Using World Heritage Status to Maximize the Effectiveness of Sustainable Financing Strategies in Argentina

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Abstract

In Argentina, World Heritage Sites have a key role in globally outstanding regions for conservation of biodiversity. Some examples are Iguazu National Park (Misiones province, Atlantic Forest) and the Valdes Peninsula (Chubut province, Patagonian steppe and adjacent marine areas). Examples of how the WHS branding helps to promote their implementation and improve their present financing strategies are shown.

The Iguazu and Valdes cases also are useful to analyze how World Heritage Sites help to gather international interest in protected areas conservation. The concept of the “Transboundary (Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina) Green Corridor” within the Atlantic Forest is reviewed under this framework. The ways in which we can enhance our financial strategies are very diverse. World Heritage status is a useful tool that we frequently do not use. Some examples for the cases of Iguazu and Valdes are proposed.

Introduction

In a widely distributed editorial at the World Parks Congress in Durban about the importance of World Heritage sites (WHS), Klaus Toepfer (UN Under-Secretary General and UNEP Executive Director) selects the case of the Iguazu National Park, located at the Argentine border with Brazil, as an example of how the designation of a WHS helps to accomplish a successful protected area story.

This park - one of the most visited and prestigious in Argentina - was designated a WHS in 1984. Toepfer reviews the satellite images of the region between 1973 and 2000 to see the land use pattern that has affected the surroundings of the largest remnant of the Atlantic Forest complex of ecoregions. The image is dramatic: while the national park and other protected areas still keep the forest, most of the Atlantic forest outside is gone. The case offers, in fact, a striking example of how a set of integrated efforts are taking profit of the WHS designation to revert this pattern. Another case, the Peninsula Valdes WHS, is also analyzed.
From Iguazu to the Atlantic Forest Green Corridor: A Transboundary set of World Heritage Sites sharing one vision

The Iguazu National Park in Argentina and the Do Iguacu National Park in Brazil are both WHS. Since their designation, a wide diversity of mechanisms to integrate their conservation efforts have increased. The Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), for example, recently supported the exchange of experiences between rangers of both parks. Undoubtedly, the JICA support was obtained with the help of the existing WH status. However, the ecological viability of these areas - which have been identified as priority core areas for conservation within this block of Atlantic Forest - heavily depends on what happens in its surroundings. The accelerated increase of agricultural expansion, social needs and forest conversion in the Argentine, Brazilian and Paraguayan areas of this ecoregion needs to be addressed with new, more creative tools. This area is the only one within the Atlantic Forest where the jaguar (*Panthera onca*) still exists.

In 1995, with the support of WWF, Fundacion Vida Silvestre Argentina convened a first meeting with a wide array of institutions from Brazil, Argentina and Paraguay to focus on this issue. After three trinational meetings, more than 40 governmental organizations, academic institutions and NGOs of the three countries agreed to work on a common vision for conservation and sustainable development (Bertonatti and Corcuera, 2000). At the beginning, this concept - named “Trinational Green Corridor”- showed unprecise boundaries. Today, after an intense effort to attain standard methods and maps initiated in 1999 and supported by several donors (The Summit Foundation, the Overbrook Foundation, the John D. and Catherine T. Mc Arthur foundation, USAID and WWF), the transboundary vision has been completed (Di Bitetti, Placci and Dietz, 2003) and a common agreement on the financial mechanisms to implement this vision is being reached. Each country will develop its own trust fund system for the “Transboundary Upper Parana Green Corridor” of the Atlantic Forest. Once installed and functional, these mechanisms will coordinate their efforts, in order to support the transboundary vision. The vision has been also integrated into a larger vision for the conservation of the whole set of Atlantic forest ecoregional units, where the Upper Parana,(Argentina, Brazil and Paraguay), the Pernambuco and the Serra do Mar ecoregions (in Brazil) are the priority areas at present. The Atlantic Forest has been selected by WWF as one of the “Global 200” ecoregions, and is also the object of conservation efforts by Conservation International (CI), The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and other organizations.

The public support needed to advance the development of the Upper Parana Vision and financial strategy was obtained by means of several tools. One of them, and perhaps a key one, was the designation of the WH areas in the region. Not surprisingly, the Argentine National Parks Administration supported this vision from the beginning of the process.

In the case of Argentina, where the target area covers approx. 1,140,000 hectares of native forest (the largest Atlantic Forest continuous remnant) a legal tool has been created: the Misiones Green Corridor Law (bill passed in November 1999, implementation decree signed in 2001). This provincial law, intended to promote the integration of conservation and sustainable development efforts in the above cited area, was passed after a public communications campaign where the landmark generated by the existence of WHS was a very useful tool. The area covered includes not only the Iguazu National Park and several provincial protected areas, but also the Yaboti Biosphere Reserve. A provincial fund was created by the Misiones government. With the support of FVSA, WWF and the Summit Foundation, a GEF proposal to start filling in this fund is being prepared by the Misiones province government. The French governmental GEF (FFEM) is preparing a project to support the implementation of the Yaboti Biosphere Reserve. Parallel to this, and following the needs of private and even governmental international funding sources to improve transparency and accountability control, a private fund to complement these efforts is also being created. The concept of these financial mechanisms has been designed with the technical support of WWF, RedLAC and the Fondo Mexicano para la Conservacion de la Naturaleza (FMCN).

The Iguazu case shows a pattern of evolution in the way to ensure sustainable financial mechanisms for protected areas: a site-based branding (National Parks, WHS) leads to the development of regional planning schemes, new inter-institutional mechanisms of control and participation and ecoregional-scale financial mechanisms tools. The need to ensure benefits beyond boundaries finds here an excellent opportunity. In order to work at the level of these transboundary targets, and wherever national-scale
funds are weak or not functional - as in the case of Argentina - the focus on regional (vs. national) financial mechanisms offers new opportunities. Undoubtedly, the World Heritage status of the Iguazu and Do Iguacu National Parks helped to obtain these results. Moreover, WHS could have a major role in helping to trigger the implementation of this new generation of (.ecoregional) financial mechanisms.

The Valdes Peninsula: Building public and donor perception with the WH status

The Valdes Peninsula is a provincial protected area located in the Argentine patagonian Chubut province. Globally known due to its southern right whale (*Eubalaena australis*) breeding grounds and orca (*Orcinus orca*) attacks on sea lions on the beaches, Valdes integrates a typical patagonian steppe landscape with marine areas of outstanding value for conservation and ecotourism. Valdes attracts more than 100,000 tourists every year.

Valdes was designated a WH Site in 1999. Since then, public perception has dramatically changed in favor of conservation. The Argentine public perception about the importance of its conservation led to the development of the Valdes Management Plan, after an effort of 44 workshops that allowed different stakeholders to reach an agreement on a basic zoning, with goals and objectives. However, the management plan still needs to be implemented.

Valdes, like other areas of Argentina, is covered mainly by private lands. Therefore, private landowners have a strong influence on the decisions that the Chubut provincial government adopts. The profile of the traditional private landowners of Valdes is not conservation-oriented. In fact, most of them feel that after the WHS designation, there has been too many land use restrictions. However, it is interesting to note that this is more a perception than a reality. The Management Plan is not implemented yet, and Valdes is being affected by coastal development, unrestricted permits on whale and dolphin watching activities, and encroachment due to poor infrastructure for visitors. However, the landowner’s perception of new restrictions helped to slow down the rate at which some of these threats operate.

Under the framework of its recently created Marine Program, Fundacion Vida Silvestre Argentina and WWF are developing a strategy to support the implementation of the Valdes Management Plan. A proposal of approx. USD 3 M has been presented to a private funding source for these purposes. The potential approval of this proposal, according to a member of one of the donor organizations, relies on several factors, and one of them is the WH status. FVSA emphasized this status in the proposal. Like in the case of the Misiones Green Corridor, ensuring a wider set of institutions involved in the decision-making scheme is one of the primary objectives.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The branding provided by the World Heritage Convention to outstanding natural sites most definitely helps to draw the attention of governmental and private donors to implement their effectiveness. World Heritage status provides an international level of branding that attracts new opportunities for partnerships with the private sector and other alliances. The Iguazu National Park WHS branding is a successful tool to promote the development, in the Argentine province of Misiones, of a two-fold sustainable financing strategy (a government and a private one). In Valdes, the WH status helps to attract new donors and promote the implementation of its management plan.

In both cases, a side-effect of the WH branding has been the creation of inter-institutional mechanisms of control and public participation. The support of the development of sustainable financing strategies based on these mechanisms shows that WH status is an effective tool to help generate new ways to promote the conservation of protected areas. However, the involvement of the financial mechanisms that usually support WH sites still needs to be addressed.
References


Since 1997 Javier Corcuera has been Director General of Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina, the Associate Organization of WWF in Argentina. Under his management, Vida Silvestre has bought and donated to the state one national natural reserve (El Nogalar, 6000 ha), one provincial park (Pintascayo, 20,000 ha), and one national park (Monte Leon, 61,700 ha). FVSA has also supported several protected areas in Argentina. This NGO has also been key in the approval of the Misiones "Green Corridor" Law (one that covers 1,140,000 ha) that includes the National Park of Iguazu (a WHS) and intends to develop a Transboundary Corridor including also the Brazilian National Park Do Iguacu (another WHS, next to the first one). He is a member of the WWF International Programme Committee.

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