Case Study: The Prespa Park Basin

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Introduction to the transboundary river basin/lake/aquifer

Hydrology, economic activities, social and environmental issues, institutions, management

Situated in SE Europe, Prespa forms a single high altitude[1] tri-border basin shared by Albania, Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. The basin covers a total area of 1,519 Km^2 and encompasses two interlinked tectonic Lakes - Great and Lesser Prespa - and their surrounding mountains.

Despite being located at a threefold border junction, Prespa forms a unitary region with rich shared natural and cultural heritage. It is an area of global importance for its biological diversity, best known for the impressive populations of rare water birds; the world largest breeding colony of the Dalmatian pelican being the most noteworthy (Crivelli and Catsadorakis, 1997). Remarkable also is the wide variety of recorded habitats, the presence of endangered mammal species and the high degree of recorded endemism among its plants, invertebrates and fish (Crivelli et al., 1997). Besides, Prespa is also famous for its cultural values, which extend from Byzantine monuments, traditional architecture and unique local traditions and practices.

National protected areas are established in all three countries sharing the basin; however the level of protection varies across the region. Parts of all sides are characterised as wetlands of international importance under the Ramsar Convention, while the Greek part of the basin is designated as a protected area under the EU Law.

Nevertheless, unsustainable human practices in the basin bring about deterioration of natural resources. Main threats to the ecosystem include: water and soil pollution, deforestation, soil erosion, depletion of fish stocks and biodiversity loss (TDA, 2009).

Lakes Lesser and Great Prespa - among the oldest ones in Europe[2] (Eftimi et al., 2001) - are separated by a narrow isthmus, situated within the Greek part of the basin. Lesser Prespa lies higher than Great Prespa and flows into the latter through surface and underground waterways. The surface outflow is controlled by a sluice gate which regulates the water level of Lesser Prespa. The operation of the gate lies under the Greek National Park authority, which conforms to the optimum water level fluctuation limits agreed among the local stakeholders after extended national and transboundary consultations. The basin has no natural surface outflow (Hollis and Stevenson, 1997). Notwithstanding the serious gaps in knowledge of the area hydrogeology, there is a well-documented underground hydrological connectivity with Lake Ohrid via karst channels[3]. Major inflows include five permanent rivers flowing into Lake Great Prespa. Lesser Prespa has no permanent inflows.

The Prespa region has a turbulent history of conflicts and political tensions between the littoral states. Wars, people relocations and immigration characterised the history of the region up until the early 1960s, rearing ethnic identity issues within the local populations (Malacou, 2011). During the Cold War era, Prespa was a remote border area in all three countries and contacts among the people were virtually non-existent. Relations among the countries significantly improved after the fall of

[1] 850asl

[2] Estimated age of the lakes is between 2 and 35 million years.

[3] Lake Ohrid lies 150m lower than Great Prespa.

Communism, in 1989 (Christopoulou and Roumeliotou, 2006). Nevertheless, bilateral relations among Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia remain intense due to the unresolved Macedonia naming dispute.

The three states sharing Prespa feature economic asymmetries as they have diverse historical backgrounds and face legal and political disparities. At present, Greece is an EU member state while Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia are both on their ways to accession[4]. Still, all three parts of the basin share certain common features, stemming mainly from their proximity to national borders and their common recent history. Similarities include isolation due to relative remoteness from major population centres[5], low population density (c. 26,000 inhabitants[6]), depopulation, unemployment, underdeveloped services sector, predominance of the agricultural sector[7] and hurdles in the marketing of local products.

Description of the process of transboundary water cooperation

Parties, institutions, evolution, key milestones, key achievements, key challenges

The sprout of transboundary cooperation in Prespa emerged after a non-governmental sector initiative. Advocacy efforts of the locally based NGO Society for the Protection of Prespa[8] and WWF, supported by the Ramsar and MedWet international organisations, led to the Joint Prime Ministerial Declaration on the “Creation of the Prespa Park and the Environmental Protection and Sustainable Development of the Prespa Lakes and their Surroundings” on 2 February 2000. Despite past turbulent relations and prevailing political uncertainty in the region, Prespa would become the first transboundary protected area in SEE on the 29th anniversary of the World Wetlands Day.

The Declaration recognised that “*the conservation and protection of an ecosystem of such importance not only renders a service to Nature, but it also creates opportunities for the economic development of the adjacent areas that belong to the three countries*” and provided for the enhancement of cooperation and the undertaking of joint activities for the protection of the ecological values of the region, the prevention of habitat degradation and the management and sustainable use of water resources for the promotion of peace among the three peoples (Declaration, 2000).

Shortly following the Prime Ministerial Declaration, a provisional institutional multisectoral structure was established to facilitate inter-state cooperation up until a more binding undertaking was realised among the littoral states. The Prespa Park Coordination Committee (PPCC) was formed, by decision of the Ministers of Environment, as a non-legal entity representing the central government, the local authorities and the NGO sector of the three Parties, including also one permanent observer from the Ramsar Convention/MedWet system[9]. The PPCC, which operated from 2001 until 2008, had been holding regular biannual as well as extraordinary meetings and was fulfilling a political,

[4] Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a candidate country and Albania a potential candidate country.

[5] Only one city of app. 17,000 inhabitants is situated at the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia part of the basin.

[6] The basin population is appr. 26,000 people: Albania: 4,285 (2000 census), FYR of Macedonia: 20,665 (2002 census), Greece: 1,060 (2011 census)

[7] Intensive fruit growing in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and bean mono-cultivation in Greece, as well as small and medium sized cultivations in Albania where productivity is much lower due to the non-operational irrigation system.

[8] The Society for the Protection of Prespa is seated in the Greek part of the basin and consists of seven Greek and three international member organizations.

[9] The Prespa Park Coordination Committee was an interim, ten-member body composed of representatives of the national environmental authorities, the local municipalities and the environmental NGOs active in the region, as well as a permanent observer of the MedWet/ Ramsar Initiative. Initially established for a two-year period (in 2000) the structure was envisaged to be evaluated by the three Parties up until the setting up of a more permanent tripartite collaboration scheme.

institutional, administrative and technical role while coordinating planning and activities in the region. The Committee's work was supported by a trilateral Secretariat consisting of officers from the three participating NGOs[10]. Over the years, the institutional operation has been supported and funded by the international community (UNDP, GEF, KfW, Ramsar Bureau, MedWet Initiative and WWF), the national NGOs that undertook the Secretariat duties and the governments and municipalities of the three littoral states.

Ever since its establishment the PPCC has acted as a forum for communication, information exchange and collaboration among the parties, enabling the cultivation of trust and the planning and implementation of joint activities at various levels.

Landmarks in cross-border water cooperation as of today include the following:

1. A binding Agreement on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park signed by the three littoral states (at a ministerial level) and the European Commission in 2010. The Agreement focuses on water management and provides for a formal structure of institutional cooperation for waters; i.e. a permanent multi-sectoral water management working group. It has been ratified by two out of the three littoral states and the European Union (Agreement, 2010).
2. Development and endorsement by the Parties - after extensive consultations with stakeholders at all levels - of a joint Strategic Document which lays down a common vision for the basin, the mutually agreed objectives and an action plan for their accomplishment (SPP, 2005).
3. Consolidation of municipal cross-border cooperation demonstrated by an independent joint position of the mayors of the three states emphasizing the need for water management cooperation (2003) and the signing of two Memoranda of Understanding (2007 & 2012) expressing convergence of will among the mayors of the region[11].

Major achievements, joint activities and work also include:

a. Commitment of the Prespa Park stakeholders to found water management cooperation on the basis of the integrated water resources management principle as incorporated in the EU legislation[12]. To this effect, as of today, national River Basin Management Plans have been finalized for the two parts of the basin (Greece and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

b. Strengthening of inter-state water cooperation, through the realization of working meetings among the national water management authorities and the formulation of draft ToRs for a transboudary water management working group.

c. Development of a transboundary monitoring system covering all key environment-related issues in the Prespa basin[13] under the guidance of a cross-border, multi-stakeholder Working

[10] The Society for the Protection of Prespa has been hosting the seat of the Prespa Park Coordination Committee Secretariat and provided financial and logistic support to its operations.

[11] The mayors of the three littoral states have agreed on common goals which among others include the protection of the natural and cultural heritage of the region, the opening of cross-border points and the direct road connection of the adjacent municipalities and the creation of a free trade and transaction zone in the Prespa basin.

[12] EC Water Framework Directive, 2000/60/EC.

[13] The Transboudary Monitoring System project was implemented by the SPP in collaboration with the UNDP/GEF Prespa Regional Project (See footnote 25), with Tour du Valat France as the Scientific/ Technical Consultant and with the support of national experts from the three countries. It covers 7 thematic areas: Water, Aquatic Vegetation & Habitats, Forests & Terrestrial Habitats, Fish & Fisheries, Birds & Other Biodiversity, Socio-economy, Landuse. More info and project reports are available at: http://www.spp.gr/monitoring_en (accessed 10 April 2014).

Group[14] which ensured consensus at all stages of development (Perennou et al., 2009; Gletsos and Perennou, 2011). The water monitoring component of this system is streamlined with the national water monitoring systems but has not been implemented so far (Gletsos et al., 2012).

d. Strengthening of the civil society cooperation, through the establishment of transboundary environmental NGO Network which aims to promote conservation and sustainable development activities across the borders[15].

e. Implementation of transboundary monitoring activities, such as synchronized mid-winter waterbird counts at the three parts of the basin and monitoring of other bird and fish species[16].

Benefits of transboundary water cooperation (N.B. not the benefits generated by the "water" itself).
Qualitative (and quantitative if available) description of the benefits generated so far by the process of transboundary water cooperation.

Environmental benefits:

1. Better scientific knowledge on water quality status and undertaking of appropriate action to address eutrophication issues in the lakes[17]
2. Mitigation of water pollution as a result of: i) the reduction of agricultural runoff[18], ii) the improvement of agricultural waste management practices[19] and iii) the improvement of wastewater management systems[20]
3. Aversion of water and wetland-related threats, namely the decision for the non re-activation of past river diversion works which have had adverse environmental and social impacts in the region[21]

[14] The Monitoring and Conservation Working Group involved representatives of the protected areas, the national authorities, the NGOs and the academic sectors of the three states (see more at http://bit.ly/1m88CSd).

[15] See footnote 23

[16] Transboundary monitoring activities are realized with the collaboration of the NGOs and protected area authorities.

[17] Preliminary water monitoring in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (conducted within the frames of the UNDP/GEF Prespa Regional Project) and Greece (see more in Maliaka and Smolders, 2013 and online on http://bit.ly/QmiUAh) revealed a susceptibility of the Prespa Lakes to eutrophication. The findings have triggered the undertaking of vital projects in the two countries to further investigate and address the issue. Those include the launching of a multi-annual project in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia part of Lake Greater Prespa , funded by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation-SDC (see more at http://www.lakeprespa.mk/default.aspx) and a long-term eutrophication assessment of the Prespa Lakes within the Greek territory, undertaken by the SPP with the collaboration of European scientific institutes (see more at http://bit.ly/1gXbyJk).

[18] Reduction of agricultural inputs is achieved through the shift to more environmentally friendly methods of cultivation in the bean mono-cultivation in Greece and the introduction of Good Agricultural Practices in apple production in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which has included the establishment of an agrochemical laboratory and an agro-meteorological monitoring system that provides farmers with information on wise agro-chemical use.

[19] Agricultural waste management practices are improved through the establishment of an agricultural waste management system and the introduction of a biodegradable waste management system in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

[20] Wastewater management improvements in the region include the enhancement of wastewater systems and the construction of wastewater treatment plants in Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

[21] In the mid '70s the Prespa Lake system was artificially connected to a river of an adjacent basin, in Albania, to serve agricultural purposes. The operation of the diversion works, which carried on until 2004, caused significant ecological and social impacts in the area. Repeated discussions of the issue at the Prespa Park Coordination Committee meetings, backed up by a bilateral (Greek-Albanian) study for the evaluation of the problem, cultivated a mutual understanding by all parties and resulted in the formal commitment of the respective country authorities to halt the operation of the works in the future. Such a decision at a national level would not have been possible without ongoing lobbying efforts at the

Social benefits:

1. Improved local societies’ satisfaction due to: i. the greater international recognition of the area, ii. the realization of on-the-ground projects and activities, and iii. an increased sense of inhabitants’ pride for the value of their living area
2. Strengthened civil society partners actively participating in conservation and sustainable development activities[22]

Geopolitical benefits:

1. Building of trust, improvement in information exchange and knowledge transfer, increase of awareness and enhancement of dialogue among stakeholders at all levels
2. Institutional development at the transboundary level – Signing of the International Agreement on the Prespa Park (see landmark #1 in previous paragraph)
3. Convergence of views and institutional development at the transboundary municipal level – Joint position of the three mayors and Memoranda of Understanding setting common priorities and collaboration goals (see landmark # 3 in previous paragraph)
4. Strengthening of cross-border cooperation at various sectors – i.e. workshop meetings of the respective water, fisheries spatial planning authorities, the veterinary and fire-fighting services and the protected area bodies.
5. Development of a transboundary environmental NGO network - the Prespa Net - for the enhancement of cooperation and the preservation of natural values of the Prespa region[23]

Qualitative (and quantitative if available) description of the benefits that could be generated in the future by a stronger process of transboundary water cooperation.

Future benefits of transboundary water cooperation in Prespa could be summarised as follows, according to the Prespa Park objectives stated in the Strategic Action Plan adopted by the Prespa Park Coordination Committee (SPP, 2005):

1. Conservation of ecological values and functions and of the biological diversity in the Prespa Park area
2. Enhancement of opportunities for sustainable economic and social development of the local societies and wise use of the natural resources for the benefit of nature, local economies and future generations
3. Preservation of cultural values, such as monuments, traditional settlements and traditional human activities, and of cultural elements that promote the sustainable management of natural resources.
4. Participation, cooperation and involvement in decision making and in benefit or loss sharing of stakeholders in the three countries.

transboundary level and communication of the detrimental diversion effects both within the institutional framework for transboundary cooperation and towards the competent authorities.

[22] See footnotes 19 & 23.

[23] The Prespa Net is a transboundary network of environmental NGOs which decided to join forces for the conservation and sustainable development of the Prespa region. It was established on March 2013, with the signing of an Agreement of Cooperation by the NGOs Macedonian Ecological Society (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia), Protection and Preservation of the Natural Environment of Albania (Albania) and Society for the Protection of Prespa (Greece) aiming to enhance cooperation between the different stakeholders, enable better flow of information on ecological and sustainable development issues and influence environmental policies concerning the area. See more at: http://bit.ly/1qydMWZ.

Have the parties needed/requested an assessment of the (actual or potential) benefits of transboundary water cooperation?

At what stages in the cooperation process was the benefit assessment needed/ requested? What type of benefits assessment (in terms of scope and level of detail) was needed/ requested?

The first comprehensive assessment of the potential benefits of transbounday water cooperation was undertaken at the very early stages of cooperation, following the Parties decision to jointly develop a Strategic Action Plan for the Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park (SPP, 2005). The SAP was developed with the collaboration of the three environmental NGOs participating in the Prespa Park governance scheme[24] and WWF Greece, as well as national and international experts. The draft document underwent extensive consultations with local, regional and national stakeholders in each side of the basin until it was endorsed by the Prespa Park Coordination Committee in May 2004.

The Strategic document provides for a description and analysis of the catchment basin, including environmental and socio-economic parameters and trends, and lays down a joint vision and objectives for the region. Moreover, it identifies the main management issues that relate to all three countries and require coordination and provides for a list of specific indicators for environmental protection and sustainable development (see next paragraph for more information).

A revision of the SAP, involving also a Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis study, was conducted within the frames of a multi-annual project for the Integrated Ecosystem Management in the Prespa Lakes Basin, co-funded by the international community[25]. The revised SAP concludes at a series of long-term environment quality objectives to address current and potential environmental threats to the basin (see next paragraph for more information). (TDA, 2009 & SAP, 2012)

How were the benefits estimates derived?

Methodologies used, data used, peer review of results, critical assessment of the quality of the results.

The Strategic Action Plan identifies environmental and socio-economic policy fields on the basis of those adopted at the 5th Environmental Action Programme of the European Community. In accordance to the above, the policy fields identified in the Prespa basin are: Status of biodiversity, Status of natural resources, Spatial planning, Waste, Water quality & Water quantity, Economic prosperity, Convergence between countries, Education, Empowering of citizens, Public health & Infrastructure (SPP, 2005).

The environmental indicators selected to measure impacts on the environment are based on the development of environmental pressure indicators for the EU, adapted to the Prespa specialties as well as availability and reliability of data. The list of proposed indicators includes:

[24] Society for the Protection of Prespa - SPP (Greece), Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania – PPNEA (Albania) and Macedonian Alliance for Prespa – MAP (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia).

[25] The UNDP/GEF Prespa Regional project (2006-2011) aimed at improving water resources management and conserving biodiversity in the region, through the implementation of activities at the national and transboundary level. With regard to water management, the project foresaw the strengthening of institutional cooperation and the development of water management plans in the two recipient countries - Albania and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia - and eventually the transboundary coordination of water management, which, however, did not materialize during the life of the project. The project was co-funded by the GEF, the three Governments and other international donors and implemented by UNDP. More info at: http://prespa.iwlearn.org/.

Environmental indicators		**Socioeconomic indicators**
Water quantity Lake level	Status of Natural Resources Water use Share of consumption of renewable energy resources (as a ratio of total) Nutrient balance of the soil Timber balance Fishing pressure	Economic prosperity Convergence between countries Empowerment of citizens Infrastructure Education Public health
Water quality Nitrogen and phosphorus used per hectare of agriculture land Pesticides used per hectare of utilized agriculture land Non-treated wastewater Index of water quality Bio-indicatords	Status of biodiversity Important area loss and damage Fragmentation of landscapes Wetland area change Forest area change Percentage of specific habitats, ecosystems, species Changes in land uses	
Solid waste Waste land filled		

The Transboundary Diagnostic Analysis conducted in 2009 provides data, reviews and expert judgement of the state and pressures on the basin environment, as assessed by a team of national experts - and consulted with national stakeholders - under the guidance of an International Consultant (TDA, 2009). The TDA concludes at the following transboundary priority threats (current and potential pressures) to the ecosystem: degradation of water quality and pollution, land use changes and lack of spatial planning, unsustainable fishery management, drop of Great Prespa water level, and sediment erosion. The initial five priority transboundary concerns where refined to three Major Perceived Problems, summarized as follows: 1. Decline in water quantity & quality, 2. Lack of spatial planning and 3. Habitat changes and biodiversity loss. Finally, to address the aforementioned concerns the revised SAP lists several environment quality objectives (SAP, 2012).

How were the benefits assessment's findings communicated?
Government agencies targeted, other stakeholders targeted, type of information given, when was the information given.

The Prespa Park Strategic Action Plan was the first project completed jointly by experts of the three adjacent countries. Expected to serve as a guidance document for future activities in the Prespa basin, the SAP Executive summary was translated in the national languages of the three littoral states and disseminated to all respective public authorities and key stakeholders (SPP, 2005)..

Over the years of institutional cooperation in Prespa, the benefits of transboundary cooperation (both actual and potential) are systematically communicated to diverse stakeholders at different levels. Communication activities have been tailored to serve: 1. Wider awareness raising purposes (stakeholders, residents, general public) and 2. Specific advocacy purposes (state authorities, European Commission, international community). This process catalyzed institutional development at multiple levels (local, regional and transboundary).

As an institutional structure, the Prespa Park Coordination Committee (PPCC) provided a platform for cooperation among the three states. Serving as an interface between the national and local authorities, the environmental NGOs and the international community, the Committee fostered

connections and benefits transmission among various public authority levels and groups of stakeholders. In addition, the PPCC’s role extended beyond that, to the establishment and maintenance of a communication channel with all bodies and organizations with an interest in Prespa, including national authorities and services of different public sectors, civil society, academia, international organizations and the general public.

Moreover, awareness raising and involvement of the intermediate levels of government and the local societies was set to be one of the main tasks of the Committee and its Secretariat (PPCC, 2001-2007). The Secretariat fostered information dissemination of activities and plans in the region to diverse governmental levels and stakeholders, maintained regular information of governmental authorities on the Prespa Park achievements and promoted dialogue on the problems and issues of the region among the three states (PPCC, 2001-2007). Besides ongoing briefings and contacts to the central, regional and local public authorities aiming at the formalization of institutional cooperation, special effort was made for the integration of different actors in the Prespa Park process. The institutional setup was the vehicle for the outset of trilateral cooperation among other sectors, as it provided a platform for the organization of events and working meetings among public authorities of various sectors and other key stakeholder groups, such as the water, the fisheries, the spatial planning and the protected area authorities.

The Secretariat had a vital public relations role in the communication of the transboundary cooperation and its associated gains. To this effect a Communication Plan was prepared and a communications officer reinforced the Secretariat’s work at this field for a period of two years.

The Communication Plan identified the following target audiences:

- Public authorities and decision makers at all levels, i.e. central (competent for water management and other sectors) regional and local authorities
- Protected area authorities
- Business/ producers associations
- Local communities
- Environmental NGOs (national & international)
- International organizations and donor community
- General public in each country and internationally

The main Prespa Park communication tools have included: an identifiable Prespa Park logo, a website[26], national and international press releases and press conferences, public awareness material (a multilingual newsletter and fact sheets disseminated locally to the three sides of the basin) and joint activities at the local level.

How were the benefit findings used by the target audiences?

Being the first document ever to formulate a shared vision for the transboundary Prespa basin and to identify main environmental and socio-economic pressures in the region (the alleviation of which is eventually translated into benefits), the Strategic Action Plan for the Sustainable Development of the Prespa Park provided a basis for the formulation of activities and projects in the region, funded by either the national authorities or the international community. The most noticeable, long-term project, which was based on the Strategic Plan’s suggestions, was the multi-annual UNDP/GEF Prespa Regional project on Integrated Ecosystem Management in the Prespa Lakes Basin[27]. The

[26] The PPCC website was hosted at the MedWet/Ramsar central website for better leverage. It served in promoting the Prespa Park initiative to certain stakeholder groups and to the international community. Still, the nature of the tool and the language barriers (only English spoken site) blocked the entrance mainly to the regional and local authorities and the local people. Also, a stand-alone Prespa Park website was launched within the frames of the international GEF Project (2008). Both sites are currently non-operational mainly due to lack of funding support.

[27] See footnote 25

Prespa Park Coordination Committee served as the Supervisory Committee during the second preparation project phase (PDF B) and as the Project Oversight Committee for the transboundary component of the international project.

Awareness and appreciation of the benefits derived by the transboundary cooperation in Prespa, motivated the renewal by the national authorities of their political support to the process (with the signing of the International Agreement between the three states and the EU) and triggered the undertaking of cooperation initiatives at other sectors (see next paragraph for details).

Have the findings of the benefit assessment been useful in strengthening the transboundary water cooperation process?
Were the findings credible? Were they actionable? What decisions have been influenced by the benefit assessment's findings?

In spite of its initial interim status, and the lack of a legally binding foundation, the Prespa Park institutional structure provided a formal communication channel that enabled regular information flow and sharing of benefits among stakeholders of the countries and between different sectors. Better awareness of transboundary cooperation benefits among main stakeholder groups facilitated building of partnerships and deepening of cooperation at the sectoral level, culminating in the gain of political support for a legally binding agreement between the states.

Milestones in the maturation of transboundary cooperation include: (a) the International Agreement on the Prespa Park signed by the three littoral states and the European Commission in 2010, which provides for cooperation on a formal legal and institutional basis; (b) the consolidation of municipal cross-border collaboration, expressed by the signing of trilateral agreements among the mayors of the region[28] and c) the strengthening of cross-sectoral cooperation through workshop meetings of the respective water, fisheries and spatial planning authorities, the veterinary and fire-fighting services as well as the protected area bodies and NGOs.

Nevertheless, institutional collaboration at state level has come to a halt due to a serious delay in the ratification of the international Agreement by one of the contracting countries, which is hoped to be rectified soon. Hence, it is obvious that the maintenance of political will and state commitment requires continual communication of the benefits at the high governmental level. On the other hand, the strong commitment to transboundary cooperation of the littoral municipalities indicates that the gains of water cooperation are more accepted and evaluated at the local level.

Key messages and lessons learned for others
What worked well? What did not worked so well? Why? Possible improvement in short, medium and long term.

- Communication of benefits is effective when tailored to a specific purpose and target audience; Awareness-raising and advocacy purposes necessitate different means and tools
- Involvement of stakeholders (policymakers, experts, beneficiaries) in the benefit-assessment efforts is crucial as it increases the parties’ feeling of ownership and it enhances better dissemination of the gains
- Established cross-border networks, partnerships and institutional structures intensify the benefits spreading scaling up the impacts in policy; At the same time, appreciation of mutual benefits builds trust among stakeholders and fosters networking and engagement in the transboundary cooperation process

[28] See footnote 11

- Benefits of transboundary water cooperation are better appreciated and valued by local stakeholders; Yet institutional measures and high level mandate are required for the effective long-term management of water resources
- Communication of transboundary cooperation benefits at the local level is more successful when being transmitted from the local level; i.e. local stakeholders such as NGOs with presence and on the ground activities in the region
- Communication of benefits at the local level (local communities, associations, resource users) increases community awareness and catalyses stakeholder involvement in transboundary cooperation; which in turn enhances benefits in the region
- A joint, multi-language website can serve as a powerful outreach tool for the communication of transboundary cooperation benefits to diverse stakeholder and moreover attract international interest and funding support to the cooperation process
- Effective and continuous sharing of benefits to diverse audiences requires financial resources which may be provided by international organisations and the donor community

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to thank Dr. Vivi Roumeliotou for her constructive comments and Mr. Miltos Gletsos for his useful recommendations.

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