

**THE DINARIC ARC INITIATIVE (DAI)  
AN EXAMPLE OF  
INTER-INSTITUTIONAL  
COOPERATION FOR THE  
PROMOTION OF THE LOCAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT**

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**PREFACE**

There is no web site, neither a permanent secretariat nor a specific budget. Despite that, the *Dinaric Arc Initiative* (hereinafter referred as DAI) has been an active platform of cooperation for a growing number of international organizations, ranging from United Nation agencies to large NGOs, since more than two years ago.

The name originates from the geographical scope: the mountain chain extending from the North-Eastern corner of Italy (the Karst area around Trieste) Southwards, until Albania, called 'Dinaric Mountain' or 'Dinaric Arc'.

The *incipit* was offered by the Mediterranean Programme of the WWF, in December 1995, a meeting was called in Rome to discuss with potential partners which joint actions to be taken within the eco-region<sup>1</sup> 'Dinaric Arc', in order to be more effective towards the protection and valorization of natural and cultural heritage.

A first positive reaction came from the representatives of the UNESCO<sup>2</sup> *Regional Bureau for Science and Culture in Europe* (BRESCE) (based in Venice) and the IUCN<sup>3</sup> *Programme Office for South-Eastern Europe* (based in Belgrade).

Two years later, the DAI members group embraces the Council of Europe, the UNDP<sup>4</sup> offices of the countries concerned, the FAO<sup>5</sup>, Euronatur and UNEP<sup>6</sup>, and five regular meetings were organized in different locations of the Dinaric region.

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<sup>1</sup> WWF's interest in ecoregion-based conservation arises, in part, from the recognition of the need to find ways to operate at a scale larger than that for most projects. To achieve conservation results that are ecologically viable, it is necessary to conserve networks of key sites, migration corridors, and the ecological processes that maintain healthy ecosystems.

<sup>2</sup> The United Nation Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation.

<sup>3</sup> The World Conservation Union (formerly, the International Union for Conservation of Nature).

<sup>4</sup> The United Nation Development Programme.

<sup>5</sup> The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations.

<sup>6</sup> The United Nations Environmental Programme.

## THE DINARIC ARC: A CHALLENGING AREA OF COMMON INTEREST

The geographical scope of the DAI was, in fact, one of the first arguments to be proposed for discussion by the founding members;<sup>7</sup> the borders, as proposed by the WWF on its eco-regional approach (see picture nr.1), were considered a significant and pertinent basis.

Picture nr.1. The geographical scope of the Dinaric Arc Initiative



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<sup>7</sup> The Dinaric Arc is a region of South-Eastern Europe, with a surface of approximately 100,000 km<sup>2</sup> and including more than 6,000 km of coastline, encompassing the whole region facing the eastern Adriatic Sea, from the city of Trieste (Italy) to Tirana (Albania). It includes portions of the following countries: Italy, Slovenia, Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, and Albania.

The relatively high Dinaric Alps (maximum height is 2,692 m) run parallel to the eastern Adriatic coast, and are famous for their karstic geology - Livnjsko Polje in western Bosnia being the largest karstic field in the world. Towards the southern end of the region, the Prokletije Massif and the "Albanian Alps" are among the wildest mountains in Europe. The Dinaric Arc hosts important freshwater ecosystems, including the most extended network of subterranean rivers and lakes in Europe, and wetlands of international importance, such as the Neretva delta (Bosnia and Herzegovina/Croatia), and Skadar/Shkodra lake (Serbia and Montenegro/Albania). The river Tara, which flows through Montenegro into the Drina, is well known for forming a long and wild canyon which is the second deepest in the world, after that of the Colorado. The Eastern Adriatic coast still includes unspoiled tracts, with limited major mass tourism development. Hundreds of islands characterise the Eastern Adriatic coast - from Cres to Mljet - giving way to a variety of seascapes and coastal/marine ecosystems. The extremely indented Bay of Kotor is unique in the Mediterranean, while the coast of Albania is amongst the wildest in the whole Mediterranean basin.

Very soon, that of the geographical borders became a less and less relevant discussion, as the focus of the Initiative was the creation of a well-functioning cooperation platform, to be extended to a significant number of institutional stakeholders, in order to better foster the common objective: securing the long-term conservation and sustainable development of this part of Europe. The DAI in its founding document, identifies itself as “a broad framework of collaboration which aims to add value to the on-going programmes of all its partners, and put in place new specific actions aiming at:

- the preservation of the wealth and integrity of the Dinaric Arc through the establishment of networks of protected areas and the support to initiatives for the conservation of its biological diversity and the sustainable management of its resources;
- the preservation and valorisation of the cultural diversity and the cultural heritage of the Dinaric Arc;
- the promotion of intercultural dialogue, trans-boundary collaboration and scientific co-operation among the countries of the region;
- the empowerment of the local societies to foster local community development;
- the integration of the environmental policies across all the relevant sectoral initiatives”.

The common ‘slogan’, “*The Dinaric Arc: A Unique World of Nature and People, where South Eastern Europe meets the Mediterranean*”, had consequently, to be articulated in a clear definition of the common objectives, based on the assessment of the existing resources: namely, the *natural* and *cultural* heritage. By confronting the different organisations’ perspectives, a common identification of the main assets emerged, that was exposed as it follows:

#### (a) *The Natural Heritage*

Throughout the Mediterranean region, the introduction of farming and livestock systems over 3.000 years ago led to a change and, in some cases, an increase in the biological diversity. Over the millennia, these low intensity farming practices created habitats which integrate forest, pasture and cropland, and provide a home for a unique set of species. These complex mosaics are still present throughout the Dinaric Arc. Some of the most relevant conservation values and favourable conditions for conservation along the Dinaric Arc include:

- large and well preserved forests with high flora diversity of species and a high rate of endemism (10-20% of all the plants are endemic to the region);
- unique karst ecosystems and cave habitats with a diversity of invertebrates, fish, amphibians, and reptiles;
- the Dinaric mountains harbour important populations of large carnivores – lynx, brown bear, wolf, jackal – that use them as a crucial ecological corridor between the Alps and the mountains of South-Eastern Europe;
- the numerous wetlands and freshwater habitats host important nesting populations of endangered bird species, including Dalmatian pelican, glossy ibis, pygmy cormorant, and many others;
- the variety of coastal and marine habitats - including shallow reefs, Posidonia meadows, small rocks and archipelagos, high coasts, caves - are feeding and breeding grounds for species like cetaceans, sea birds, and marine turtles.

- the Eastern Adriatic is one of the richest fishing grounds of the Mediterranean. It also hosts the richest commercial marine species diversity of the Basin;
- the presence of many nature-friendly traditional economic activities - especially small-scale agriculture and livestock-raising, traditional forestry, and small scale fisheries - form a valuable basis for the sustainable development of the rural and natural regions of the Dinaric Arc.

*(b) The Cultural Heritage*

The South-Eastern part of Europe has been historically a rich conglomerate of cultures and religions, mainly due to its position as a cross-road between Western Europe and the Middle East. Consequently, its development politically, philosophically and historically is central to a broad European vision. This rich background certainly reflected in terms of conflicting issues between the various parties, but also resulted in a large variety of cultural heritage that the different groups left as symbols of their civilisations. The location and geographical distribution of various settlements reflect a search for harmony in the development of the towns and their natural surroundings: Kotor and its bay, and Dubrovnik and the coastline, represent two symbolic examples of this close interrelation. Unfortunately, cultural symbols have frequently been targeted during crucial phases of the various conflicts that have affected the region; the most recent ones left huge damages on the cultural heritage, as well as on the natural ones.

This 'heritage mosaic' looks nowadays fragmented, by mostly the fact that it is often the result of the interactions of ideas and people from different neighbouring areas (e.g. Illyrian, Roman, Byzantine, Christian, Islamic). Furthermore, it offer the basis for a challenging multiethnic approach to this complex heritage management, as a possible driving factor for a democratic development of the region.

Traces of the ancient borders (e.g. the Roman *limes* along the Danube River) and more recent ones (the Iron Curtain) are currently becoming relevant elements of cultural landscapes that are important to be protected and valorised within the local development frameworks.

Local heritages - as resulted by the long interaction between the human settlements and their natural *milieu* - can be important factors to foster the mutual understanding of the various communities and their rapid national socio-economic transitions.

Ultimately, the Dinaric Arc Initiative intends to facilitate this process, serving as a cross-sectoral framework of cooperation, where natural and cultural assets are harmonised into the same territorial and development frameworks.

## **THEORY AND PRACTICE: HOW TO DESIGN SHARED CONCEPTUAL AND OPERATIONAL FRAMEWORKS**

Regular meetings were held twice a year in different location, preferably within the Dinaric Region. On those occasions, two parallel directions were always combined; (1) a constant development of the common conceptual framework and (2) an operational 'translation' of these 'principles' into concerted actions, to be taken in specific sites of joint interest. Additionally, a shared project portfolio - a sheet listing each DAI member's project and major targets - was soon created, as a practical tool to identify the existing overlapping and potential areas of further synergies.

The first example of this 'strategy in action' was given by the DAI member's recognition of the Skadar/Shkodra Lake<sup>8</sup> as a transboundary water basin of exceptional international relevance, where a joint action would have been valuable. During the third meeting of the Initiative – held in Podgorica, Montenegro, in May 2005 - it was decided to organize a 'multiple' event, in order to cope simultaneously with various stakeholders. Few months later - in October - the so called 'Skadar Event' occurred; a two days international conference, entitled to "Lake Skadar International Designations: a framework for territorial development" was followed by a DAI member regular meeting and a three-day training on capacity building and networking, organized by IUCN for its SEE members.

The 'cartel' effect generated immediate positive reactions: the first, being the presence of the Prime Ministers of Albania and Montenegro at the opening of the conference and, later on, the commitment of Albanian government to finalize the establishment of a protected area on its side of the lake, that was implemented before the end of 2005.

## **IT WORKS: CONCERTED ACTIONS MAKE THE DIFFERENCE**

Despite the very many convergences of the various DAI members institutional missions, that emerged from the theoretical background analysis, the operational frameworks lead to a fragmented picture of different projects and activities, most of the times conducted independently in the same territories.

The first obvious joint reaction to this observation was a coral: "let's coordinate our efforts!"

But this was neither a 'spontaneous' nor and 'automatic' process. It rather still absorbs the largest part of the joint resources – time, person and money – to constantly shape the 'individualities' of each organization, towards a more concerted common goal.

It is interesting to notice how the first positive results of the 'DAI corporate' imagine generates a different reaction on the 'traditional' counterparts of the Initiative's members: being seen as a coherent group of different organizations, the external counterparts are also reacting in more synergic way.

Ultimately, the 'added value' of the 'DAI family' is becoming more and more recognized, as a relevant 'collective actor' in the international arena of the South-East Europe.

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<sup>8</sup> The Skadar/Shkodra Lake is the largest water basin in the all the Balkan Peninsula and it's shared between the Republic of Montenegro (in the north) and the Republic of Albania (the Southern part).