreign Language Communication – 3 (moderate).** All Lithuanian national park staff members speak fluent Russian, although other foreign language skills are missing among the staff of both parks.
- 2.4 Ecological Monitoring – 0 (no).** No systematic linking of the resources for the ecological monitoring of the shared ecosystem.
- 2.5 Basis of Financing – 5 (excellent).** Project proposals for international funding are jointly prepared and submitted.

3. Primary Field of Work

- 3.1. Nature and Landscape Conservation – 5 (excellent).** The joint activities are compatible with the guidelines and recommendations for the application of the IUCN Protected Area Management Categories in Europe. Cooperation in the field of nature and landscape conservation is developed through concrete activities and projects.

4. Secondary Fields of Work

- 4.1. Education and Communication – 0 (no).** Regular trans-frontier cooperation in the field of 'education and communication' is absent.
- 4.2 Recreation and Sustainable Tourism – 2 (weak).** Trans-frontier opportunities for people to experience nature and enjoy the landscape are impeded by a very complicated visa regime between the EU and Russia.
- 4.3. Research and Monitoring – 3 (moderate).** The partners implement common mutually agreed research activities, but joint monitoring programmes are absent.
- 4.4 Mutual Understanding and the Promotion of Peace – 5 (excellent).** The partners stimulate and support joint activities, which promote cultural understanding and the sharing of cultural experiences, and which facilitate the building of communication and trust between neighbouring communities and peoples.

9. Success and Fail factors

a) Success factors

1. Similar landscape and its recent evolution on the Curonian Spit on both sides of the border. As the state border on the Curonian Spit between Lithuania and Germany was present only in 1920 to 1938, and between Lithuania and Russia is present only since 1991, the management of the Curonian Spit for many centuries, including the better part of the 20th century, was identical on the entire Curonian Spit with few regional differences (Povilanskas, 2004).
2. As already mentioned, the key to the successful management coherence was the joint development of the initial master plans for both parks in the early 1990s, applying identical functional zoning, forest management and dune conservation approaches.

b) Fail factors

1. Russian Federation hasn't signed the Bern Convention (1979), which is a binding international legal instrument in the field of nature conservation covering most of the natural heritage of the European continent. Its aims are to conserve wild flora and fauna and their natural habitats and to promote European co-operation in that field.

2. Russian Federation hasn't signed the European Landscape Convention (2000), also known as the Florence Convention, which promotes the protection, management and planning of European landscapes and organises European co-operation on landscape issues.
3. Due to strong state level influence and a lack of full stakeholder inclusion, different philosophies and priorities on both sides of the border challenge common management efforts and co-operation (Moritz, 2010).

10. Unforeseen outcomes

None as yet

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13. Sources

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14. Relevance for cross-border management of transitional waters

Trans-boundary protected areas encompassing transitional water bodies or their adjacent habitats are critically important for the reinforcement of the environmental integrity. Benchmarking of coherence and differences in the management regime is an important tool helping to identify the bottlenecks of the cross-border co-operation. Therefore this case study is of high relevance for the cross-border management of transitional waters of Europe.