Our main goal is to preserve species and habitats in the good conditions and maintain favourable conservation status.

(Park administration)

“We [the municipality] do not receive taxes or subsidies, so I always wonder how we are supposed to make ends meet and deliver education, healthcare and reliable public transportation.

(Municipality office)

Nature conservation and rural development are seen increasingly as interlinked agendas. In practice, however, the local potential for their integration remains limited, and often no strategic vision exists for how to achieve it. Local actors are reluctant to engage in developing more inclusive, transparent, accountable, and participatory policy making, as they have often experienced few positive outcomes from these strategies.

This thesis explores key challenges and opportunities for nature conservation policy and practices at the local level in a context of post-socialist legacies and Europeanization to further understand the ongoing governance changes in Central Eastern Europe.

Natalya Yakusheva carries out research in the field of environmental science with a special focus on environmental governance. This is her PhD thesis.
Parks, Policies and People
Parks, Policies and People
Nature Conservation Governance
in Post-Socialist EU Countries

Natalya Yakusheva
Abstract
The national parks in the Carpathian Mountains along the Polish and Slovak border represent encompassing policy agendas that strive to balance biodiversity conservation and social welfare tasks. These countries have, during the last 25 years, undergone rapid transformation from socialist regimes to liberal democracies, and this transformation has affected the political, social and economic spheres. The accession to the European Union (EU) introduced demands for further changes, such as closer integration of conservation and socioeconomic development and inclusive, transparent and accountable decision-making that are based on participatory mechanisms. Therefore, modern policy processes do not follow the previous hierarchical model but rather have a diffused character, including actors from both the vertical and horizontal policy axes.

This thesis explores key challenges and opportunities for nature conservation policy and practice at the local level in a context of post-socialist legacies and Europeanization. Multi-level governance, Europeanization, and post-socialist studies are used as theoretical vehicles for the analysis of four transboundary national parks: Pieninsky national parks (NP) in both Poland and Slovakia and Bieszczady NP [Poland] and Poloniny NP [Slovakia].

The results of this study show that the early designation of the studied parks as protected areas prevented their exploitation and enabled preservation of important landscapes, which currently are highly valued at the European level. These nature conservation regimes have created tangible restrictions on the possible economic uses of these areas. However, rural development alternatives depend on a broader set of local, national and global factors such as the structure of the local economy and employment, the prioritization of nature conservation in national policies, investors’ interest, and increasing urbanization. Europeanization provided opportunities for local actors to benefit from additional funding made available for nature conservation and rural development. At the same time, demands for participatory decision-making posed significant procedural and conceptual challenges to achieving transparent, inclusive and accountable governance. The prevalence of informal practices in local policy-making and the lack of trust in state authorities pose further challenges to formal participatory processes. The opportunities of local actors to reach out across levels to express their interests remain scarce and are not institutionalized, whereas the multi-level characteristics of modern governance indirectly shape local processes by defining common legal and policy frameworks.

Keywords: national parks, Carpathians, Poland, Slovakia, Europeanization, Central Eastern Europe, multi-level governance.
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I first started to think about Sweden when I was approximately 12-13 years old; I trained in cross-country skiing and dreamt of becoming a professional skier. Everyone discussed *Vasaloppet*, and I wanted to make it there one day. I have not become a professional skier, and thus far I have only participated in a short version of *Vasaloppet*. Sport, however, became a major part of my identity, and now when I think about it, it is also a perfect metaphor for describing my PhD process.

As in skiing race, you ultimately complete your PhD alone and are solely responsible for the final result. However, actually achieving the final result is not possible without the support of many people. First and foremost, I am most grateful to my “coaches”, my PhD supervisors, who guided me through the processes and kept me on track despite numerous detours of various side projects. Björn Hassler, Magnus Boström, and Annica Kronsell, without your thorough and critical comments, helpful suggestions and tireless editing, this thesis would not be possible. Thank you for believing in me and my ideas!

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<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aarhus convention</td>
<td>The Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-Making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carpathian convention</td>
<td>The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CEE</td>
<td>Central Eastern Europe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EIA</td>
<td>Environmental Impact Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENGO</td>
<td>Environmental Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPI</td>
<td>Environmental Policy Integration principle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FEP fund</td>
<td>Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management of the Republic of Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GDEP</td>
<td>General Directorate for Environmental Protection of the Republic of Poland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MLG</td>
<td>Multi-Level Governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NP</td>
<td>National Park</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAs</td>
<td>Protected Areas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SAC</td>
<td>Special Area of Conservation under the EU Habitats Directive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>SNC</td>
<td>State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPA</td>
<td>Special Protection Area under the EU Birds Directive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNEP</td>
<td>United Nations Environment Programme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNESCO MAB</td>
<td>United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Man and the Biosphere Programme</td>
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PART 1
Introduction
CHAPTER 1

Contested conservation regimes: between socialist legacies, EU norms and local conditions

Everyone says our nature is unique and very important and that we, locals, must protect it. I know and agree with this opinion. But this is the area where people live, who need to earn money to eat, spend free time, and enjoy. We must remember it is not only about nature, but also about people, who live in this area for hundreds of years. They went to poloniny [meadows] up in the mountains to collect berries and it was fine. Now scientists are worried that we will lose these poloniny, because no one is there and they become covered by forest…

(Lutowiska (b)).

Globally, millions of people living in rural areas are increasingly preoccupied with their long-term ability to remain on their land, as the possibilities for earning income the way they have traditionally done becoming scarce. The importance of nature conservation and the preservation of natural resources is clearly visible to them, as they directly rely on these resources. However, a need for sustaining local economies often makes local citizens hostile to centrally enforced conservation policies. Thus, the notion of a balance between nature conservation and socioeconomic development objectives in and around protected areas (PAs) is a widespread dilemma in policy and practice globally. The development of protected areas in Central Eastern Europe (CEE) presents a particular, but not unique, case of such a dilemma. Protected areas in the region have historically enabled the preservation of a rich natural and cultural heritage. However, the rights of local citizens have been largely ignored, since parks were embedded in the existing rigid top-down governing system. This resulted in a lack of representation of local interests in conservation policies, the state appropriation of land, and a
low priority being placed on socioeconomic development in municipalities in and around parks and reserves.

All over the world, parks are established to conserve distinctive ecosystems and rare species with the aim of supporting biodiversity richness and providing spiritual, scientific, educational, recreational, and touristic opportunities (Dudley, 2008). Parks support national pride by conserving symbolically important natural monuments and phenomena, and they serve as places where people can find peace, quiet, and the opportunity to connect with nature. In terms of economic potential, protected areas can offer local employment opportunities through increased tourism and other activities, which provides additional local income (Chape et al., 2008).

At the same time, protected areas entail certain legal restrictions on access and possible land use, as they are aimed at preventing the destruction or degradation of nature. These restrictions can limit possible development options, reducing potential employment opportunities and disrupting traditional socio-cultural connections with the environment. Thus, unemployment and the discontinuation of traditional ways of life can lead people to leave these areas. This is often followed by land abandonment and related land use changes as well as by socioeconomic marginalization and increased emigration from rural to urban areas (MacDonald et al., 2000; West et al. 2006; Antrop, 2004). Accordingly, nature conservation, which includes protected areas as one of the key implementation mechanisms, becomes not only a part of the immediate conservation agenda but also embedded in a wider context of socioeconomic development policies (see, e.g., Brosius et al., 2005; Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997; Igoe, 2004).

National parks in the Carpathian Mountains along the Polish-Slovak border have been deeply affected by these conservation and developmental dilemmas. These countries have undergone a rapid transformation from socialism to liberal democracy during the last 25 years. The changes implied a shift from a centrally planned economy and a command-and-control mode of decision-making and implementation under socialism towards a more inclusive democratic and market-based regime (Andonova, 2005; Kluvankova-Oravska et al., 2009). These liberalization and democratization processes affected all economic, social and policy sectors, including nature conservation.

Poland and Slovakia joined the European Union (EU) in 2004 as part of the Eastern Enlargement wave. Thus, the transformation processes in these countries have been further shaped by EU regulations and policy practices, known as Europeanization, which implied major policy reforms in nature conservation (Tickle & Clarke, 2000; Börzel & Buzogány, 2009). EU policy-
making in general, and nature conservation in particular, is characterized by
the broad engagement of a diverse set of actors that interact across different
governmental levels and policy sectors. This collaboration spans from the EU
to local levels and from government officials to local stakeholders. Practically,
such complex arrangements mean that most of the regulations are set at the
supranational (EU) or national levels of governance, whereas hands-on
implementation occurs locally. The EU regulatory framework for nature
conservation policy is most profoundly influenced by two legislative acts: The
conservation of wild birds (The Birds Directive) (EC, 1979) and The Council
Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna
and flora (The Habitats Directive) (EC, 1992). The key tool for implement-
tation of these Directives is the EU-wide ecological network of protected
areas, Natura 2000. Approximately 20% of the Member States’ territory has to
date been designated as part of the Natura 2000 network (EU, 2014).

The Carpathian Convention is an additional international policy um-
brella supporting broader participation and promoting the integration of
local socioeconomic development and nature conservation. The Conven-
tion was signed by all seven Carpathian countries in 2003 in Kiev, Ukraine,
under the auspices of the United Nations Environmental Programme
(UNEP). The Parties to the Convention include both EU (the Czech
Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and Slovakia) and non-EU (Serbia
and Ukraine) members. This broad regional approach increases the poten-
tial for more coherent policy development across the Carpathians. The
Convention includes a wide range of mechanisms, ranging from the
development of common policy standards, such as conservation and sus-
tainable use of biodiversity and tourism, to the establishment of strategic
partnerships and hands-on projects in the Carpathians.

Nature conservation was among the few areas of environmental policy
that previous socialist regimes did tackle. Accordingly, both regulations and a
set of protected areas were in place in both Poland and Slovakia before the
initial transformation phase (Andonova, 2005). Conservation measures were
continued throughout this phase in the 1990s. Neither of these two countries
decided to dismantle existing conservation regimes but instead added the new
EU requirements, creating a mix. The integration of old and new policy
components remains a challenge. Contemporary nature conservation in this
region is a good example of a policy sector undergoing restructuring due to
Europeanization. Transparency, accountability and inclusion – foundations of
EU policy – have few historical antecedents in CEE. The EU policies’ call for
broader participation in policy-making clashes with the lingering top-down, command-and-control forms of governing in this area (Suskevics, 2012).

Large areas in the new Member States, such as the Carpathians, are rich in biodiversity and their preservation is important to supporting the remaining wilderness and ecological connectivity in Europe. The Carpathians is one of the few wilderness spots remaining in Europe; it comprises unique areas of preserved primeval beech forest and a substantial population of large carnivores, such as brown bear, wolf, and lynx. Populations of endangered chamoix, marmot and golden eagle can also be found here (Oszlanyi et al., 2004). Furthermore, the Carpathians form a corridor between Europe’s northern forests and those in the south and west. The region is a vital route for the dispersal of plants and animals and the migration of certain species, for example, large carnivores (CEI 2001; Eurac/UNEP 2014; Olson & Dinerstein, 2002). The large wild territories of CEE countries are, in fact, semi-natural landscapes, and the current types of habitat result from traditional human practices and economic activities, including pastoralism, agriculture, and timber harvesting dating back centuries (Oszlanyi et al., 2004). Continuation of these traditional practices may benefit the long-term conservation of habitat conditions and is essential for the preservation of biodiversity richness.

However, the countries of the Carpathian mountain range face several dilemmas in their effort to implement the EU nature conservation agenda. In particular, the Carpathian countries are currently in a period of rapid socioeconomic development and economic growth, which is leading to increased pressure on the environment through the intensive exploitation of natural resources. One of the key contemporary challenges is how to balance socioeconomic development and nature conservation. This brief description of the problem area sets the background for this study. In the next section, I introduce the main objective and research questions. The focus then turns towards the studied area and case selection, followed by the literature review and reflections on how this study contributes to the literature; this chapter concludes with the thesis outline.

1.1 Main objective and research questions
The contemporary conceptual and political debates on nature conservation have moved beyond arguments about protecting nature from humans and now recognize the complex relations between the two (Wapner, 2014). This
1. CONTESTED CONSERVATION REGIMES

means that trade-offs between ecological and socioeconomic needs are an integral part of policy-making and implementation practices. In EU nature conservation, such trade-offs are often conceptualized as a search for balance between preserving biodiversity and ensuring conditions for rural development. Arguably, the notion of balance remains problematic in practice, and particular relations between conservation and development objectives are shaped by various political, economic, and social factors. Hence, the main objective of this study is to examine key challenges and opportunities for nature conservation policies in relation to rural development at the local level in a context of post-socialist legacies and Europeanization. The examples of transboundary national parks in the Carpathians from Poland and Slovakia (Pieninsky NPs in both Poland and Slovakia, Bieszczady NP [Poland] and Poloniny NP [Slovakia]) were selected for the analysis (see Figure 1). These parks form two transboundary protected areas characterized by similar natural characteristics. These national parks have also fully or partially been designated Natura 2000 sites and thus are directly included in the Europeanization process. At the same time, local socioeconomic conditions such as the local economic structure, employment, and access to social services vary greatly. This similarity of natural conditions but differences in local contexts makes it possible to scrutinize the effects of governance changes, post-socialist legacies, and nature conservation practices.

This thesis will contribute to the discussion on the opportunities and constraints set by nature conservation for rural development, and examine the integration of conservation and socioeconomic agendas at the local level. Despite the policy demand to integrate nature conservation with other socioeconomic sectors, these do, to a considerable extent, appear to be competing agendas. The rapid change of regime and the disintegration of the socialist economic and welfare system resulted in an initial economic and social shock that impoverished large groups within the population (Bridger & Pine, 1998). In turn, new democratic governance prioritized economic development and promised the prosperity of a market economy (Poboda, 1998). It is likely that the high priority placed on economic growth as well as the initial shortcomings of a developing market economy could lead to compromised nature conservation. In addition, the EU approach to conservation introduced by Natura 2000 recognizes the need for the closer integration of conservation and rural development objectives. Therefore, one piece of the research problem concerns the search for a balance between
nature conservation and socioeconomic objectives at the local level. The following question guides the analysis:

- What potential exists for integrating nature conservation objectives and enriching rural livelihoods?

EU policies and norms on, for example, participation, transparency, accountability and inclusion are expected to influence local policies and practices through regulatory and conceptual frameworks that have been adapted during the accession (Baker & Jehlicka, 1998). Thus, this thesis will scrutinize how a broader stakeholders’ engagement influences nature conservation in countries with a history of socialism. At the same time, the reverse assumption can be made that local practices may affect how the EU policies and norms play out on the ground, since the complex and often abstract political objectives of the EU regulatory framework are translated and adapted to local contexts. The second question, thus, zooms in on the dimension of Europeanization:

- How and to what extent do the EU norms expressed through Natura 2000 influence local nature conservation differently given dissimilar contexts?

The legacies attributed to socialist regimes significantly influence social, economic and political life in Central Eastern Europe, including nature conservation (Sztompka, 1999; Andonova, 2005). It can be assumed that both the legacies of socialism and the inherited sector-specific practices influence contemporary local nature conservation. Top-down decision-making, a planned economy, the absence of independent non-state actors and a lack of trust in public institutions are often described as major post-socialist legacies. It is likely that this also holds for the nature conservation sector (Lawrence, 2008; Kluvankova-Oravska et al., 2009; Sztompka, 1999). A “fortress” approach to protected areas, aiming to “save” wild nature based on scientific knowledge under rigid top-down management by state authorities in combination with a lack of concern for local interests were among the key characteristics of the socialist conservation regime (Josephson et al., 2013). Thus, the third research question aims to scrutinize how the remaining socialist legacies influence contemporary local nature conservation in this region.
1. CONTESTED CONSERVATION REGIMES

- How and to what extent do lingering post-socialist legacies influence contemporary nature conservation practices at the local level?

These research questions comprise the “explorative map” of this study and facilitate the analysis of local nature conservation in the selected parks. Theoretical concepts from Multi-Level Governance (MLG) theory, Europeanization and post-socialist studies are used as the main vehicles for the analysis. The next section provides further background on the selected parks.

1.2 Background and cases in focus

The Carpathian Mountains represent a geologically young mountain chain in the Central European region covering approximately 190 000 km² (Ruffini et al., 2006). The total length of the mountains varies from 1 800 km on the outward side to 1 150 km on the inner side. Their breadth ranges between 75 km in the narrowest areas, located in Romania, and 200 km in the north between Poland and Hungary (Turnock, 2002). The highest section of the range is the Tatra group, with Gerlach Peak (2 655 m), located in the Slovak territory near the Polish border.

The territory of the Carpathian Mountains is shared between Slovakia (17%), the Czech Republic (3%), Poland (10%), Ukraine (11%), Romania (55%), and Hungary (4%), with some smaller territories also in Serbia and Austria. Currently, 16 to 18 million people inhabit the area, representing different nationalities and ethnic groups (Turnock, 2002). On the one hand, the population of the Carpathians varies ethnically, linguistically and culturally. On the other hand, aspects of the traditional cultural heritage are shared across the region. For instance, the practices of sheep herding and cheese (brynza) production are common throughout the Carpathians (Bösze & Meyer, 2014).

Poland and Slovakia, the countries chosen for closer investigation in this study, vary considerably in their geographic and socioeconomic characteristics (see Figure 1). Poland is one of the largest countries in the CEE region, with a total area of more than 320 000 km² and a population of approximately 38.5 million people. The Carpathians are the highest mountain range in Poland situated in the southeast of the country, stretching from the border with the Czech Republic through the border with Slovakia and towards the Ukrainian border. In contrast, Slovakia is a relatively small,
landlocked country with a total area of approximately 49 000 km² and a population of 5 million people. The Carpathian Mountains cover most of the country’s terrestrial surface; thus, both the use of its resources and nature conservation have strategic national importance. The differences between the countries are likely to bring to light the importance of national context in the ongoing governance changes.

The focus on transboundary cases with similar ecosystem characteristics makes it possible to exclude the differences in conservation objectives associated with the diverging management needs of different habitats. This allows further examination of the implications for conservation set by supranational and national political and legal frameworks and post-socialist legacies. Additionally, such focus enables the examination of a range of local socioeconomic conditions and development alternatives for rural municipalities with similar available natural resources. Furthermore, border areas played a special role during socialism, as many of these areas were closed for access and development. It is particularly relevant to trace changes in these areas because the transformation process has often developed rapidly.

The opening up of the borders in the Carpathians after socialism is a prominent example of such a change. In a relatively short time, a transformation occurred from strictly closed to open borders and the free movement of people and goods. This is in stark contrast to the previous buffer zone status of those border areas, which were often in sparsely populated areas and remained underdeveloped during the socialist regime. In recent literature, thus, it is noted that borders can serve not only as barriers and economic obstacles but also as a starting point for collaboration in the event that they are opened up (Wieckowski, 2013).

The opening of borders in CEE creates both challenges and opportunities for nature conservation and regional development (Wieckowski, 2013). The limited use of these territories during the socialist regime resulted in a comparably low human impact on nature (Wieckowski, 2013). Thus, due to the relatively well-preserved nature of these areas, they are attractive for cross-border conservation projects. However, these well-preserved areas also became of interest to the state and private investors due to their strategic location and wealth of natural resources. Such changes likely lead to an increase in human pressure through the intensified use of these territories.
Figure 1. Overview map of the studied cases: C1 – the Bieszczady and Poloniny National Parks; C2 – the Pieniny National Parks. Map data source: EuroGeographics and UN-FAO, 2015

Table 1. Studied parks in a nutshell

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristic</th>
<th>Pieniny NP, Poland</th>
<th>Pieniny NP, Slovakia</th>
<th>Bieszczady NP, Poland</th>
<th>Poloniny NP, Slovakia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total territory (ha)</td>
<td>2 372</td>
<td>3 750</td>
<td>52 065</td>
<td>29 805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of designation</td>
<td>1932</td>
<td>1932 (nature reserve)</td>
<td>1973 (NP)</td>
<td>1967 (nature reserve)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1967 (NP)</td>
<td>1997 (NP)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of state-owned land inside NP</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of staff</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approximate budget</td>
<td>~2 M zloty (472 000 EUR)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>~12 M zloty (2.9 M EUR)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrance fees</td>
<td>4-5 zloty (~1 EUR)</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>7 zloty (~1.7 EUR)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual number of tourists</td>
<td>~700 000</td>
<td>~600 000</td>
<td>~350 000</td>
<td>~17 000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The four parks selected for analysis in this study vary greatly in size, number of staff, technical capacity and expertise, available financial resources, and number of visitors (see Table 1 for a brief overview). Furthermore, the current policy and regulatory frameworks for nature conservation in the two countries differ greatly, which means that the conservation regimes vary as well. Both differences and similarities in the socioeconomic conditions of the four park locations can be found. Rural populations around the four parks mainly rely on forestry, nature conservation, and tourism for employment. In other words, the main economic sectors are tightly linked with the areas’ natural resources. The municipalities in and around the parks, with few exceptions, are characterized by poor transport and social (medical care, education) infrastructure. Therefore, the rapid emigration of local, especially young, people has led to depopulation and land abandonment. This, in turn, has various effects on the state of natural habitats, since abandonment results in the expansion of forest habitats through the deterioration of the traditionally used grasslands, leading to landscape-wide changes.

Tourism is an important source of income in some municipalities. Despite similar landscapes in the transboundary parks, the number of visitors differs. The Polish parks are more frequently visited by tourists than the Slovak parks. Furthermore, the Pieniny Mountains area is more popular among tourists both in Poland and Slovakia, whereas Bieszczady/Poloniny is less visited. Thus, there are only approximately 16–17 000 people annually visiting the Poloniny NP in Slovakia as opposed to approximately 700 000 visitors per year visiting Polish Pieniny. The remotely located Bieszczady/Poloniny parks are considered to be “wild” areas, and mass tourism could have detrimental effects for their unique flora and fauna. The nature conservation objectives and socioeconomic development of these areas are tightly interlinked. However, different local situations call for different priorities in conservation and development. Consequently, the later analysis illuminates the degree of flexibility in the employed nature conservation approaches and the ability to accommodate both nature conservation and socioeconomic objectives. This could indicate the potential to satisfy the interests of various actors and achieve win-win solutions for different local contexts. The remaining part of this chapter elaborates on different conceptual approaches to nature conservation versus rural development in relation to governance structures, accession to the EU and the socialist heritage.
1.3 Conceptual approaches to nature conservation

Nature conservation is not easily defined, as many different approaches to conservation co-exist in scientific writings and in policy (Sandbrook, 2015). Conservation practices have a long history, with the first forest reserves being established in India approximately 24 centuries ago and medieval rulers in Europe defining hunting reserves to safeguard the game animals and forests (Bishop et al., 1995). The modern approach to nature protection is associated with the establishment of the US Yellowstone National Park in 1872. The first national parks were designated with the primary goal of safeguarding iconic landscapes and species within clearly defined boundaries (Wapner, 2014). This approach was often colloquially referred to as “fortress conservation” that aimed to preserve the “wild” state of nature and did not count local people as a part of the environment. This, in turn, resulted in “creating the barriers between human and natural world to protect the latter from former” (Wapner, 2014, p. 208). The idea that conservation is about protecting nature for its own sake and that it should focus on preserving pristine landscapes, ecologically valuable species, and biological diversity can still be found in research and practice (Soule, 2013).

However, widespread criticisms noting the limitations of the “fortress conservation” approach have been voiced over time. Among other points, these criticisms include the inability of such protected reserves to cope with complex ecological processes that expand beyond their boundaries, their inability to adjust to rapidly changing ecological and socioeconomic conditions, their defensive position against all human influence, and their high cost, especially for local populations (Bishop et al., 1995). The advocates of an alternative, more socially oriented approach claim that nature conservation should strive to maintain healthy ecosystems that could have both environmental and social benefits (Sandbrook, 2015). Proponents of this approach are less inclined to claim humans need to be excluded from nature. Instead, they call for integrated natural resource management that will ensure sustainable resource use, support conditions for biodiversity preservation and provide economic opportunities for people directly relying on these natural resources (Wapner, 2014). Some scholars even note that the term “wild” is misleading, as it implies the absence of human influence, something that does not exist almost anywhere in the world (Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997; Igoe, 2004). This leads to recognition in research and practice that humans play vital roles in many landscapes and ecosystem processes and that inhabited places may also need protection (e.g., Petrova,
2014; Igoe, 2004). More adaptive and flexible mechanisms for nature conservation, in which conservation objectives take into consideration complementary socioeconomic activities, are developed in this approach (Wapner, 2014; Bishop et al., 1995; Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997; Tickle, 2000). Such mechanisms include various community-based natural resource management schemes, integrated landscape management, and even initiatives to protect urban environments (Wapner, 2014; Watson et al., 2014; Brosius et al., 2005).

In such a socially oriented approach, parks are no longer seen solely as nature reserves but have the character of living or working landscapes. This means that the space in and around protected areas is used for various economic (agriculture, forestry, tourism) and educational activities, as well as for spiritual practices (Hammer et al., 2016). In turn, different actors assign different values to the same landscape, and discussion arises how to define and prioritize what should be protected (Adams, 2004). A landowner, botanist, conservationist, governmental official or tourist will have different ideas on what nature means in an area. Thus, different actors will sometimes have diverging views of what to protect and how to protect it. It is likely that a solution suited to everyone’s interests does not exist, and trade-offs are inevitable. Moreover, ecosystems are dynamic systems based on the interaction of many elements, and interference with one or several elements can have long-term environmental and social effects that must be carefully considered in policy (Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997). Hence, the conservation of different types of habitats requires different measures. Certain habitats tolerate, or even benefit from, various well-managed human activities, whereas others are sensitive to any type of anthropogenic influence (Chape et al., 2008).

In practice, the divisions between the fortress and the socially oriented conservation approaches are not necessarily strict, and several elements can be used in parallel in concrete conservation approaches. The choice of conservation measures is a political act and is closely linked to values and interests (Adams, 2004). These choices are therefore always dependent upon the broader policy context, economic conditions, social norms and values, as well as on the resources available for conservation (Adams, 2004). Socialist conservation practices in CEE countries were mostly based on a fortress conservation approach, with the limited use of some areas for recreation and hunting by elites (Josephson et al. 2013). The change to a democratic regime and then Europeanization opened up policy processes and introduced socioeconomic concerns in nature conservation. The EU-
promoted conservation model exemplified by Natura 2000 is based on ambitions to more closely integrate conservation and rural development, and these objectives are expected to not compromise each other (Kluvankova-Oravska & Chobotova, 2010).

The interaction between nature protection and local development is a relatively well-studied topic. The existing research looks both at multiple case studies, stressing the importance of local context, as well as at more general trends around the socioeconomic and ecological implications of protected areas. These discussions can enrich understanding of the complex topic of conservation decision-making. The next section provides a brief overview of this research topic.

1.3.1 Protected areas and local development: a literature review

The relations between protected areas and local development have been studied previously (e.g., Adams, 2004; Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997; Adams & Hutton, 2007; Child, 2004; Brosius et al., 2005). The research touches upon many problems arising from the relations between nature conservation and rural development that are of relevance to this study. Broadly, the scientific discussion starts with an attempt to define global conservation objectives and the mechanisms to reach these objectives, taking into account various interests and socioeconomic considerations (Larsen et al., 2014; Ferraro et al., 2015). Others claim that conservation should be about protecting nature and that socioeconomic development should be addressed by other means (Soule, 2013).

Connections between environmental degradation and rural poverty have been studied in most parts of the world (e.g., Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997; Wells, 1992; Igoe, 2004). However, the outcomes of these studies in terms of the local socioeconomic implications of protected areas and how protected areas can contribute to local well-being are inconclusive. Some authors acknowledge that protected areas create additional restrictions on land use and often limit the access of local people to essential natural resources without providing adequate benefits in return (Brockington et al., 2006; Woodhouse et al., 2015; Igoe, 2014). Others note that protected areas provide ecological benefits that can result in a variety of social and economic benefits at global, national, and local scales (Wells, 1992; Chape et al., 2008). Thus, various community-based conservation schemes aimed at the co-management of natural resources can become sources of income and thus support communities’ livelihoods (e.g., Brosius et al., 2005). Such
projects can also have important indirect effects on democratization and the empowerment of local citizens (Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997).

Previous research raises a number of critical questions in regard to the conceptual and practical implications of stakeholder engagement in conservation. Some discussions are related to defining conservation priorities and balancing the interests of different stakeholders (Hammer et al., 2016). Others are concerned with the role of park institutions in managing local conservation and related policy processes and with measuring the impacts of conservation interventions on human well-being. (Woodhouse et al., 2015; Wells, 1992; Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997; Kettunen & ten Brink, 2013). Research on the legal aspects of nature conservation includes discussions on the legal foundations for wildlife conservation (e.g., Treves & Sanderson, 1995), asking, for example, how the resource and land use rights of local communities are treated in nature conservation programmes (Brosius et al., 2005). A widely shared message seems to be that parks are common property regimes that are supposed to serve society (e.g., Brosius et al., 2005). Inclusive governance structures are seen as one of the ways to account for the possible limitations of the conservation measures and reach a balance among various local interests (Borrini-Feyerabend & Tarnowski, 2005; Ostrom, 1990). Locally fitted, diversified, flexible, long-term measures are often recommended for hands-on conservation and natural resource management (Pimbert & Pretty, 1995). However, in regard to choosing from possible conservation mechanisms and governance options, preferences can vary greatly depending on the focus of the analysis and the specific case in focus.

A general finding in previous research is the importance of tightly linking long-term conservation objectives and the ability to accommodate the interests of local stakeholders and citizens. This is especially acknowledged in writings on conservation and socioeconomic development in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Child, 2004; Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997; Menzies, 2007). These regions are rich in biodiversity and at the same time often comprise local rural communities that struggle with poverty. Insights on how to combine development without compromising existing natural conditions are in focus because they often feed into policy programmes (Menzies, 2007). The global south context, which is the source of most local empirical analysis, is rather different from the post-socialist realities of the Carpathian countries. Hence, there is a need to further characterize the historical perspective on nature conservation, key trends and post-socialist legacies in nature conservation in the former socialist countries documented in previous research.
1.3.2 Land use and nature conservation in Central Eastern Europe: key features and practices

The history of nature conservation policy in the Carpathian countries is tightly linked to political regime changes. During socialism, nature was primarily perceived in instrumental terms and almost any use was justified as long as it served the interests of the state (Petrova, 2014). This resulted in complete depletion in certain areas, especially those rich in natural resources (Coumel & Elie, 2013). Polluted rivers, unregulated toxic waste landfill sites, urban air pollution, soil and water contamination from agriculture and industry were among the negative environmental legacies of socialist regimes (Paget & Vagacova, 1998; Coumel & Elie, 2013). At the same time, protected areas and rural land use and planning systems were established during the socialist regimes (Paget & Vagacova, 1998). Thus, along with highly polluted areas, almost completely intact patches of nature were preserved all over the Eastern bloc. The Carpathian Mountains is such an example (Kurek et al., 2001).

In terms of land use trends during socialism, the acceleration of large-scale urban-based industrial development led to the massive relocation of people from rural to urban areas (Perlitz et al., 2010). Policies of collectivization and the intensification of agriculture resulted in large-scale agriculture. Arable land and hay meadows in the valleys were aggregated into large blocks that were cultivated with the use of pesticides and heavy machinery. In contrast, traditionally used semi-natural mountains meadows were abandoned because of their lower productivity (Bezak & Halada 2010; Griffiths et al., 2013). Agricultural changes went hand in hand with forest changes, as abandoned agricultural land turned first into shrub and then into young forests, following the process of natural succession (Munteanu et al., 2014). Succession in the Carpathians has resulted in the loss of rare valuable grassland communities with rich biodiversity (Bezak & Halada, 2010).

The overall direct influence of abandonment on biodiversity and ecosystem dynamics is not yet well understood. Competing views exist among scientists on the implications of these changes in agriculture, forestry and environmental management (see, e.g., MacDonald et al., 2000). For example, abandoned agricultural habitats and grassland are more likely to be affected by pest and weed invasions, the encroachment of shrubs, and deteriorating habitat quality. These processes often lead to the loss of certain species and thus decreased biodiversity (MacDonald et al., 2000). At the same time, due to the increase in forest cover, these areas can become refuges for forest species, such as large mammals, which are typically wide-
ranging and require large and well-connected habitat networks (Sieber et al., 2015).

Another significant form of land use during socialism was border and military installations. This use was particularly significant in the Carpathians, since the mountain range passes through many countries. The border installations divided the East from the West of Europe and socialist countries from each other. The border infrastructure occupied a considerable amount of land, and no-go zones were created around the borders. In some cases, local populations were displaced near the borders (Wieckowski, 2013). On the one hand, these measures led to disrupted social connections, as people living in the immediate vicinity of the borders could not move freely. On the other hand, the restricted access to border zones arguably benefited nature preservation in these areas. The number and scale of military installations and their particular usage during socialism is unclear because information on these issues still remains classified. Estimates suggest that thousands of such sites could have existed across the socialist bloc (Cizek et al., 2013). A number of studies note the biodiversity richness in former military areas, which means that they offer important potential for the conservation of certain habitats, e.g., dry acidic grasslands, and for species richness in general (see, e.g., Cizek et al., 2013; Jentsch et al., 2009; Warren et al., 2007). The next section reviews key features of nature conservation during the socialist regime and the early transformation years.

1.3.3 Protected areas during socialism and transformation

National parks and nature reserves became widespread in socialist countries in the 1950s–1970s. This development was mainly due to three rather different factors. First, the well-respected scientific community successfully lobbied for the establishment of national parks and strict sanctuaries (zapovednik) to study nature and natural processes (Josephson et. al, 2013). Second, members of the party elite (nomenklatura) were often enthusiastic hunters and wanted to preserve some patches of intact nature for this purpose (Andonova, 2005). Third, tourism and recreation developed into one of the central features of socialist welfare, and parks were created to provide the working class with access to nature (Hoenig, 2014). Large-scale recreational facilities were constructed throughout the socialist bloc, including the Carpathians. State-subsidized holidays were provided to “regenerate the labour force” through collective tours to such recreational centres (Williams & Balaz, 2001). Consequently, some places in the Car-
pathians, such as the Polish side of the Tatra Mountains, were highly exploited. Approximately one million tourists visited this park every year (Hoening, 2014). In contrast, other areas remained relatively unknown and undisturbed by tourists.

During socialism, the state was considered to be the only “proper” steward of nature, and the park administrations were fused into the existing strictly hierarchical governing and planning system (Tickle, 2000). Consequently, nature conservation was characterized by top-down management and followed rigid and standardized procedures. The responsibilities for conservation strategies were fragmented across different ministries, each with different plans, and coordination between them was minimal. This often placed into question the adequate protection of these areas, as various contradictory plans existed for the same territories (Tickle, 2000; Prazan et al., 2005). Considerable emphasis was put on research and monitoring in conservation practices due to the strong role of the scientific community. This allowed the accumulation of extensive data on flora and fauna (Gasienica Byrcyn, 1992; Kurek et al. 2001).

Among the important functions of the countryside under socialism was the provision of leisure opportunities for working class people living in urban areas. Hence, there was no consideration of rural development and the diversification of local economies (Josephson et al., 2013). State ownership made a countrywide system of rural resource management possible, with the most productive arable land being used for intensive agriculture. Thus, only land perceived to be unproductive was designated as protected areas (Griffiths et al., 2013). This approach resulted in a high representation of mountain habitats in protected areas, since they were less suitable for other uses (Gaston et al., 2008).

With some exceptions, landowners were not properly compensated when national parks were established. Poland was one exception, since large-scale collectivization never occurred here, and land remained in private hands, including parts of the land within the protected areas. Alternatively, during the park designation, some owners received compensation or were offered plots outside parks (Otto & Chobotova, 2013). In Slovakia (former Czechoslovakia), all land was collectivized and no private ownership was allowed (Paget & Vagacova, 1998). National parks were created in areas that had been appropriated by the state without any compensation to local landowners. Obviously, this resulted in significant dissatisfaction (Otto & Chobotova, 2013). Local inhabitants and nearby residents still often display negative attitudes towards park institutions and consider them
hostile to local life (Otto & Chobotova, 2013). The lack of formal ways to express their opinions or to participate in conservation decision-making and management contributed to the negative perceptions of protected areas among locals (Petrova, 2014).

The shift in conservation approaches in Poland and Slovakia started in parallel with the regime transformation. Democratization and economic liberalization put new demands on all policy spheres, including nature conservation. The changes in land ownership profoundly influenced conservation strategies and the related land use sectors, such as agriculture and forestry (Munteanu et al., 2014; Kuemmerle et al., 2007). In Slovakia, as in many other CEE countries, the land was returned to its pre-socialist owners through a so-called restitution process. The restitution process was intended to be compensation for the perceived injustices of socialist appropriation and became an important component in the emerging market economy (Kluvankova-Oravska & Chobotova, 2006). The diversification of land ownership increased the number of actors formally entitled to participate in the governance and management of natural resources and conservation (Paget & Vagacova, 1998). Due to the intact structure of private land ownership in Poland, state ownership of non-private land remained in place and did not greatly affect land use practices. Thus, the transformation process in Poland had less direct consequences for the management of protected areas compared with that in Slovakia (Otto & Chobotova, 2013).

The economic recession during the transformation phase influenced nature conservation through resource shortages and less effective law enforcement. In some places in the Carpathians, weakened law enforcement led to the spread of illegal activities such as illegal logging and poaching outside and even within some protected areas (Turnock, 2002; Kuemmerle et al., 2009; Knorn et al., 2012). The legal framework and division of competencies among public institutions became unclear, as old socialist norms sometimes co-existed with newly adopted legislation. The administration of protected areas needed to adjust to the demands of an open market economy, with reduced state funding and the required generation of local cash flows from park activities (Turnock, 2002). Moreover, the park administrations had to negotiate with new resource owners and local citizens to promote conservation objectives (Petrova, 2014).

Another set of changes in the approach to conservation is linked to the opening up of decision-making and management based on participatory mechanisms. These new elements originated from the demands of the EU, other national and international development agencies and international
NGOs that fund conservation initiatives (Andonova, 2005). Participatory and co-management practices in national parks in CEE have been established rather slowly. The deep-rooted hostility among locals towards park administrations and the lack of training within park management in facilitating public participation obstruct the development of co-management (Petrova, 2014). The next section focuses on research into nature conservation in a context of post-socialist legacies and Europeanization, including the relation between conservation and socioeconomic development and the development of new governance structures. It mostly draws upon the literature on post-socialist legacies and those aspects of Europeanization of relevance to contemporary nature conservation in Central Eastern Europe.

1.3.4 Previous research in post-socialist legacies and Europeanization

Research on post-socialist environmental legacies has shown that the socialist regimes have had multifaceted effects upon the environment. The overexploitation of natural resources and pollution from industries and large-scale agricultural production resulted in drastic decreases in soil, water, and air quality in many areas (Coumel & Elie, 2013; Paget & Vagacova, 1998). Some authors suggest that the collapse of the Soviet Union and its CEE satellite regimes was, in fact, an “ecocide” (e.g., Coumel & Elie, 2013). These regimes were unable to manage massive disasters, such as the Chernobyl fallout or the shrinking of the Aral Sea, and did not manage to mobilize groups outside of the traditional state- and party-controlled systems for the necessary support (Feshbach et al., 1993). There has been something of a public consensus that the environment was a policy failure that required urgent attention (Andonova, 2005). These acute problems led to a growing dissatisfaction with the state of the environment among citizens and resulted in civic mobilization on environmental issues (Carmin & Fagan, 2010). This mobilization played a significant role in the collapse of the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe (Hicks, 1996).

In contrast to the “ecocide” portrayal, other scholars have called for a fairer environmental assessment and recognition of the positive aspects of the socialist regimes, which included the establishment of protected areas that helped to preserve pristine nature all over the Eastern bloc (Coumel & Elie, 2013). Some authors even connect the national pride in these preserved natural areas to the expression of national identity that became a foundation of the resistance to forced industrialization and collectivization
and to the later national rejection of the regime (Coumel & Elie, 2013; Schwartz, 2006). Katrin Schwartz (2006), for example, scrutinizes the case of Latvia and the idealization of rural landscapes as an expression of the “true” national identity. Josephson and colleagues provide a comprehensive overview of the environmental history of Russia and the Soviet Union. These authors stress the importance of the sense of pride in the unique natural environment for movements against the Soviet regime in Baltic republics. They also analysed the shifts in concepts and approaches to the conservation of nature over time, stressing the role of scientists and nature lovers in preserving protected areas in the Soviet Union (Josephson et al., 2013).

A relatively large number of studies across the region on “green” social movements towards the end of the socialist regimes have been published (e.g., Hicks, 1996; Fagan, 2004; Jehlicka et al., 2005; Fagan & Carmin, 2011). These studies have shown that civic mobilization played an important role in the collapse of Soviet-style socialism in Eastern Europe (Poboda, 1998; Fagan & Carmin, 2011). Initially, in the 1970s, environmental groups and “green” activism were not perceived as sources of political mobilization by the regimes and were therefore exempted from close surveillance (Podoba, 1998). Furthermore, this mobilization had practical consequences, as it prevented some large-scale infrastructure developments that could have had a serious negative impact on the environment (Jehlicka et al., 2005). This “green” activism also raised the profile of environmental policies in general, and nature conservation policy in particular (Carmin & VanDeveer, 2005).

The key role of environmental groups in the overturn of the regimes brought many of their leaders into high positions in governments and parliaments (Podoba, 1998). Environmental improvements were portrayed as complementary to other democratization and nation-building efforts (Andonova, 2005; Bridger & Pine, 1998). The Western models of environmental governance were seen and promoted as “appropriate” models for the newly established democracies (Andonova, 2005). According to this transition approach, new market-based, democratic regimes were supposed to introduce sustainable environmental practices in response to existing problems (Coumel & Elie, 2013). However, what was initially strong public engagement and mobilization on environmental issues ceased during the later stages and failed to establish robust environmentally sound practices. Instead, environmental issues became fairly marginal to the political agenda in these countries in comparison to subjects such as economic growth, energy and geopolitics (Coumel & Elie, 2013; Börzel & Buzogany, 2010).
There were numerous reasons for the decreasing interest in environmental issues. Economic recession brought an overall decline in industrial production. Heavy industry, one of the largest polluters with obsolete technologies, suffered the most with the economic slump, and many plants quickly went bankrupt. There were also structural changes in the agricultural sector, leading to the reduced use of fertilizers (Kurek et al., 2001). At later stages, better waste treatment and energy-saving technologies contributed to less acute pollution situations and a general improvement of the environment. However, the recession resulted in serious economic and social problems that needed immediate attention (Wilson, 1999). Furthermore, few green parties emerged to support the momentum for environmental matters, and those that did emerge soon lost their relevance in most CEE countries (Jancar-Webster, 1998). The initial transformation seamlessly turned towards the demands of Europeanization, as almost all countries of the region expressed interest in joining the EU. For NGOs, Europeanization resulted in increased funding, capacity-building, and networking opportunities (Carmin & Fagan, 2010; Carmin, 2010). Their engagement in the Europeanization process resulted in the so-called phenomenon of professionalization, as described in several studies (Börzel & Buzogány, 2010; Carmin, 2010).

Studies show that accession to the EU brought significant institutional challenges to these countries (e.g., Lawrence, 2008). Broader participation mechanisms and inclusive governance were introduced together with the legal restructuring of nature conservation policies (Kluvankova-Oravska & Chobotova, 2010). Europeanization research pays significant attention to the analysis of national policies and governance adaptation in the CEE countries (Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003; Agh, 1998). The specificities of environmental policies in transition processes have been analysed, showing that the environmental acquis contained over 250 pieces of regulation that needed to be adopted or transposed by national governments. At many times, this was perceived as a costly but not necessarily very useful process (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Andonova, 2005). Liliana Andonova (2005, p. 135) describes the CEE countries seeing the changes in environmental policies as “a bitter pill that candidates had to swallow”. Moreover, these changes were paralleled with requirements to transfer competencies from central to regional and local levels. The aim with this devolution and decentralization was to strengthen the role of local decision-making and to bring management and decision-making closer to citizens, as well as to adapt existing governance structures to prevailing management problems (Baker & Jehlicka, 1998).
However, the local situation across CEE countries provided a set of different contexts to which EU policies needed to be adapted (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Svajda, 2008). For example, previous research shows that the management of protected areas still tends to be dominated by lingering top-down socialist approaches based on the continued exclusion of local populations and weak communication skills in the park staff (Schliep & Stoll-Kleemann, 2009). Moreover, rural areas have been struggling with economic hardship and the impoverishment of the local population, paralleled by deepened dependency on natural resources (Turonck, 2002, Bösze & Meyer, 2014). Local communities often perceive changes in conservation measures as threatening their access to natural resources rather than as a potential source of income (Lawrence, 2008). Additionally, the increased policy and management competencies of the local and regional self-government and state institutions were often not supported by appropriate resources, thereby limiting their capacity to ensure effective implementation (Baker & Jehlicka, 1998).

It has been shown that locals in the vicinity of national parks were often not aware of ongoing changes, including, for example, the introduction of Natura 2000 (Petrova, 2014). This raises legitimate questions about the added value of superimposing Natura 2000 measures to already existing national conservation regimes. Previous studies have shown that Natura 2000 adoption sometimes led to duplication of administrative efforts by local conservation authorities as well as fragmentation of national legislative and policy frameworks (Petrova, 2014; Papadopoulos, 2008). Furthermore, various actors, such as the EU and donor organizations, often act in a manner contrary to the proclaimed goals of local sustainable development. Support is simultaneously provided for both nature conservation and extensive economic development without much coordination (Lawrence, 2008). Very few indications so far have shown the meaningful inclusion of local actors in nature conservation programmes. This inclusion is most often limited to NGOs and local activist groups that have shown an interest in developing local tourism (Kluvankova-Oravska & Chobotova 2010; Suskevics, 2012). Scholars suggest that improved education, local infrastructure, and employment opportunities for local citizens could help to advance the acceptance of protected areas and raise interest in participatory mechanisms (e.g., Petrova et al., 2009). Arguably, support of the national and local conservation authorities is needed in order to develop more inclusive governance practices (Petrova, 2014; Kluvankova-Oravska & Chobotova 2010). Thus, the previous research this thesis draws upon covers
the key topics of local conservation and development, post-socialist natural resources and environmental legacies and transformation in Central and Eastern Europe. The next section elaborates on how this thesis contributes to the existing corpus of literature in this area.

1.4 The contribution of this study

Previous research on the development of nature conservation concepts and practices, including the interplay between conservation and rural development, literature taking historical perspectives on nature conservation policies in Central Eastern Europe and studies addressing new trends related to Europeanization provide a solid basis of literature to draw upon. However, several gaps have been identified, and this thesis aims to address some of these gaps. The conservation and local development literature scrutinize a broad variety of empirical cases. However, most of them have been undertaken in different political, economic, social, and cultural contexts than the Carpathian cases in focus here. Therefore, their explanatory potential for CEE countries is limited. The outcomes of this study covering parks in Poland and Slovakia will help to better understand existing possibilities and constraints in balancing nature conservation and socioeconomic development in post-industrial countries. The results of this study can also offer interesting opportunities for comparisons of conservation trends in different regions.

The bulk of research on Europeanization focuses on quite general legal, policy and economic implications of governance restructuring and on analysing national and supranational actors and processes. In contrast, detailed studies of the effects of Europeanization on changes in local nature conservation remain rather limited in number. Similarly, the post-socialist literature corpus, with few exceptions such as works on civic mobilization, is focused on overarching patterns and trends in transformation societies. Only a few studies on local post-socialist legacies are to be found. Thus, the literature lacks empirically informed studies focused on changes in nature conservation governance in Central Eastern Europe. The discussion on the potential of protected areas to provide alternatives for rural development in this region is also incomplete, as is more general considerations of existing rural development options. Furthermore, little is known about the state of local post-socialist legacies in nature conservation and rural development or on their influence on current practices. Finally, insights into local conser-
vation objectives, as well as mechanisms that support various forms of participatory practices in Central Eastern Europe, are also limited.

This thesis makes a conceptual contribution to empirically informed studies of nature conservation governance. Furthermore, it advances understanding of the empirical significance of Multi-Level Governance theory and investigates the opportunities available for local actors to participate in policy processes across hierarchical levels. This thesis also illuminates the conceptual understanding of the role of local context in the process of policy change against the background of Europeanization and the transformation of post-socialist legacies.

This research is of relevance to a wide audience in the field of environmental social sciences, and particularly to those interested in environmental governance. The empirical focus of this study makes its findings relevant not only for scientists but also for policy-makers and practitioners seeking to understand local governance and critical discussions on the opportunities presented by nature conservation for rural development. The next section provides a thesis outline to help orient in the structure of this thesis.

1.5 Thesis outline

This thesis proceeds as follows: Chapter 2 introduces key theoretical concepts and elaborates the analytical framework of this research. I will provide an overview of MLG theory, Europeanization, and post-socialist studies and will explain how a selection of theoretical concepts from these bodies of literature will be used in this thesis. Chapter 3 discusses method, including reflections on interviews and field trip experiences. This chapter moreover addresses some key methodological issues related to the fieldwork. Chapter 4 provides an overview of changes in nature conservation policies in Poland and Slovakia before EU accession. This chapter then turns to a discussion of EU nature conservation policies and the transformation triggered by those policies. It ends with an account of the existing national nature conservation policy contexts in Poland and Slovakia. Chapters 5 and 6 present the results of case studies of two transboundary parks. Chapter 5 focuses in the East Carpathian region, namely, Bieszczady National Park in Poland and Poloniny National Park in Slovakia. This chapter takes a closer look at conservation practices, local actors, their resources and the interplay among them. Chapter 6 provides a similar analysis of cases from the Pieniny Mountains, i.e., Pieniny National Parks
on the Polish and Slovak sides of the border. Chapter 7 illustrates key analytical results of the thesis and provides answers to the research questions. Finally, Chapter 8 concludes the thesis, offering general reflections upon results of the study and placing these results into a broader discussion of nature conservation governance and rural development in Europe. The next chapter turns to a discussion of the theories employed in this research.
PART 2
Theoretical considerations and methods
CHAPTER 2
Multi-level governance and Europeanization in post-socialism

This chapter develops a theoretical framework that draws on three bodies of literature: Multi-Level Governance (MLG), Europeanization, and post-socialist studies. These three bodies of literature build upon concepts suitable for analysing changes in the local governance of nature conservation in CEE post-socialist countries within the policy context of the EU. First, MLG theory is a particular strain in a vast field of governance research that strives to understand the rising complexity in interplays among actors across vertical and horizontal governance levels (Marks & Hooghe, 2001). Second, the research on Europeanization provides insights into changes related to the transposition of EU norms on national policies. In the context of CEE countries, Europeanization was initially linked to studies of accession processes (Featherstone & Radaelli, 2003). Finally, post-socialist studies focus on understanding the transformation of socialist regimes, identifying key patterns and obstacles to changing processes, policies, and institutions (Bafoil, 2009). These three bodies of literature provide analytical tools that I use to answer the research questions of this thesis.

It is widely recognized in MLG theory that policies adopted at supranational and national levels of governance are put into practice locally (Conzelmann & Smith, 2008; Bache, 2008). However, not much scholarly attention has been paid to how local practices shape multi-level governance and what mechanisms are available (if any) for local actors to engage in decision-making at other levels. In this study, MLG theory is used to characterize the overall context where local policy processes occur and as a vehicle to gain insights into how local practices shape multi-level governance. The transposition of EU norms, i.e., the translation and implementation of EU norms in national politics, in the CEE countries was undertaken in parallel with the post-socialist transformation (Kl
Consequently, both Europeanization and existing post-socialist legacies are likely to influence governance. The analysis of local nature conservation governance with concepts from Europeanization and post-socialist studies provides useful insights into actors’ adaptation to transposed norms and how local practices have been influenced.

This chapter proceeds by introducing the three bodies of literature together with selected concepts employed for further analysis. The subsequent sections turn to a critical discussion of the employed concepts and their use in current research. The last section summarizes this discussion and elaborates on the analytical framework that will be applied to the empirical cases.

### 2.1 MLG, Europeanization, and post-socialist legacies in the analysis of local processes

MLG theory is commonly used to understand shifts in horizontal relations between state and society and vertical relations between different territorial levels (Marks et al., 1996; Hooghe & Marks, 2003; Bache, 2008). Thus, the vertical axis refers to the division between supranational (international), national, subnational (regional), and local governmental levels (Hooghe & Marks, 2003). The horizontal levels refer to different types of interactions between state and non-state actors, in which these actors seek to promote their interests (Kluvankova-Oravska et al., 2009; Suskevic, 2012). The non-state actors can be NGOs, businesses, citizen groups, experts, resource users, etc. MLG theory suggests that negotiations through public participation form a core of interplay among the involved actors (Marks & Hooghe, 2001). It emphasizes the role of non-state actors, acknowledging their increasing importance in policy and decision-making processes. Potentially, actor mobilization can occur across levels, meaning that actors can engage in negotiations at different levels in an attempt to avoid existing hierarchies (Börzel & Risse, 2003). For example, national stakeholders may sidestep state authorities and turn directly to EU authorities if they think this will promote their interests most effectively. This suggests that the division of power between vertical levels is not predetermined (Peters & Pierre, 2004). MLG has become a widely employed policy tool, especially in the EU. In this thesis I only use MLG as a theoretical vehicle and not for engaging in a normative discussion about how to develop proper EU policy-making.

MLG theory is wide in scope and includes analysis of governance models and types (e.g., Marks & Hooghe, 2004; Hooghe & Marks, 2003; Conzel-
mann & Smith, 2008; Bache, 2008) and application to various policy sectors, including environmental policies (e.g., Suskevic, 2012; Marsden et al. 2014; Weale et al., 2000) and national contexts (e.g., Feltenius, 2014; Weale et al., 2000). MLG theory has sometimes been criticized for neglecting the role of institutions in governance and for a lack of critical discussion on the democratic foundations of multi-level governance (Peters & Pierre, 2004). Governance theories, including MLG, have also been criticized for “ignoring” power discrepancies among actors at different levels (Arts & Tatenhove, 2004; Peters & Pierre, 2004). MLG theory often assumes that state and non-state actors have a comparable role in policy processes, even though state authorities retain most of the formal political and legal responsibilities. The questions related to horizontal interplay and the vertical distribution of power across governance levels are particularly relevant in the context of this research, since they help to shed light on the role of local state and non-state actors within multi-level governance and their opportunities to influence actors from other levels.

Europeanization research seeks to understand Member States’, or other actors’, transfer of power to the EU and adaptation to its norms and practices (Featherstone, 2003; Bache, 2008). The concept of Europeanization builds on understanding political change; it is a process of constructing, diffusing and institutionalizing formal and informal norms (Radaelli, 2003). The norms, in turn, can be understood as a “relatively stable collection of practices and rules defining appropriate behaviour for specific groups of actors in specific situation” (March and Olsen 1998, p. 948 cited in Braun, 2014). The shared norms provide a foundation for the EU as a political entity (Braun, 2014). The EU enforces this normative aspect through the principle of political conditionality, i.e., the national adoption of core norms and associated legal frameworks (Schimmelfennig et al., 2005).

Previous research has acknowledged the existence of an embedded normative character of Europeanization (Manners, 2002; Schimmelfennig et al., 2005; Radaelli, 2003). This applies not only to the compulsory changes to legal and institutional frameworks but also to core democratic norms, where the EU promotes consensual principles based on negotiations, compromise, and the pooling of sovereignty (Haukenes & Freyberg-Inan, 2013). The normative character of Europeanization has been documented in the context of CEE accession processes (Schimmelfennig, 2009; Börzel & Byzogany, 2009; Haukenes & Freyberg-Inan, 2013). Compliance with *acquis*
The set of legally binding EU rules, was the key requirement for new Member States to join the EU (Braun, 2014). The countries of the CEE region were treated similarly, neglecting existing differences in political, economic, and social conditions, indicating the top-down character of Europeanization and a wide-reaching influence in all policy sectors (Haukenes & Freyberg-Inan, 2013).

Europeanization research ranges from the analysis of mechanisms of Europeanization (e.g., Trieb, 2006; Schimmelfennig, 2009), implications for various actors and policy sectors (e.g., Börzel & Byzogani, 2010; Borras et al., 2015), and multiple studies of the accession processes and their implication for national politics (e.g., Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeir, 2005; Sedelmeier, 2006; Haukenes & Freyberg-Inan, 2013). The main critique links to normative stands of Europeanization and lack of focus on the national political, social, cultural, and economic contexts (Schimmelfennig, 2009). Consequently, policy changes are often the result of rigid conditionality, and transposed legal requirements, such as acquis communautaire, are rarely adjusted to national contexts (Schimmelfennig, 2009). This, in turn, is unlikely to lead to broad societal consensus regarding policy changes. Furthermore, this inflexibility may cause obstacles for the Europeanization path (Haukenes & Freyberg-Inan, 2013). Such contradictions are even more evident in CEE post-socialist countries, where proposed consensual, negotiable and inclusive modes of conflict resolution were not a part of previous practices (Haukenes & Freyberg-Inan, 2013). Local practices remain understudied in Europeanization research, and little is known about the local adaptation of norms and whether these processes differ from those at the national level.

Finally, post-socialist studies provide important insights into legacies, namely, elements formed during previous socialist regimes, in national-level processes, policies, and institutions (Bafoil, 2009; Agh, 1998). The notion of a legacy signals the continuity of processes, actors’ behaviour, and the adoption of available solutions (Bafoil, 2009). Thus, legacy is related to the idea of a “lock-in effect”, in which previous policy choices reduce the number of currently available solutions (Bafoil, 2009). Actors replicate

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1 An alternative understanding of Europeanization suggests that the EU is an arena where policy processes play out, rather than an actor actively steering interactions, and Members States and other actors can actively shape Europeanization from the bottom-up (see, e.g., Goetz, 2002).
previous practices, following acquired habits and vested interests. This is especially the case for power-holders who want to retain their positions. One of the most prominent and well-documented examples in post-socialist countries is the succession of elites. In almost all former socialist countries, the *nomenklatura*, party elite members, either managed to keep their place in politics or transferred political power into economic assets (Bridger & Pine, 1998). Additionally, the bureaucratic apparatus was not changed, and new governments relied on staff members who were trained and recruited during the socialist era (Bafouil, 2009). Thus, an actor’s position under the previous regime became an important asset under the new regime (Bafouil, 2009). Furthermore, everyday choices relate to unpredictable outcomes from abandoning or renegotiating existing agreements, especially if a great number of actors is involved (Bafouil, 2009). The post-socialist legacies shape transformation processes, since they influence actors’ capacity to address changes (Bafouil, 2009; Agh, 1998).

In contrast to MLG and Europeanization, post-socialist studies give more attention to contexts of change. The emerging economies of transformation countries were, despite perceived similarities, shaped by rather different socio-political, economic, and natural conditions (Bridger & Pine, 1998). The strikingly different outcomes of more than three decades of regime changes across CEE and the Soviet Union have shown that transformation is determined by a variety of internal and external factors (Agh, 1998). Thus, regime transformation has become increasingly understood as a multi-dimensional open-ended process triggering a variety of responses (e.g., Bafouil, 2009).² Thus, researchers call for expanding the analysis of transformation to local processes to understand the extent of everyday life changes, which go beyond policy and legislative frameworks (Bafouil, 2009; Bridger & Pine, 1998). The understanding of local interplay between “old” and “new” elements, as well as how these local legacies shape current practices, remains one of the key focal points in post-socialist studies.

² Initially, the abrupt regime changes across CEE and the Soviet Union were analysed through the prism of “transition” studies, a theoretical approach previously applied to Latin America and Southern Europe (see, e.g. O’Donnell et al., 1986; Huntington, 1991). A transition implies an interim state between two fixed positions, “a movement between the point of departure and of arrival”, therefore adopting a linear view of a policy process, meaning that if a particular procedure is followed, outcomes can be predicted. (Bridger & Pine, 1998, p. 3).
This brief overview and presentation of the key conceptual underpinnings of each body of literature reveal several shared notions and analytical complementarities, which will be further explored in the section below.

2.1.1 Introducing the selected concepts
MLG theory, Europeanization, and post-socialist studies are built on a number of shared notions that are relevant for this study. Actors, their interests, and resources are central concepts in all three bodies of literature. MLG theory recognizes a variety of involved actors, both individual and group and state and non-state, in policy-making and implementation as a core set of governance processes (Marks & Hooghe, 2001; Stephenson, 2013; Marsden et al., 2014). Following Marks and Hooghe (2001), I refer to the variety of actors engaged in multi-level governance processes as a membership. In Europeanization and post-socialist studies, actors adapt to policy norms and practices, as well as shape them by responding to compliance pressure (Radaelli, 2003; Bridger & Pine, 1998). Actors, their interests and resources are the key categories employed for further analysis of the empirical cases in this study. The actors are engaged in governance through various participatory mechanisms, which supposedly provide a platform to promote their interests and influence decision-making (Biermann & Pattberg, 2012). Thus, exploring participation is important when seeking to better understand the relations between actors involved in different governance settings.

Power remains one of the key aspects of politics, and it is particularly important to look at local power dynamics to understand the implications of governance changes. Multi-level governance could be seen as a structure in which available resources are coordinated, which inevitably affects power distribution between the involved actors (Peters & Pierre, 2004). Together with formally defined jurisdictions, such as legal and policy frameworks that define governance arrangements, a variety of informal mechanisms that shape power relations exist in MLG (Tatenhove et al., 2006). The complex character of formal and informal interactions contributes to the alleged democratic deficits. Qualities of governance processes such as inclusion, transparency, and accountability are often seen as the means to reduce democratic deficits and balance power distribution (Marks & Hooghe, 2004). Europeanization research too, although not always explicitly, addresses various aspects of power distribution. For example, scholars
studying the top-down structures of Europeanization in environmental policy-making, note a high dispersion of power and decision-making across governance levels in which decisions are set at supranational level but implemented locally (Jordan & Liefferink, 2004; Knill & Liefferink, 2007; Andonova 2005). Post-socialist studies often explore changes in power structures in new policy realities (Bafoil, 2009).

Trust is another important category for understanding the social and democratic foundations of MLG and is a core focus in post-socialist studies. Trust is a complex social phenomenon that relates to confidence and predictability in the expected behaviour of people and institutions (Rose-Ackerman, 2001). Trust in policy and governmental institutions, in turn, links to legitimacy, which implies acceptance of authority, including compliance with legal frameworks and other formal and informal rules prevailing in society. This form of trust is a key building block in democratic regimes (Suskevic, 2012; Boda & Medve-Ballint, 2014). A lack of legitimacy is often seen as a problem in MLG, when governance expands beyond representative democracy and includes nonelected individuals and groups (Piattoni, 2009; Bache, 2008). This increases the importance of trust in multi-level governance, as it serves as a critical support for participation (Reed, 2008). Trust, however, has been shown to be lacking in post-socialist societies. These countries are often characterized by low levels of trust, and even distrust, in public institutions and the associated formal processes. As a consequence, reliance on personal relationships and networks have become more important (Sztompka, 1999; Kochanowicz, 2004). Therefore, tension between trust-based MLG and the persistent legacy of low trust in public institutions as it appears in the ongoing governance processes will be further explored.

Last, various categories in these three bodies of literature capture the dynamics of governance processes. The category of transformation widely employed in both Europeanization and post-socialist studies captures the dynamic of change. The notion of interplay is typically used in MLG theory to investigate actors' relations on both the vertical and horizontal axes (Piattoni, 2009). I look at local power dynamics and the legitimacy of existing governance by examining transformation and interplay among actors.

The next part of this chapter further discusses selected concepts that will be used in the empirical analysis in the following chapters. I start by elaborating on my use of the term actor and the associated categories of interests, resources and power distribution. The chapter proceeds by discussing qualities of governance: transparency, inclusiveness, and account-
tability. I then take a closer look at participation, proceeding with the concepts of trust and legitimacy and finishing off with a discussion on the dynamics of change. The chapter concludes by bringing the selected concepts together in an analytical framework that will be used for the analysis of the empirical cases.

2.2 Elaborating selected concepts

2.2.1 Actors, interests, resources and power

Different assumptions regarding actors’ motivation to engage in policy can be found in the literature. First, actors’ behaviour is constrained by existing institutional and legal frameworks. Departing from this baseline, some scholars assume that actors are primarily rational individuals driven by self-interest to engage in policy processes (see e.g. Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). Others emphasize acquired habits as drivers of individual and collective behaviour (Bafoil, 2009). In practice, actors are likely to have mixed motives, which can have various implications for local governance (e.g. Kooiman, 2003). This is a topic that will be further explored in this thesis.

Different motivations may also affect how actors act to promote shared interests, i.e., collective action, which is central to governance analysis (e.g., Ostrom, 1990; Biermann & Pattberg, 2012). For example, for non-state actors, collective action might be a way to coordinate resources and increase their impact in decision-making (Hufty, 2011). However, the ability of actors to promote shared interests for transforming societies might be obscured by a lack of previous experience with public participation. A shortage of credible negotiation procedures, lower awareness and capacity to cooperate may also hinder collective action (Biermann & Pattberg, 2012).

The diversity of actors involved with diverging interests around policymaking results in a variety of interpretations of what is at stake (Hufty, 2011). For example, the interests of farmers affected by the introduction of a conservation regime may vary depending on the size of the farm, applied practices and ability to access compensation. Thus, a policy problem is not an objectively defined issue; instead, a set of interrelated issues and interests are at stake (Hufty, 2011). The normative demands of the EU policies promoted to find consensus in relation to such “stakes”, which in nature conservation are often expressed in terms of a balance between conservation and socioeconomic development, seem to comprise several embedded contradictions. Such contradictions range from more general concerns
about whether such a balance is at all possible to specific concerns about the scope of compromise among different objectives and in relation to various tensions among local actors. The understanding of multiple “stakes” is therefore essential to capture the dynamics of local policy processes, as it can indicate possible tensions, as well as grounds for alliances, among the involved actors.

The notion of “stakes” links to the concept of stakeholders, which is widely used in theory and practice. Stakeholders are often defined as individuals or groups who have certain interests regarding a policy issue or who are affected by, or may affect, a policy decision (Rauschmayer et al., 2009; Reed, 2008). The degree of involvement may vary, but typically stakeholders engage in promoting their interests (Rauschmayer et al., 2009). For example, the owner of land that is assigned as a Natura 2000 site is a stakeholder in EU nature conservation policy-making along with NGOs, businesses, citizen groups, and experts who may have interests in the area. Some confusion may arise because the concepts of actors and stakeholders are sometimes used interchangeably. In this study, I use the term ‘stakeholder’ to refer to non-state actors who actively promote their interests. Therefore, ‘actor’ is a more encompassing term, as it also includes groups and individuals who are present in policy due to formal requirements (e.g., state authorities).

The influence of actors is tightly linked to the concept of power, which has various definitions and approaches and is essentially contested (e.g., Arts & Tatenhove, 2004 for discussion). In governance research, the nature of power can be linked to having resources (dispositional power) and to achieving outcomes through the ability to influence other actors (relational power) (Arts & Tatenhove, 2004). In this thesis, I place most of my focus on dispositional power, looking at the various resources available to local actors. The term ‘resource’ is a broad category of items and can include any material, social, symbolic, and cognitive/discursive means that are used by actors in political, social, or economic relations to achieve their goals. The range of resources may vary greatly, and its importance and value are often context-specific (Rhodes, 1997). Material resources, for example, include various natural and energy resources, capital, labour, land, and organizational capacity. Social resources may range from legally assigned competencies to access to social networks. Symbolic resources may include reputation and charisma, whereas the cognitive dimension includes access to information and various types of knowledge sources, including scientific as well as traditional and local knowledge (Rhodes, 1997; Hardin, 2006).
Resources are almost always limited and unevenly distributed, leading to the emergence of resource dependency among involved actors, which serves as the basis for interplay in governance (Rhodes, 1997).

Previous research has shown that Europeanization has various effects on the distribution of resources among different groups of actors. Given the promotion of decentralization, the nation-state is often considered to be the “loser” in this power game along the vertical axis, whereas the power of sub-national authorities has increased (Bache, 2008). Furthermore, to strengthen the role of non-state actors in policy processes, Europeanization opens up new funding opportunities for them. In CEE countries, NGOs have particularly profited from such support (Börzel & Buzogany, 2010), as they have become important partners with essential skills to attract resources from the EU and other external donors, as well as sources of expertise and knowledge (Carmin, 2010). This leads to increased professionalization and institutionalization of the NGO sector driven by the goal to access external donor support (Jancar-Webster, 1998). The side-effects of this professionalization include a decreased role for grassroots movements and the lowered capacity of the civil sector for mass mobilization (Fagan, 2004; Jancar-Webster, 1998).

Exploring the local distribution of power may reveal further insights into the value of different resources, as well as the existing resource dependencies and their implications for multi-level governance. The process of power redistribution in multi-level governance is closely linked to the discussion on participation and other qualities of governance, which I investigate further in the section below.

2.2.2 Inclusion, transparency, and accountability: exploring the qualities of multi-level governance

Stakeholder participation in environmental decision-making is increasingly seen as an essential part of modern policy-making in both theory and practice. Scholars see participation as a way to embrace the diverse knowledge, values, and interests necessary for developing sound solutions to complex, multi-scale environmental problems (Reed, 2008). This recognition of participation as a democratic right and essential part of policy process is reflected in various legal and policy documents, including the UN
Aarhus Convention. These developments are incorporated in MLG theory, where inclusion, transparency, accountability principles and participatory mechanisms of policy-making are seen as key qualities of governance (see, e.g., Piattoni, 2009). This literature suggests that these normative requirements expand upon the initial need to overcome inadequate democratic control, increase legitimacy and ensure a better “fit” between policy decisions, public interest and local conditions (Conzelmann & Smith, 2008; Reed, 2008). This section provides definitions and a discussion on inclusion, transparency and accountability, whereas the next section will focus on participation.

The principle of inclusion is one of the normative aspects of participatory practices; it refers to the provision of equal access to decision-making processes. All interested actors should be allowed to express their opinions and to exert influence over decisions taken (Piattoni, 2009). The principle of accountability defines the governance aspects related to democratic control, implying that those who govern are held accountable to their constituencies (Bäckstrand et al., 2012). Finally, the transparency principle means that decision-making processes and outcomes are visible and clearly understandable by all relevant parties (Suskevic, 2012). These three principles are based on equal access, the clarity of rules and the decision-making process, and public control by multiple actors at various levels to enable an understanding of policy processes and meaningful participation (Suskevic, 2012; Wittmer et al., 2006). In theory, transparent, accountable, inclusive policies agreed upon through participatory decision-making processes increase the legitimacy of governance (Suskevic, 2012). This implies that citizens will show a higher degree of acceptance for policy decisions and institutions that they understand and have helped to develop (Bäckstrand et al., 2012).

However, the multi-level character and complexity of EU policy-making often have the opposite effect, reducing the visibility, openness and clarity of decision-making processes, and may therefore undermine inclusion, transparency and accountability (Conzelmann & Smith, 2008; Knill & Liefferink, 2007; Suskevic, 2012). Thus, MLG scholars increasingly refer to “poor” transparency or a “lack” of transparency in observed policy pro-

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processes. Additionally, decision-making processes in multi-level governance are often informal, which makes it difficult for not-included actors to understand them (Papadopolous, 2008; Tatenhove et al., 2006). Actors' inclusion and balanced representation in MLG is also seen as a problematic area, due to the often informal character of processes and the highly unequal distribution of resources among actors and across levels (Peters & Pierre, 2004). This may raise questions about whether informality means inequality and how to account for differences in resources and ensure the adequate representation of less powerful actors (Peters & Pierre, 2004). Finally, the complexity and informality of MLG settings make it difficult to establish and maintain accountability within policy processes (Rhodes, 1997; Suskevic, 2012). Who is ultimately responsible for the final decision and policy implementation in this multi-actor, multi-level setting when state authorities no longer have full competence in all areas?

A study of inclusion, transparency and accountability in local policy processes may provide useful insights into the legitimacy of newly transposed norms. It may also help to improve the understanding of local decision-making practices. I will therefore look at the use of these EU-promoted governance principles in local policy practices and their overall acceptance by local actors. The analysis of policy acceptance is based on the actors’ perceptions and illuminates how EU norms shape local nature conservation. To further address the analysis of governance qualities, the next section reflects upon the role of participation in multi-level governance, as well as on the large body of work describing approaches and practices.

2.2.3 Participation: Analytical approaches and the MLG twist

The inclusion principle in the literature is often linked to the discussions of participation. These, to large extent, are overlapping categories, where participatory practices are linked to procedural aspect of inclusion. The literature on participation provides more nuanced discussion regarding inclusion and help with operationalization for further analysis. Thus, public participation concerns the involvement of nonelected or appointed individual and group actors in preparing, making or implementing collectively binding decisions (Rauschmayer et al., 2009). There are numerous examples of participatory mechanisms employed in policy-making; from various forms of public consultation, to a negotiation process that collect inputs for policy proposals, to public-private partnerships, to cooperation
that delegates various public sector functions to private actors (Biermann & Pattberg, 2012).

MLG research recognizes the significance of participation in multi-level governance in several ways. First, participation is, by definition, embedded in governance, since actors engage voluntarily across the vertical and horizontal axes. Thus, these relations do not fit into the command-and-control logic (Piattoni, 2009). Second, actors’ resources and interests are essential inputs into decision-making processes and may profoundly influence outcomes. Participation can rarely occur without the existence of minimum conditions such as a legal framework, defined procedures, available resources, and the engagement of relevant actors (Reed et al., 2009). However, ensuring proper participation in highly diverse MLG settings becomes a challenge in itself. The quality of participatory processes is therefore directly linked to actors’ acceptance of these practices. This is an important aspect that needs to be explored at the local level.

In theory, participation can contribute to the establishment of broader agreements and may increase public trust in decisions and improve overall quality of governance (Reed, 2008). For actors to voluntarily participate in decision-making, they need to trust the process of negotiations (Newig & Fritsch, 2009). The absence of public views and support in nature conservation decision-making can be detrimental and hinder adequate implementation (Turnhout et al., 2010; Aarts & Leeuwis, 2010). In addition to legitimizing decision-making procedures, participation may lead to enhanced learning, improved quality of decisions, and a more equal distribution of power (Turnhout et al., 2010; Goodwin, 1998). For example, the designation of protected areas can potentially provide a wide spectrum of societal benefits. However, for local citizens, resource owners and other users, such protection can mean the restriction of use options, which naturally raises concerns that need to be addressed during designation.

Participation should not be seen as a panacea for all policy problems in multi-level governance. For example, broader participation in policy processes often requires additional resources (time and funding) to reach adequate outcomes (Turnhout et al., 2010; Goodwin, 1998). Ideally, actors

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4 This is a somewhat simplified understanding of the links between legitimacy and participation, referring to procedural aspects (input legitimacy); in addition, output legitimacy concerns whether norms and institutions lead to collective problem solving (for further discussion, see, e.g. Bäckstrand et al., 2012; Piattoni, 2009; Rabe, 2017).
with fewer resources ought to be supported by external means to enable their participation. There would have to be measures to avoid participation simply becoming “talking shop”, that is, nominal procedures in which actors are formally included but lack any means to influence outcomes (Reeds, 2008). Moreover, participatory processes could be taken over by actors with more resources, who may then feel free to label the outcome as the result of an open participatory process (Stirling, 2006). Furthermore, the growing importance of participation in public policies makes the quality of participation more significant (Font & Galais, 2011). A single negative experience of participation can undermine trust between participants and be a disincentive for further engagement. This, in turn, can damage even independent policies, especially at the local level. Furthermore, participatory decision-making, although important, is not the only way to manage local policy processes. The possible benefits need to be considered along with the shortcomings (e.g., resource consuming process) (Goodwin, 1998).

Scholars acknowledge the existence of an elaborate system of informal participatory practices. This system includes all practices that are not required by law within the EU framework for multi-level governance (Hogenauer, 2014; Borras et al. 2015; Haukenes & Freyberg-Inan, 2013). These practices appear across EU levels and sometimes run in parallel with, or even replace, formal processes and fulfil similar functions (see, e.g., Hogenauer, 2014; Tatenhove et al., 2006). This makes it increasingly difficult to develop common approaches to the various existing practices. Informal practices are difficult to monitor and assess, which further raises concerns over transparency and accountability of such practices (Rauschmayer et al., 2009). Nevertheless, these practices, especially at the local level, can increase legitimacy and effectiveness if they are grounded in local conditions. Informal practices require fewer resources than formal participatory processes (Rauschmayer et al., 2009). Informal practices may vary between face-to-face meetings between actors, feedback on a planned policy, peer pressure and the formation of alternative alliances for policy implementation. Informal participatory practices may, on the one hand, allow various, even marginalized, actors to access decision-making (Hogenauer, 2014). On the other hand, informal processes may result in the exclusion of certain actors. When “the rules of the game” are not formalized, it might be unclear to external participants how to be included. In this case, there is no viable alternative for participation, and the process may lose legitimacy due to the intentional or unintentional exclusion of some actors.
The variety of participatory practices can be captured using typologies based on, for example, the potential for power redistribution among involved actors or actors’ ability to influence final decisions (Reed, 2008). Based on these characteristics, participatory practices may vary from low levels of ability to influence decisions, corresponding to power-holders only informing affected actors, to citizens’ ability to exercise control over decisions (see, e.g., Arnstein, 1969; Pretty, 1995; Goetz and Gaventa, 2001). Some scholars recognize that the complexity of modern policy-making may require different levels of engagement depending on the task and context (Reed, 2008).

The recognition of variety and the different roles of participatory practice may provide useful insights into the scope of participation. However, it is often difficult to set concrete criteria for assessing observed practices, including informal ones that also account for specific contexts. In the case of CEE countries, such contexts include limited experience with formal participation, the lack of a reference point, and the traditionally strong role of the state authorities in nature conservation (Niedziakowski et al., 2016). Therefore, my study targets the changing character of relations between state and non-state actors caused by the emerging formal participatory practices and the potential for power redistribution. I investigate whether local practices have shifted away from non-participation, which was typical for socialist regimes, to a new level of engagement. A low level could be understood in terms of ‘symbolic participation’, referring to actors being represented in formal processes and able to express their opinions while still failing to secure their interests in the final decisions taken (Niedziakowski et al., 2016). Another participatory level could be defined as a ‘partnership’, where different groups of actors do have the chance to secure their interests in the final decision (Niedziakowski et al., 2016). Such analysis can help to assess the empirical implications of Europeanization in post-socialist settings.

Furthermore, I scrutinize informal participatory practices, since their importance is recognized in all three bodies of literature (Peters & Pierre, 2004; Bridger & Pine, 1998; Radaelli, 2003). Informal practices in post-socialist countries to overcome the lack of trust and system inefficiencies may form a significant component of the existing legacies (Boda & Medve-Balint, 2014). Thus, by analysing local informal practices, I illuminate the interplay between existing and emerging participatory components in the local policy processes. This can potentially illustrate the tensions between post-socialist legacies and the introduced EU norms. Furthermore, the analysis of local participatory practices can illuminate various forms of
formal participation (how legal participatory requirements are implemented at the local level) and informal participation (how local practices of participation are formed), as well as the relations among these forms. Better understanding the forms of participation will illuminate the motivation of various actors to become involved in policy processes. Participation closely links to the issue of trust, as the latter is often seen as a prerequisite of the former. Thus, the following section elaborates on a conceptual understanding of trust.

2.2.4 Trust and post-socialist legacies

The concept of trust has gained considerable attention in the social sciences and is often used to explain the likelihood of cooperation in social and political relations (see, e.g., Putnam 2000; Sztompka, 1999; Hardin, 2006; Newton & Zmerli, 2011). Trust involves an active component: to commit to certain actions in the future in situations characterized by uncertainty and lack of control (Sztompka, 1999). In democratic societies, trust serves as a foundation for citizens to participate in community life, civil society, and political decision-making. Trust facilitates collective action and encourages the inclusion of various interests. At the same time, democracy and good governance enable effective cooperation and broad citizen participation to create conditions for the development of trust in public institutions (Zmerli & Newton, 2008).

The literature suggests two main dimensions of trust: social (or interpersonal) and trust in institutions (Zmerli & Newton, 2008). These two different types of trust are sometimes conceptualized as ‘horizontal trust’ between fellow citizens and ‘vertical trust’ towards the government and other state institutions (Sztompka, 2007). Both are equally important for the functioning of democratic regimes and tend to be mutually supportive (Newton & Zmerli, 2011). Research often connects vertical trust to the concept of legitimacy, since a high level of trust in institutions reflects their societal acceptance. In practice, however, various global surveys of trust show a trend of decreasing vertical trust, which is often associated with growing scepticism about government institutions and public authorities (Hardin, 2006; Sztompka, 2007). Therefore, I look at institutional trust in the local context rather than relying on broad surveys. In contrast with most of the research on trust that is based on surveys, I examine perceptions of trust among non-state actors towards state institutions. Such scrutiny of
vertical trust may shed light on the factors influencing local trust and how trust is related to local governance and participation.

Post-socialist societies are commonly characterized as low-trust (or even distrust) societies. Citizens do not trust public institutions because of their experience of the previous regime (Sztompka 1999). In these countries, vertical trust has been replaced with a relatively high level of interpersonal trust, which is primarily based on family relations, friendship and other personal connections (Kochanowicz, 2004). Arguably, this creates fertile soil for informal practices. Low vertical trust sets a background for the development of democratic institutions (Kochanowicz, 2004). The emerging participatory practices are negatively affected by the absence of experience with inclusive, transparent and accountable political processes and institutions. The absence of clear and coherent rules that are equally enforced for everyone further contributes to the lack of trust (Rose-Ackerman, 2001). Consequently, trust is likely to evolve slowly. Positive experiences from participation are crucial for these processes to occur. The formal participatory practices transposed through Europeanization imply a strong role for state authorities in initiating and leading the process. Because of the historically low vertical trust, this strong role could undermine the potential development of trust.

The distrust in public institutions extends from previous experiences with command-and-control political systems and restricted public spheres (Andonova 2005; Bafoil, 2009; Agh, 1998). Public spheres and civil society engagement were strictly controlled, and even oppressed, as both formal public negotiations and citizen engagement were absent (Bafoil, 2009). There was no independent civil society, and few existing civil organizations were embedded in the party system. Typically, these organizations were subordinated to the state (Agh, 1998; Rose-Ackerman, 2001). Interestingly, environmental issues were among the few areas where limited grassroots and expert mobilization existed (Josephson et al., 2013; Carmin 2010). This explains, at least partially, their relatively independent role within the system that remained throughout the initial transformation. To overcome the shortcomings of the socialist economic system and the absence of public spheres, a parallel economy and reliance on informal solutions became widespread (Ledeneva, 1998).

The socialist systems were characterized by a paradox: people had low trust in official institutions, but at the same time had high expectations of what a socialist model of the welfare state ought to provide (Kochanowicz, 2004). The socialist regimes provided the massive redistribution of resour-
ces, and the welfare state model rested upon egalitarian values of social equality, universal employment, and collective ownership. However, this model did not abolish social inequality. For example, party elites remained a privileged class. Moreover, the quality of goods remained poor over time due to the state monopoly and lack of competition (Bridger & Pine, 1998). Finally, the legacy of collective ownership and Soviet-type enterprises presented obstacles for the development of private initiatives and active roles for property owners in local policy processes. The experience of collective ownership resulted in a lack of credibility for private property as an appropriate management option. This is especially evident in the remnants of the centralized land and natural resource management systems across the region (Lerman et al., 2004; Bridger & Pine, 1998).

The legacies of the command-and-control political system, restricted public spheres, the socialist welfare system, and collective ownership had varying implications for different economic and policy sectors in different socialist countries. Thus, my analysis of the empirical cases starts by identifying specific sectoral post-socialist legacies and their transformation during the regime changes. I will then zoom in on local specificities of the post-socialist legacies and their influence on transformation paths. This will include an examination of persisting legacies in conservation practices, suggested solutions, and actors’ behaviour. This work will support the analysis of the levels of trust in state authorities held by local non-state actors and the possible factors influencing their trust.

2.2.5 Operationalizing the dynamics of change in Europeanization

The Europeanization process predictably triggers a certain degree of “misfit” or incompatibility between European and national policy norms, processes, and institutions (e.g., Radaelli, 2003; Piattoni, 2009). In turn, these misfits generate responses from actors and institutions under pressure to adapt, inducing both resistance and change (Börzel & Risse, 2003). With a greater initial misfit, as for example in CEE countries that had limited experience with the promoted EU norms, a greater resistance is to be expected (van Gerven et al. 2014; Schimmelfennig, 2009). These dynamic processes involve a variety of actors that become subjects of change (Radaelli, 2003).

Against this background, I look at the processes behind local actors’ adaptation to general and sector-specific EU norms and examine whether this adaptation triggered shifts in practices. The introduction of the Natura
2000 network became the key change induced by Europeanization in nature conservation. The norms behind Natura 2000 are based on a vision of sustainability in general and, in particular, a belief that policy measures should benefit both local socioeconomic development and biodiversity conservation, translating into a more socially oriented approach to conservation (Paavola et al., 2009; Kistenkas, 2013). The lack of clear guidance on how to balance conservation and development, as well as the failure to include local contexts in these EU policies, led to a conceptual and practical critique of Europeanization in relation to nature conservation (see, e.g., Paavola, 2004; Hiedenpää, 2002; Borras et al., 2015).

This thesis examines local changes related to the Europeanization of nature conservation based on actors’ experiences with Natura 2000 and the associated norms of public consultations. To analyse the extent of the changes brought about by Europeanization at the local level, further operationalization is needed. For this, following Radaelli (2003), I look at the strategies local actors used to cope with the new set of norms. Radaelli (2003) suggests four possible strategies: 1) inertia, 2) absorption, 3) transformation, and 4) retrenchment. Inertia refers to situations where change is lacking. This often occurs when the differences between the Member State and EU policies and practices are too large. Inertia may result in delays in the transposition of directives and resistance to EU-induced change (Radaelli, 2003). Absorption refers to change as adaptation. National structures absorb certain non-fundamental changes, but the historical cores remain. In other words, absorption leads to the accommodation of certain policy requirements without any real modification of political structures and behaviour (Heritier, 2001). These two strategies, in which actors act or do not act, maintain the status quo link to inherited legacies. Transformation constitutes a third form of change in national policies and practices; in transformation, the fundamental logic of political behaviour is altered. Finally, retrenchment implies a paradoxical outcome in which national policies become “less European”. This may occur when state authorities dissolve existing informal partnerships and practices by enforcing formal requirements (Radaelli, 2003). This typology is commonly used in research on national adaptation processes. The application of this typology in the analysis of local cases can provide insights into possible discrepancies between national and local processes and thereby advance the understanding of the local specificities of change. The actors’ experience with Natura 2000 serves as the primary material for the analysis of local adaptation processes. The focus on local contexts is instrumental in the
understanding of Europeanization in the transformation of local practices of nature conservation and rural development. In the following section, I use the theoretical components described above to build an integrated analytical framework that will subsequently be used as a theoretical vehicle in the analysis.

2.3 Analytical framework of the research

In contrast with most MLG research, which focuses on interactions between the supranational and national levels, this study focuses on local governance. Such analysis is important for several reasons: (1) it allows study of the implications of multi-level governance at the local level; (2) it helps to identify the formal and informal mechanisms allowing local actors to reach out to actors at other levels; (3) it provides empirical insights into the strategies local actors use to cope with the changes induced by norms and practices from higher levels as well as how these norms shape local practices; and (4) it provides empirical insights into the actual interplay among local actors forming governance practices in multi-level contexts. Thus, the incorporation of local perspectives into MLG research provides an additional aspect that can enrich this theory and contribute to a both broader and deeper understanding of interactions between local and higher levels of governance.

Europeanization research is mostly focused on examining supranational-national relations and less on the analysis of the local changes triggered by Europeanization. Europeanization rests upon enforcing a particular consensus-based, participatory, multi-actor governance model by exerting top-down pressure. This leaves limited opportunities for contextualization and adaptation to national and local realities. I will investigate the possible implications of Europeanization by examining the extent of local changes and the adaptation strategies of local actors based on their attitudes towards Natura 2000. The norms of a more socially oriented approach to nature conservation, as promoted through Natura 2000, are likely to influence the balance between conservation and rural development objectives. Thus, I will explore the local effects of such changes in the approach. To assess the local outcomes of Europeanization, I primarily rely on the typology developed by Radaelli (2003) with its four possible adaptation strategies (inertia, absorption, transformation, and retrenchment). I will also inves-
tigate how Europeanization affected local power structures (if it did so) and whether it has had equal influence across different groups of actors.

In the context of Central Eastern Europe, the changes induced by Europeanization are likely to cause tension with existing post-socialist legacies. These legacies set the initial conditions for transformation through the remaining institutional and legal frameworks, the distribution of resources, and the actors’ position in national politics. Nature conservation-specific legacies include the prevalence of “fortress” conservation approaches that rely on scientific knowledge, state-owned land and centralized natural resource management coupled with general legacies of command-and-control political systems, a restricted public sphere, and a lack of experience with market models. A context-dependent understanding of local post-socialist legacies in nature conservation makes it possible to gain insights into the scope and practical implications of existing legacies. Such understanding can also shed light on possible obstacles to the development of multi-level governance.

Societal trust gains special significance in multi-level governance. In post-socialist studies, CEE countries are often conceptualized as low-trust societies, where citizens do not trust in public institutions and policy. MLG scholars, in turn, claim that trust is one of the foundations for the participation that is essential to governance processes. Thus, trust and participation are interlinked categories that are mutually supportive. I will study how local actors express trust and how vertical trust in state institutions has influenced governance at the local level after the regime changes. The widespread use of informal practices constitutes another post-socialist legacy challenged by Europeanization, which has introduced formal participatory requirements to decision-making. This research will analyse the extent to which formal participatory practices allow multiple actors in transparent and accountable ways to include their interests in decision-making processes. Therefore, I look at local processes to identify whether participatory practices have moved beyond non-participation towards symbolic participation or partnership. However, scholars in all three bodies of literature recognize the importance of informal practices. Thus, the analysis of local processes will help to identify the role of informal practices in local governance, as well as their adaptation to new conditions.
The analytical framework comprises two dimensions (Figure 2): contextual and local. First, I look at the contextual dimension to examine the EU-promoted nature conservation policies and norms. As illustrated in Figure 2, the contextual dimension sets a framework in which local processes occur. Speaking in MLG terms, the contextual dimension comprises vertical and horizontal interplay occurring between the EU and the national level. This helps to illuminate the role of national authorities in transposing supranational norms to the national context (focused on Poland and Slovakia).

To examine the contextual dimension, I use the following categories: jurisdictions, which help to investigate relevant policy and legal frameworks; membership, which describes the composition of involved actors; and interplay among actors and levels, which helps to assess the dynamic of policy processes. I examine these components both at the EU and the national levels. The analysis of the contextual dimension pays attention to the key norms for this policy sector that are likely to shape local practices.
(e.g., implementation of Natura 2000). This is coupled with an examination of the historical perspective of nature conservation during socialism to help identify the practical implications of the lingering legacies for this policy sector. I also identify differences between these two countries. In the analysis of the national level, I particularly focus on the scope of key actors engaged in the nature conservation policy sector and their attitudes towards Europeanization, as it may have particular meaning for national adaptation strategies.

The main focus of the analysis lays in investigating the local dimension of nature conservation governance. In particular, I investigate the transformation of local practices towards formally promoted, inclusive, accountable and transparent policy-making, as illustrated by Figure 2. The analysis of the transparency, accountability and inclusion (comprising formal participatory practices) of policy-making, is based on actors’ perceptions of local processes and elucidates the acceptance of nature conservation policy and the EU-promoted norms. This understanding of actors’ perceptions helps to draw conclusions on the overall legitimacy of local governance and the factors contributing to it.

For this, I analyse existing jurisdictions in this policy sector and the local practices relevant to nature conservation. I then identify the actors engaged in conservation and related sectors, their interests and the available resources. Figure 2 illustrates how the interplay between interested actors and their resources creates a core set of local policy processes. Special attention is here placed on the role of state actors (i.e., park administrations) due to their historically dominant role in this sector. At the same time, I analyse the trust non-state actors display towards state authorities to identify how trust (or lack of thereof) influences local processes. The analysis of local processes focuses on the interplay between the formal and informal practices utilized for local decision-making and various forms of participation and cooperation among actors. To investigate cross-level links, I identify the mechanisms available for local actors to use to reach actors from other levels (if any).

Based on the scope of the actors’ interest, I explore the relations between nature conservation and rural development objectives to gain empirical insights into the possibility of reaching a balance between them locally. This, in turn, illuminates the acceptance of the EU-promoted socially oriented approach to conservation and helps to identify the mechanisms of adaptation to this new approach or lack of thereof.
Before I turn to the empirical analysis, the next chapter will elaborate on the methods employed for data collection and analysis, as well as on the specificities of the local case studies.
CHAPTER 3

Methods

This chapter reflects upon the methodology employed in this thesis. In particular, I explain the case selection and scrutinize the strengths and weaknesses of the data collection, interviews and arrangement of the field studies, as well as further analysis of the field material. This thesis engages with the interdisciplinary field of environmental studies, drawing mostly upon methods and concepts from the social sciences. Environmental studies are a good example of collaboration between disciplines, as the problems are complex and knowledge from various fields is required for a profound understanding. At the same time, it is important to clearly define and reflect upon the employed methods to better structure the available material, limit the scope of potential data, and explain the analytical procedures.

The chapter starts with the argumentation behind the case selection, including reflections upon the specificities of transboundary cases. It then continues with methodological reflections upon interviewing, the interview guide and the use of secondary sources. Finally, it reviews in detail my experience with interviewing and the field work and possible limitations of the collected data.

3.1 Case Selection: nature conservation in transboundary national parks in the Carpathians

The current thesis presents a case study of nature conservation governance in the Carpathian Mountains by analysing four parks in two countries to provide a comparative perspective on a variety of employed practices. The comparative method is widely employed in various scientific disciplines and is based on a thorough, systematic description of the events (cases), as well
as of the relationships between different relevant events, on clearly defined
grounds. (Bennett & Elman, 2007). A similar experience with political and
associated socioeconomic changes during socialism and the EU accession,
as well as similarities in ecological characteristics, were chosen as the
grounds for comparison.

The selection of the four sub-cases was intended to document the variety
of local practices to increase the empirical contribution of this research, as
well as to account for the factors shaping different responses to governance
changes. Similar natural conditions allow the elimination of possible dif-
fences in required conservation measures and available natural resources
that could significantly affect local conditions. These, in turn, could make it
difficult to determine whether the variety of local practices is the result of
particular legacies and governance changes or is linked to different natural
conditions.

The selection of two, rather than one, countries allows examination of
the role of national contexts and socioeconomic and political conditions in
the adaptation to EU requirements. Previous research documented general
similarities across CEE countries in terms of socialist past and EU accession
experience. At the same time, the countries in this region have chosen
different strategies for reforming land use and nature conservation sectors,
and they also differ in the availability of resources for nature conservation.
Based on previous research, overviewed in Chapter 1, it is possible to assume
that land use modes in/around protected areas and the availability of
resources could significantly influence nature conservation practices and are
therefore important to account for. Thus, a comparison of multiple nature
conservation policies and practices provides various insights into nature
conservation governance in the Carpathians and allows the assessment of
several factors influencing governance change. This design and the in-depth
study of the focal sub-cases can help to better understand the complexity of
the ongoing governance changes (Flyvbjerg, 2006; Gerring, 2007).

To further improve the feasibility of the research, specification of the
sub-case selection was required (Gerring, 2007). The selection of sub-cases
was based on both conceptual and practical considerations. Conceptually,
the sub-cases should correspond to the research design and provide
adequate grounds for answering the research questions. From a practical
point of view, the sub-cases should be feasible and accessible to the
researcher (Bennett & Elman, 2007). The Carpathians cut through the
territory of seven countries. To conceptually support the selected compa-
rative strategy based on similar natural habitats, focus has been placed on
countries with shared borders. The practical considerations behind my choice included the availability of resources (time and finances) for field trips and basic knowledge of the local language to ensure access to the relevant documents and the ability to arrange field visits.

Through a background literature analysis, Poland and Slovakia became two likely candidates. Both countries shared a common socialist past (although different in essence) and experienced the process of democratization, market reforms, and Europeanization. These two countries did not experience any violent conflicts or unresolved territorial disputes between them. They face similar challenges in terms of rapid socioeconomic development and high rates of migration of rural populations to urban centres and abroad, leading to land abandonment and the depopulation of rural areas. Despite numerous similarities at the transformation stage, rather different approaches to the reforms were applied, including decisions on land use modes and the provision of resources for conservation policies. This brought different outcomes; therefore, the selected sub-cases provide insights on the influence of wider political agendas on nature conservation policy and practices at the local level, as well as account for the role of local practices within multi-level governance.

The choice of Poland and Slovakia was also in line with practical considerations. The countries share a common border along the Carpathians and it was easy to arrange travel and field work. The travelling between parks required less time and financial resources because I could combine visits to coupled parks. In terms of language, it was also a good match, as I have an intermediate level of Slovak and basic knowledge of Polish and can read and understand both languages fairly well.

Additionally, I narrowed down the selection by focusing on the type of protected area. Only areas designated as national parks have been considered for the selection of sub-cases. In the selected countries, national parks have a comparatively high degree of protection and an established management structure. They are considered to be the basis of national nature conservation policies and stand at the forefront of implementation. There is a significant number of relevant policy and planning documents for the parks available throughout the study period. From a practical point of view, the parks administrations served as an initial contact point to access the local actors involved in nature conservation and land use. There were staff members able to communicate in English in three out of four park administrations, which helped to partially resolve the language issue at the
preparation and interview stage. It was particularly important for the Polish case, as my Polish was not sufficient for in-depth understanding.

An additional criterion for park selection was their partial or full designation as parts of the Natura 2000 network, which is likely to indicate their formal inclusion into EU governance. Formal designation as a Natura 2000 site brought about changes related to Europeanization and allows the dynamic of these changes to be traced. The higher visibility and profile of the large national parks is likely to attract various actors (national and international environmental NGOs, private actors, etc.), providing material for the scrutiny of horizontal interconnections. Additionally, this type of protected area allowed to look at transboundary cooperation between these parks. Overall, the analysis of policy processes in/around national parks is relevant for understanding the horizontal and vertical interplay within the EU governance of this sector.

3.1.1 Chosen cases similar, but different

The background analysis was based on the selected criteria and indicated that there are three official transboundary parks between Poland and Slovakia: the Tatra National Park (Tatranský Národný Park) in Slovakia—the Tatra National Park (Tatrzański Park Narodowy) in Poland; the Pieniny National Park (Pieninský Národný Park) in Slovakia, the Pieniny National Park (Pieniński Park Narodowy) in Poland; and the Bieszczady National Park (Bieszczadzki Park Narodowy) in Poland and the Poloniny National Park (Národný Park Poloniny) in Slovakia. The two latter parks together with the Uzhansky National Nature Park in Ukraine constitute the East Carpathian Biosphere reserve designated under the Man and Biosphere (MAB) reserve programme of UNESCO. All three transboundary parks fit the adopted research strategy, but due to practical constraints, mostly time, further selection had to be made.

The Tatra National Parks are the best known in both Poland and Slovakia. This sub-case was ruled out because these are relatively large parks with a developed infrastructure and a high number of involved stakeholders. A thorough analysis of these sub-cases would require significant time and resources, which unfortunately were not at my disposal. Therefore, I decided not to include them as examined sub-cases. The case of Tatra is also relatively well-documented; thus some references from this literature are included in the analysis.
Ultimately, I chose two sub-cases for the detailed scrutiny: Pieniny National Parks on both sides of Polish-Slovak border and Bieszczady and Poloniny National Parks. This selection was based on further conceptual and practical considerations. Poloniny/Bieszczady, in addition to being a transboundary park, is also the UNESCO biosphere reserve. This potentially may indicate an influence on local practices from international institutions other than the EU. Initially, I considered also including the Ukrainian side of the biosphere reserve. However, this park was excluded from selection due to the emerging turbulent political changes, revolution, and further armed conflict in Ukraine. The second selected sub-case was the Pieniny parks. These are the oldest officially designated transboundary parks in Europe, and throughout their history, they have accumulated significant records of collaboration between the two countries. This provides rich material for analysis, especially in regards to the post-socialist legacy. Overall, the chosen cases provide diverse perspectives on possible adaptation strategies to regime changes and the development of multi-level governance by including additional factors that could potentially influence local dynamics. This provides rich and diverse empirical data for answering my research questions. The additional methodological procedures included the choice of methods, which is outlined in the section below.

3.2 Methodological reflections: interviews

Interviewing was chosen as the primary method for filling knowledge gaps in the documentation of local processes for the selected cases (see, e.g., Tansey, 2007; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In the studies of local cases, as in the current research, factual information on the specific circumstances, as well as insights into local context and the personal views of local actors are often missing (Berry, 2002). Thus, targeted data collection allows to fill these information gaps. However, the studies, including the current one, that largely rely on interview materials often run into a problem of possible bias (Berry, 2002). To overcome this limitation, where possible, I tried to cross-check the information with existing peer-reviewed studies, secondary sources and among different groups of local stakeholders.

To better structure the data collection, an interview guide comprising a set of questions was designed to help interviewees to share the information particularly relevant for my research. I aimed for flexibility in the guide to allow adaptation in the course of interviews (Berry, 2002). To adapt inter-
view questions to the context of the research problem, an initial analysis of the literature and secondary sources was conducted, mapping out some key issues related to my research questions. The interview guide was based on a semi-structured open-ended approach, where the questions were pre-formulated before the interview, but the interviewees were free to structure their answers and to bring up anything of relevance (Berry, 2002) (see next section for more details). Finally, a face-to-face interview strategy was chosen, as these provide better access to interviewees, particularly for the first contact (Goldstein, 2002). In the course of preparation, it became evident that people tend to agree more easily to a personal meeting than to providing detailed answers over the phone or email. These meetings also gave me a chance to observe the local environment and put the obtained information in the proper context.

There are a number of methodological issues related with interviewing that one needs to reflect upon as a part of the research and analysis. Ultimately, an interview is a social interaction between two or more people. This interaction involves a certain degree of subjectivity from both the interviewee and the researcher (e.g., Pielker, 2007). Furthermore, the researcher explicitly or implicitly always holds a position on the subject of study. In my case, I overall support a socially oriented approach to conservation that aims to benefit both ecosystems and local livelihoods.

It is widely perceived that the interviewer should remain neutral and not challenge the respondents (see, e.g., Berry, 2002). Generally, over the course of interviews, I tried not to express any personal opinions and to refrain from judgements with regards to nature conservation or other matters. Overall, I took on the role of a “good student”, keeping a neutral position on the discussed matters but actively expressing interest in their experience (McDowell, 1998). I also tried to give the impression of being a friendly, open person, since I wanted the interviewees to be relaxed and freely share information.

As regards self-position with reference to the research subject, my role could be described as an outsider (Pielker, 2007). I do not come from any of the case countries and have not been personally involved in work related to the research topic in the area. In a way, being an outsider helped me to minimize existing judgements and pre-assumptions, which are difficult to avoid if there is close personal involvement (Pielker, 2007). On more general background note, I am originally from Russia and currently live and work in Sweden. This was seen as a curious fact by many interviewees, and they were keen to ask questions and hear my story and experience. Several
interviewees suggested that I may better understand issues related to the socialist past and their influence on the current situation thanks to my background. However, I never intended to bring my own experiences into the discussion, and it only occurred when interviewees asked direct questions about it.

Another problem related to “getting the interview” could be framed as a sampling issue, with various types of sampling employed for different research purposes (Goldstein 2002). For the purpose of this work, snowball/chain-referral sampling was employed (Tansey, 2007). In this sampling technique, the researcher asks every available contact to indicate other persons that might be relevant for the study. It was particularly suitable in my case, as I did not know the variety of involved actors (Tansey, 2007). I started by identifying the initial set of relevant respondents. I proceeded by asking them for an interview as well as for suggestions of other contacts relevant to this research. I usually repeated my request after the interview, since people tend to feel more at ease about sharing contacts with someone they have met face-to-face (Berry, 2002). As in the classic snowball technique, I continued sampling until I felt that further nomination was unlikely to produce other relevant information (Tansey, 2007). To minimize possible bias from this technique, as respondents may deliberately exclude people holding contradictory opinions, this procedure was repeated with various groups of actors.

3.2.1 Getting started

Initial interview contacts were acquired through web searches to identify relevant organizations. I then contacted the identified organizations and individuals via email, providing background information and explaining the purpose of my research along with an interview description and author affiliation. I tried to send messages to personal email addresses, rather than organization’s general email, to increase my chances of obtaining an answer, although in some cases, an email was also sent to a general inquiry address. In addition to this process, two NGOs were identified and interviewed on the spot, i.e., during workshops and public campaigns. I did not receive responses from all inquiries. The reasons for this can be manifold, starting from having an incorrect email address to personal issues and workloads. Moreover, it was difficult to determine beforehand whether important information sources have been missed due to nonresponse. This might be one of the key constraints in a research design based on inter-
views. Limited access to stakeholders also connects with overall reliability, particularly the consistency of the results and collected data (Berry, 2002). That is why in such cases, it is important to conduct several field trips and to cross-check information from various sources to determine whether crucial issues have been missed. Consequently, three field trips were conducted instead of one longer trip. The interviews were held in the locations and time slots proposed by the interviewees, as I wanted to be flexible to increase my chances of obtaining a meeting.

The diversity of the interviewed groups, which ranged from high-ranked governmental officials to lay people (mostly locally involved groups who were not always familiar with policy concepts) pose an additional methodological challenge. When interviewing lay people, I tried to phrase questions more simply and to present the interview more like a friendly discussion than a formal meeting. People without prior experience of interviewing tend to feel less pressure in informal settings and open up more easily (Harvey, 2011). For interviewing, for example, governmental officials, experts, and national NGOs, a different type of preparation was required. Representatives of these groups, experienced with interviewing, often subconsciously try to challenge the subject and the interviewer; there were also likely to avoid answering difficult questions using long “journalistic” answer (Mikecz, 2012; Harvey, 2011). This was clearly the case with some of the interviewed actors holding positions in international and national institutions. In such cases, I usually tried to ask targeted and concise questions, as well as to rephrase and repeat when necessary.

Overall, interviewing is a suitable method for collecting data about local cases that have not been previously documented. However, a number of methodological issues need to be addressed during the design of the interview guide and during interviewing itself. These issues include possible subjectivity and bias in the obtained information, the role of the researcher, and questions of access to the relevant actors and the adjustment of the interview strategy to different respondent groups. The next section provides further reflections on the design of interview guide.

3.2.2 Interview guide

This section describes the development of the interview guide for different groups of respondents, indicating the main topics for discussion with each group. The collected interview materials were coded and are referred to in the text by the code rather than by direct reference to the interviewee to
help preserve anonymity. The primary target group for the interview was actors directly involved in the park management. This group included parks administrations who are involved in day-to-day management and related conservation practices. The key topics upon which the interview questions were developed included the administration’s interpretation of existing policy frameworks, implementation mechanisms and practices, available financing, and relations with other stakeholders (see Table 2).

Another target group was broadly defined as involved groups (local businesses, users of local resources, active citizens, NGOs). The questions for this group were formulated so as to learn more about their activities and involvement in nature conservation policy and their relations with the park administration and other relevant actors (governmental institutions, NGOs, other interest groups) (see Table 2). Local/municipal authorities were also identified among the key target groups. The range of covered topics was similar to that for the parks administrations. In addition, I included questions related to policy priorities to access information relevant to socioeconomic development in the area.

To support analysis of the context dimension of the EU governance for nature conservation, I conducted interviews with national authorities and representatives of supranational/international institutions engaged in the topic. The key questions were targeted to learn their opinions on existing policy frameworks, policy priorities, implementation mechanisms, and relations among stakeholders. Last, various experts, such as scientists and policy experts, in the area of nature conservation in the Carpathians were approached. The selection of questions for this group was adjusted to the particular experience of the interviewed expert, as they worked on different issues and levels. Additionally, I was interested in learning their opinions about the potential benefits and potential pitfalls of the EU and national policies for nature conservation and, specifically, for conservation in the Carpathians.

Table 2. Groups of actors and interview topics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups of actors</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Park management</td>
<td>1) Practitioner point of view on existing policy and legal frameworks relevant for the park work, projects implemented in the park;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5 The detailed interview list can be found in Appendix 1
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Local/municipal authorities</strong></th>
<th>Similar to the one for the park management plus 1) policy priorities and sectoral relations, i.e. what are the place of nature conservation policy in comparison to other land use related policy sectors (agriculture, infrastructure development, etc.).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Involved groups, including NGOs** | 1) Their work and its relation to nature conservation, life of community and current challenges;  
2) Knowledge of park projects, limits/opportunities from the park;  
3) Involvement in nature conservation policy and practices, e.g. workshops, events, field work;  
4) Relations with other relevant stakeholders, i.e. governmental institutions, NGOs, other interest groups. |
| **National authorities and supranational institutions** | 1) Existing policy frameworks relevant for nature conservation, as well as strengths and pitfalls of these policies;  
2) Policy priorities and sectoral relations, i.e. what are the place of nature conservation policy in comparison to other land use related policy sectors (agriculture, infrastructure development, etc.);  
3) Mechanisms of implementation, including funding;  
4) Relations among stakeholders from other governance levels and sectors (international and national environmental NGOs, resource users, active citizens, development agencies etc.). |
| **Experts** | Based on the expertise, selected questions from previous groups and two additional topics:  
1) Potentials and pitfalls of the EU and national policies for nature conservation;  
2) Specificity of the Carpathian countries. |
This categorization of actors was further utilized in the scrutiny of the local interplay, and consequently, the groups are referred to in the text. All in all, the adjustment of the questions to the interviewed groups of actors allowed for a more targeted approach to account for various experiences and positions. The interview materials were complemented by the analysis of secondary sources. The section below provides reflections on some methodological aspects related to such sources.

3.2.3 Secondary sources

Secondary sources are another key source of information for this research. This section briefly reflects upon the approach to handling this source. The body of project reports, expert and policy notes, promotional materials and other similar documents is included under the definition of secondary sources. Nature conservation is a policy area where project work plays a significant role in implementation. These projects could be implemented by both governmental and non-governmental organizations, and they could focus on a concrete issue or on overarching environmental and socioeconomic problems. A project report, thus, aims to document the achieved results and often contains useful factual information. However, the information found in such reports should be treated with special caution. The reports aim to document the results relevant to the goals and tasks of a concrete project and could exclude some information considered to be irrelevant. Furthermore, the secondary sources are not peer reviewed and could be politically engaged; thus, they should be treated considering the organizations that produced them.

The collected secondary sources were of varying quality and degrees of objectivity; the latter often being clearly linked to a certain political context. I tried to use them mostly as background reading. In some cases, however, these sources were cited either to provide an example of implemented projects or to refer to some factual information. In the latter case, they were cross-checked with other sources, where possible. For example, the Baseline Study of Sustainable Development of Protected Areas in the National Park Poloniny (2014), prepared by a group of Slovak experts in the framework of the Slovak-Swiss Cooperation Programme, became an important source of information for the analysis of the Poloniny NP (Solar et al., 2014). Many socioeconomic and conservation issues such as rapid depopulation and land abandonment, lack of staff in park administrations, and constraints to the development of tourism were brought up both in interviews I conducted
and mentioned in project reports. Most of the analysed secondary sources were provided by interviewees, and some of them were clearly of promotional character. This was also interesting for obtaining insight into an organization’s communication strategies and key messages to the general public. Overall, the secondary sources became an important addition to the scrutinized materials collected during field trips. The next section reflects upon the field trip experiences.

3.3 Methodological reflections from the field trips

The chosen strategy of face-to-face interviews and the need for a better understanding of the local context determined the necessity for field trips. To ensure the ability to cross-check the obtained data and adjust interview guides, the field trips were conducted in three rounds: 1) October–November 2013; 2) May 2014; 3) September 2014. This defines the timeline of the research, as the data collection stopped at the end of 2014, and my analysis does not account for the processes occurring after this date.

The primary goal of the first trip was to gather initial background information, mostly from the representatives of international and national institutions, as well as from various experts. Another purpose of this trip was to establish initial connections with people who could assist in acquiring local contacts. Two other trips were conducted to the coupled case parks, first to the Bieszczady and Poloniny NPs and second to the Pieniny NPs. Both trips had a similar goal of interviewing various local actors involved in nature conservation identified beforehand. I aimed to access at least one representative from each group. Following the snowball technique, I made some additions to the interview list based on the recommendations of interviewed actors. The observations conducted during field trip helped to gain an overview of the natural and socioeconomic characteristics of the areas in focus. The sections below provide a detailed overview of the field trips.

3.3.1 Field Trip I: October–November 2013

The meetings during the first trip occurred in various countries such as Austria, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Belgium. The locations were determined to establish initial contacts and access relevant actors. For example, in the Czech Republic, I attended the IENE (Infra Eco Network Europe) scientific workshop “Transportation Infrastructure and Wildlife
Corridors – learning from experience”. The workshop had a special emphasis on the development of infrastructure in the Carpathians and became a good venue for learning about the actual problems of nature conservation in the region, as well as a chance to meet representatives of various organizations involved in conservation. A detailed overview of the interviewed organizations is given in Table 3.

Table 3. Breakdown of interviews by stakeholder’s group: Field trip I

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The group of stakeholders</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supranational/international institutions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Directorate General (DG) Environment of the EU Commission; The Carpathian Convention.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National authorities</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Forest Research Institute of Slovakia; State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic (several representatives).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs (international/national)</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme, Austria; Vlk (the wolf), Slovakia; Pracownia na rzecz Wszystkich Istot (the workshop for all beings), Poland.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All in all, eleven interviews were conducted; ten of these were recorded and later transcribed. One interview was held during the NGO public campaign, and thus a recording was not possible. In this case, I made notes and later wrote down the discussed issues. The average length of the recorded interviews was approximately 43 min, with the shortest being 25 min and the longest 66 min.

Most of the relevant organizations and interviewees were found through web searches. The representatives of supranational (EU) and international (Carpathian Convention) bodies were easier to access since they have informative websites where relevant contacts could be found. For the national institutions (Forest Research Institute, State Nature Conservancy), the initial web search revealed a complex management structure for land and natural resource management in Slovakia. Thus, I decided to approach all involved state institutions to collect different opinions. The NGO group proved to be more challenging to access. Often, they do not have well-
developed websites where contact information could be obtained. The contact to the WWF was found through previous personal connections. Other NGO contacts were found either by chance, namely, during a public campaign in Banská Bystrica in Slovakia, or at the IENE workshop.

The mix of actor groups interviewed during the first field trip allowed me to gather various opinions and provided rich background information on the state of nature conservation policies in Poland and Slovakia. Furthermore, certain contacts gathered during the trip proved to be crucial for accessing national parks and other local and national stakeholders interviewed during the second and third field trips.

3.3.2 Field Trip II: May 2014

The primary focus of the second field trip was to collect local data. However, I decided to also gather further background information on policy development in Poland and Slovakia. Thus, I interviewed various representatives of the national governmental and non-governmental organizations. The interviews were held in various locations around the parks, national capitals, and regional centres.

In total, twenty-eight interviews were conducted during this field trip. In Poland, twelve interviews were held in English. These interviews were recorded and later transcribed by myself. In Slovakia, sixteen interviews were held, five in English and eleven in Slovak. The majority of Slovak language interviews were conducted with an interpreter, who later transcribed them. Two respondents preferred not to be recorded; in this case, I made notes during the interviews. The average length of the recorded interviews in Poland was 52 min and in Slovakia was 36 min. This discrepancy can be explained by one particularly lengthy interview in Poland with a person knowledgeable about local, national, and international specifics. Tables 4 and 5 provide a detailed breakdown of interviewed organizations.

Table 4. Breakdown of interviews by stakeholder’s group: Field trip II, Poland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The group of stakeholders</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International/regional institutions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>UNEP-Grid; Euroregion Karpacki;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National authorities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>General Directorate for Environmental</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3. METHODS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The group of stakeholders</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National authorities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>The Ministry of Environment;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs (international/national)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Vlk (the Wolf); Pro Natura;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park management</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Specialists in: Environmental Education; Forester; Scientific specialist.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authorities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mayor of Zboj; Mayor of Ulic; Vice-Mayor of Stakcin;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved groups, including NGOs</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Director of agricultural farm; Chairman of the Association of the local forest owners (Urbariat); The owner of a pension; Director of the Snina secondary school; Local branch of NGO Vlk (The Wolf); NGO Klub slovenských turistov (The Slovak Tourist Club); NGO Karpatske Drevene Cerkvi (The Carpathian wooden churches).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
During the visit to the Poloniny National Park, I also participated in an event dedicated to the European Day of Parks. This was an educational excursion open to anyone interested in exploring new paths in the national park. I had a chance to observe local people interested in local natural resources and to talk briefly with them. In addition, in both Poland and Slovakia, I received various promotional hand-out materials and maps from different organizations, which were included in the analysis of secondary sources.

In preparation for this visit, I used the same communication strategy and sent emails in advance with an explanation of the research background. This strategy proved to work for those contacts at supranational and national authorities, and their representatives replied in due time to schedule the meetings. Remote access to local actors proved to be more difficult. Even those who had websites and email addresses either did not reply or replied with considerable delays. Thus, it was not possible to complete all the planning beforehand. I established contacts with the parks administrations and some local NGOs via email and decided to approach others by personal visits or phone calls once in the field.

I arranged most of the contacts and meetings in the Polish case. In the Slovak case, the park administration was more engaged and assisted by organizing meetings with various groups. On the one hand, this allowed me to interview more stakeholders and collect diverse data. On the other hand, it could have constrained the selection of the interviewees. Given the difficulties encountered with access to local groups, I decided to interview the proposed persons rather than not to interview at all. In addition, a number of conflictual issues between certain stakeholders and the park administration were brought up in the interviews, indicating that the problems were not silenced.

Through the course of this field trip, it became evident that the topics and problems brought up during the first field trip were relatively exhaustive and, in many regards, replicated on the ground, although the local details provided them with context and “flavour”.

3.3.3 Field trip III: September 2014

The purpose of the third field trip was similar to that of the second one. Practically, I also encountered problems establishing initial local contacts. In Poland, I visited the park headquarters in Krosienko-nad-Dunajcem and various locations in and around the park. In Slovakia, the park headquarters in Spisska Stara Ves was visited, and several trips to nearby areas were made. The two parks are located much closer to each other, and it was easier to travel.
Additionally, I was invited to participate in the Alpine-Carpathian Cooperation Forum “Carpathians – between mysticism and intelligent development” in Rzeszow, Poland, which was a useful networking opportunity. In particular, it was possible to conduct interviews with representatives of the Swiss Contribution in Poland, a development fund provided by the Swiss Confederation to support new EU Member States.

In terms of language, in both Poland and Slovakia, the interviews were mostly held in local languages. After the previous trips, I felt more confident in my language skills and conducted both Polish and Slovak interviews myself. The interview recordings were later transcribed by native Polish and Slovak speakers into Polish and Slovak, respectively. Tables 6 and 7 provide a breakdown of the interview groups.

Table 6. Breakdown of interviews by stakeholder’s group: Field trip III, Poland

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The group of stakeholders</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>International institutions</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Swiss Contribution;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional authorities</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Regional Directorate for Nature Protection (Malopolsko Voevodship);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs (national)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Fundacja Partnerstwo dla Środowiska (Environmental Partnership Foundation);</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Park management</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Director of the park; Representatives of nature conservation, planning and other departments;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authorities</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Gmina Krosienko-nad-Dunajcem (several representatives); Gmina Szcawnica;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved groups, including NGOs</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>The Polish Association of Raftsmen on the Dunajec River; Spa complex in Szcawnica; Water power plant in Niedzica;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 7. Breakdown of interviews by stakeholder’s group: Field trip III, Slovakia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The group of stakeholders</th>
<th>Number of interviews</th>
<th>Organization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

91
All in all, thirteen interviews were conducted in Poland, with an average length of 33 minutes. The relatively short average interview time might be related to holding a few group interviews. For example, the representatives of the park administration in Polish Pieniny preferred to be interviewed together. The longest interview was 1 hour 18 minutes, and the shortest was 17 minutes.

In Slovak Pieniny, fifteen interviews were conducted with an average length of 38 minutes, the longest being 2 hours 26 minutes and the shortest just 10 minutes. The shortest interview was with a farmer, who was very concise in his answers either due to a lack of the experience being interviewed or a lack of time.

Another detail that must be mentioned for both Slovak cases is that the representatives of the local branches of the State Forestry Enterprise, the institution managing the forested areas in and around the parks, refused to participate in the interviews. In the Pieniny case, the park director arranged a meeting with their local representative. On the day of the interview, the potential interviewee was in the regional office, and upon my call to confirm the time of the meeting, he cancelled. Overall, during the field trips, I managed to reach out to key stakeholders and collect valuable material, which provided sufficient data for further analysis.
3. METHODS

3.4 Summary
Methodologically, the cases were chosen based on various similarities, namely, natural habitats and socioeconomic, political and cultural patterns of transformation. At the same time, the national and local contexts captured by choosing four cases from two countries allowed me to look at diverse perspectives on the changes in nature conservation governance in the Carpathians. To gather the relevant information, semi-structured, open-ended interviews were chosen as a primary method. The interview sample was collected through the snowball technique, which was used to identify and access a wide range of stakeholders that were not known initially. To conduct face-to-face interviews, three field trips were undertaken. The first trip aimed to collect background information on nature conservation policies in Poland and Slovakia. During the two other field trips, I visited the focal parks and collected case specific information. The thorough documentation and reflection upon my field experience, to some extent, allowed accounting for the possible limitations of the collected data and facilitated future analysis.
PART 3
Policy background
Nature conservation policies are often developed with the aim of tackling the problem of biodiversity loss. All over the world, a growing demand for natural resources, urbanization, climate change and other drivers are leading to increased pressure on the environment and resulting in the rapid degradation of habitats and biodiversity loss (see e.g. IPCC, 2014; Chape et al., 2008). The expansion of protected areas is seen as one of the key policy mechanisms to mitigate these negative trends. Thus, the internationally agreed-upon Aichi Biodiversity targets set the goal to protect approximately 17% of the terrestrial and 10% of the marine surface globally by 2020 (CBD, 2015). The number of protected areas has significantly increased from approximately 10 000 sites recorded in 1962 to more than 209 000 sites protected in 2014 (Deguignet et al., 2014). Currently, protected areas cover more than 30 million square kilometres or approximately 14% of the terrestrial surface and 3.4% of the marine areas worldwide (Deguignet et al., 2014).

The idea of establishing national parks (NPs) emerged in the Carpathian countries at the end of the 19th century and followed the development in other regions. Already then, the mountain landscapes of the Carpathians attracted the attention of early environmentalists, who called for the presser- vation of a fragile environment that was under pressure from various human activities such as mining, grazing, and logging (Oszlanyi et al., 2004). However, it was not until the 1930s that the first parks were established, including the Polish National Park and the Slovak Nature Reserve in the Pieniny Mountains (Danko et al., 2011). During socialism, the protected areas expanded substantially. However, top-down management and centralized planning led to limited effectiveness in the conservation regime and coordination was lacking among the institutions involved in management. The transformation period resulted in full-scale policy restructuring and the
further expansion of protected areas. At the same time, existing protected areas and their management institutions remained in place, forming part of the post-socialist legacy. Europeanization shaped the chosen reform path and introduced new policy principles and norms for this sector. These policy changes led to the formation of the new governance arrangements examined below, including a conceptual shift to a more socially oriented approach to conservation and participatory decision-making.

This chapter starts by illustrating the key features of policy development in the Carpathians during socialism and the transformation period. It proceeds with a scrutiny of the nature conservation governance that emerged shaped by the EU demands, particularly examining the changes that occurred at the national level in response to EU requirements. A special emphasis is placed on the introduction of the Natura 2000 in these countries as one of the key practical tools for conservation in the EU. Last, the interplay between the EU and the national level in these countries is scrutinized. The analysis focuses on changed policy norms and practices, the capacity of governmental institutions and overall challenges and opportunities triggered by Europeanization in this policy sector. The timeline provided in Figure 3 gives an overview of the key regime changes and major steps in development of nature conservation policy to illustrate the historical processes in Poland and Slovakia.

4.1 Nature conservation during socialism: key features

The first national parks in the Carpathians were established in 1932 and comprised the area of the Pieniny Mountains on both the Polish and Slovak sides of the border. Poland became a conservation pioneer in Central Eastern Europe, and by the beginning of the Second World War, had already designated six national parks along with 180 nature reserves and 4 500 natural monuments (Otto & Chobotova, 2013). The strong role of nature protection associations, for example, the Polish Tatra Society, helped to advance a conservation agenda in this country compared to its neighbours (Hoenig, 2014). For instance, in Slovakia, the first national park was established only in 1948 (Tatra NP) (Otto & Chobotova, 2013). These initial conservation efforts were mostly based on a “fortress” conservation approach and were consistent with the development of protected areas in the rest of Europe and the USA (Adams, 2004).
Figure 3. Timeline: Political regime changes and nature conservation policies development in Poland and Slovakia
The next step in the development of nature conservation was related to the emerged socialist regimes. Conservation activities continued to be based on a “fortress” approach, with the strict top-down management of protected areas; the main decisions were made by a central government, often without consideration of local specificities (Andonova, 2004; Josephson et al., 2013). Protected areas were established based on sectorally defined criteria, meaning that areas which were not suitable for productive agriculture, heavy industry, military uses or other strategic economic functions potentially qualified as protected areas. Funding was planned centrally and distributed through various ministries such as forestry, agriculture, or regional planning (Meessen et al., 2015).

The existing environmental problems in socialist countries had a very distinct geography. Some areas, for example, along the Czech-German-Polish border, were heavily polluted and the situation there could be characterized as an ecological disaster. At the same time, approximately 30% of the CEE countries were preserved as pristine nature areas (Pavlinek & Pickles, 2005). The socialist governments throughout the region made attempts to halt environmental pollution and introduced various environmental legislation (Baker & Jehlicka, 1998). However, the measures themselves and their enforcement were rather weak. For example, it was cheaper for industries to pay pollution fines than to upgrade their facilities (Poboda, 1998; Millard, 1998).

The local conservation authorities in strictly centralized socialist systems were left with the sole option to execute centrally agreed-upon plans. Nature conservation institutions thus had a function to provide professional supervision and to define the technical requirements for nature protection (Josephson et al., 2013). The formal criterion for defining a protected area was its integrity and naturalness. The measure of performance for nature conservation was the total area under protection, rather than diversity and the status of protected habitats and species (Meessen et al., 2015). The central governments did not envisage any local participation during the process of site designation and management and were able to rapidly expand protected areas in their countries (Andonova, 2004).

Furthermore, nature conservation was under the competencies of different national ministries and often several plans applied to the same area, leading to rather controversial outcomes. In some cases, especially in the immediate vicinity of protected areas, this brought degradation rather than the conservation or improvement of habitat status (Kuemmerle et al., 2007). In the Carpathians, plans for timber production increased from one five-
4. DEVELOPMENT OF NATURE CONSERVATION

year plan to another without actual consideration of the sensitive ecological conditions of these mountain forests (Josephson et al., 2013). At the same time, the territories of the Carpathians were mostly omitted from collectivization, as the potential for large-scale agriculture was limited due to the mountain terrain and its remoteness. This, in turn, resulted in the preservation of a mosaic landscape formed by local traditional uses such as grazing and small-scale agriculture (Turnock, 2002; Bösze & Meyer, 2014).

Despite a common approach to nature conservation, the socialist regimes across the region were characterized by significant differences. The most prominent example was their attitudes towards land use and private property. Poland was the most liberalized country in the region, and the private ownership of the land remained in place. Consequently, a portion of the land and real estate within parks was privately owned. There were even some commercial and trading activities run by local inhabitants, such as private accommodations and the sale of local products (Otto & Chobotova, 2013; Rosenbaum, 2015).

The network of large protected areas (LPAs) in Slovakia was created after 1948. More than 90% of today’s protected areas in Czechoslovakia, of which Slovakia remained a part until 1994, were established between 1970 and 1990 (Meessen et al., 2015). The full state ownership of protected areas was in place (Otto & Chobotova, 2013). National parks were created in areas that were appropriated by the state from local landowners without compensation. After the transformation and split of Czechoslovakia, private land ownership rights were fully restituted, and the land was returned to the previous owners or their heirs, including land in protected areas. This so-called “re-privatization of land” resulted in increased shares of private land within protected areas, leading to a diverse ownership structure (Otto & Chobotova, 2013). In total, 40–50% of public lands, mostly in forested and extensive agricultural areas of the upland and mountainous part of the country, were returned to the former owners (Paget & Vagacova, 1998). Within some protected areas, the administration manages only a small share of the land, and even strictly protected zones are privately owned.

The rapid changes in the regimes associated with comprehensive economic and societal changes led to the loss of traditional connections to the land among the rural population. One generation has witnessed several formations during their lifetime. This resulted in a rooted feeling about the temporality of governance and societal structures (Palang et al., 2006). Furthermore, traditional knowledge on land management and planning has been lost, and new generations of landowners need to learn it anew. The
previous conservation regimes remained in these lands, significantly limiting the range of possible use options. As a consequence, some of the new owners were dissatisfied with the conditions and became disinterested in land management, which in turn often resulted in land abandonment and the loss of cultivated landscapes (Otto & Chobotova, 2013).

Concerns about the state of the environment during socialism resulted in public dissatisfaction with the regime and the emergence of several environmentally grounded grassroots organizations (e.g., The Danube Circle, Eko-glasnost, and the Polish Ecology Club). These organizations were actively involved in the protests against the authorities in the 1980s (Pavlinek & Pickles 2005; Millard, 1998). In Slovakia, the Slovak Union of Nature and Landscape Protectionists was among the leading organizations of the national anti-socialist opposition. This brought many of its members into high posts in post-socialist government (Podoba, 1998). Unfortunately, many of them abandoned their ideas once in power and switched to other issues. Overall, the regimes across the region responded by withdrawing the most destructive initiatives, such as the Gabčíkovo-Nagymaros dam, a planned hydropower construction on the Danube at the Slovak-Hungarian border that could have had a detrimental effect on the river environment (Pavlinek & Pickles, 2005). Thus, civic activism in the environmental sphere was one of the important elements of protest policy movements during the late socialist period.

The significant differences in attitudes towards land use and private property in Poland and Slovakia determined the starting points in these two countries for the transformation of the regime. Poland experienced less turbulent changes compared to Slovakia due to its more liberal approach to land ownership and private initiative during socialism. At the same time, the rigid governmental arrangements in which the key actors, such as park administrations and municipalities, were embedded defined their limited capacity to cope with the large-scale transformation and changes stemming from Europeanization. The next section illustrates the key characteristics of transformation in environmental and nature conservation policies occurring in Poland and Slovakia in the 1990s.

4.2 Post-socialist transformation and the initial adaptation to change
The fall of socialist regimes was followed by democratization and the rapid liberalization of the economy known as “shock therapy”. These drastic
liberalization measures combined with the decrease of state social support resulted in the significant impoverishment of the population (Wilson, 1999; Jancar-Webster, 1998). Faced with acute economic hardship, public support for environmental agendas dropped significantly. In addition, many polluting industries were shut down, and the use of pesticides and fertilizers rapidly decreased, resulting in an overall improvement of the environmental situation (Coumel & Elie, 2013; Poboda, 1998).

The environmental agenda in CEE countries in the 1990s was related to the initiated dialogue on the prospects of EU accession, which was seen as a strategic step to ensure democratic development in the region (Pavlinek & Pickles, 2005; Börzel & Byzogany, 2009; Carmin & VanDeveer, 2004). The changes induced by Europeanization and aligning nature conservation policy to the EU requirements started even before actual accession. Poland was among the early movers and already in 1992 had begun strengthening its environmental ministries and passed laws to expand state authority to regulate environmental issues. Slovakia was slower in restructuring and started to pass the necessary regulation only in the early 2000s during the actual pre-accession procedure (Coumel & Elie, 2013).

Between 1993 and 1996, most of the CEE countries formally applied for EU membership. In turn, they were asked to fulfil the necessary requirements presented in the form of the *acquis communautaire* and to transpose the relevant legal and policy principles (Carmin & VanDeveer, 2004). This determined the reform path and consequently reduced the regulatory freedom of national governments (Iwanska, 2013). The norm transposition was, to a large extent, a top-down process and provided little room for negotiations (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005). The EU regulation in the environmental policy field was colloquially referred to as *environmental acquis* and had a significant influence on the development of national nature conservation policies. Compliance with the nature conservation areas of the *environmental acquis* was initially met with enthusiasm due to the existing policy traditions in this area (Andonova, 2005). However, existing approaches and models of conservation proved to be hard to change to align with the EU model and the expectations of other Western partners (Jancar-Webster, 1998).

In terms of the actors’ adaptation to the demanded change, the state institutions followed rather slowly due to a shortage of funds and a lack of qualified personnel in high political positions in both countries (Andonova, 2005; Millard, 1998). Already in the 1990s, various early assistance mechanisms were focused on backing capacity development and institution
building all over the region. The first Pan-European initiative covering Central Eastern Europe emerged in 1991 in the form of the Environment for Europe Forum (Kolk & van der Weij, 1998; Andonova & VanDeveer, 2011). Initially, the Forum focused on two aspects, policy development and institution building, as well as on coordinating financial assistance. The latter, however, did not develop within the Forum, since donors preferred to keep control over the financial resources provided to reduce cost of transformation in CEE countries. Meanwhile, the initial broader agenda for policy development and institution building became more profound (Andonova, 2005). For example, Environment for Europe provided assistance in the development of the National Environmental Plans, a programme document aiming to set strategic objectives in the environmental sphere in these countries (Andonova, 2005).

Capacity building, policy networking and the strengthening of environmental institutions were further supported through other financial mechanisms such as programmes of the EU PHARE, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), the World Bank and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). At the latter stage, additional financing, capacity building and the coordination of conservation and socioeconomic development were provided through the Secretariat of the Carpathian Convention, established in Kiev in 2003. These programmes had a strong emphasis on promoting a flexible approach to environmental management (Kolk & van der Weij, 1998). The initiated institutional restructuring was also linked to the first attempts to actively support the establishment of NGOs based on the existing grassroots initiatives. The funding provided by various donors to the NGOs focused on capacity building, expertise and training to support the shift from protest movements to positive participation and policy expertise (Jancar-Webster, 1998; Carmin, 2010). This structural assistance brought about the trend of the so-called professionalization of NGOs, which had multiple effects on the policy process. On the one hand, in many countries, some NGOs were able to engage in national policy making and project implementation, providing high-quality expertise and delivering project results. On the other hand, those movements and NGOs that for some reason were unable to access these funds became excluded from decision-making and even marginalized (Jancar-Webster, 1998).

International assistance from the EU and other organizations provided certain financial resources and steered the initial policy development. However, one of the main critiques of this early Europeanization and the
later pre-accession process is linked to the generalized approach applied by the EU for all countries in the region (Carmin & VanDeveer, 2005). The proposed EU *acquis* did not account for existing countries’ differences in political and socioeconomic development. Existing environmental problems, varying attitudes towards environmental policies and different legacies in nature conservation were also not considered in this top-down process (Schimmelfennig & Sedelmeier, 2005; Braun, 2014). Further evidence of the shortcomings of such approach became especially clear after the accession, when countries in the region entered the implementation stage. The next section provides a further analysis of the Europeanization of this policy sector, as well as the role and strategies of different actors and the emerging policy practices.

4.3 Nature conservation in the EU: policies, norms, and actors

The framework for nature conservation policy in the EU includes both political documents and legislative acts. The main political document, the EU Biodiversity Strategy “*Our life insurance, our natural capital: an EU biodiversity strategy to 2020*”, defines the principal goals and commitments of the Union (EC (a), 2011). The legal framework is set by the Birds (79/409/EEC) and Habitats (92/43/EEC) Directives, which introduce requirements with obligatory compliance for all EU Member States.

The overall policy goal, defined in the Biodiversity Strategy, is “to halt the loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services in the EU by 2020” (EC (a), 2011). Six specific objectives in the fields of nature conservation, ecosystem services, environmental policy integration, and invasive alien species are set to help reach the declared goal. The full implementation of the Natura 2000 network is defined as a major policy tool in regards to measures directly related to nature conservation. Management targets for Natura 2000 include a 100% improvement of the conservation status of the European habitats and a 50% improvement in species conservation (EC (a), 2011).

Following policy targets, two Directives acknowledge preservation, protection and improvement of environmental quality, including the conservation of habitats and species, as their key objectives (92/43/EEC). The establishment of the common network of protected areas, the so-called Natura 2000, is seen as a major mechanism (EC (a), 2013). The main goal of the Natura 2000 is to contribute to the maintenance or restoration of
favourable conservation status for the targeted habitats (231 different types) and species (over 900 taxa) (EEA, 2012).

The provisions on the Environmental Policy Integration (EPI) principle laid down in the Habitat Directive is of particular relevance to this study. The EPI is an instrumental principle concerned with how to handle environmental policy, and it refers to the integration of environmental regulation for all other relevant types of legislation and policy sectors (Jordan & Schout, 2006; Braun, 2014). One of the practical tools for EPI enforcement is an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) (European Council Directive (85/337/EEC), which requires the assessment and mitigation of environmental damage from a concrete project (Bache & Flinders, 2004). Thus, any development on Natura 2000 sites is subject to an EIA.

Natura 2000 is based on a socioeconomic oriented approach, and human activities compatible with long-term conservation goals for a specific habitat are allowed (EC, 2013 (b)). Consequently, a majority of sites continues to be privately owned. For the landowners, this requires compliance with the applied conservation measures and, in some cases, certain restoration and management activities. The management emphasis, in this case, is on ensuring future ecological and economic sustainability, rather than on the preservation of “wild” nature (EC, 2013 (b)). Farmers are compensated for these activities through various compensation schemes, including the EU Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

Table 8. Key articles of the Habitats Directive

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Article</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article 3</td>
<td>Assigns responsibility for designation and establishment of the Natura 2000 sites to each Member State</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 4</td>
<td>Sets criteria for sites designation in connection with the whole territory of the country and biogeographical regions that present outstanding examples of typical characteristics of following natural habitats: Alpine, Atlantic, Black Sea, Boreal, Continental, Macronesian, Mediterranean, Pannonian and Steppic (9 in total). The Carpathians belongs to the Alpine biogeographical region</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 6</td>
<td>Defines management standards, including development of management plans for each site, obligatory assessment of implications for all the development projects that can have significant effect on the site and a principle of compensatory measures in case of negative assessment but absence of appropriate alternative options</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Habitats Directive is concerned with a broad conservation agenda, whereas the Birds Directive, as suggested by the name, focuses on the protection of birds. The key articles of the Habitats Directive define the main conservation principles guiding the EU policy. These principles overviewed in Table 8 include the prohibition of the deliberate capture and killing of wild animals and plants and the conservation of typical natural habitats, endangered species and others (92/43/EEC). The Directive also defines policy and management tools, such as the establishment of the EU-wide Natura 2000 monitoring system, adoption of management plans for designated sites, various compensatory measures in the case of a negative EIA for the site, as well as financing mechanisms (92/43/EEC). Due to the relatively broadly formulated goals, the actual implementation practices of the Natura 2000, to a large extent, depend on the involved actors, their interests, and resources both at the supranational and national levels. The next section provides a further analysis of the actors involved in nature conservation governance in the EU.

### 4.3.1 Key actors of the EU nature conservation policy

The Habitat Directive, similar to the majority of EU Directives, is based on the subsidiarity principle, and the key responsibilities for its implementation are in the hands of the Member States (Paavola et al., 2009). The defined measures are rather generic and goal, not process, oriented, leading to a variety of interpretations and actual policy practices (Maurhofer, 2010). At the national level, this results in various adaptation strategies characterized by different features, for example, the active involvement of NGOs or the diversified management structures of Natura 2000 sites (Kluvankova-
Oravska & Chobotova, 2010). This, in turn, leads to the involvement of a diverse set of actors in the decision-making and implementation across the EU (Paavola et al., 2009).

Table 9. Scope of actors involved in the EU nature conservation policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Actor</th>
<th>Role</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>European Commission (DG Environment)</td>
<td>Responsible for supervision of defined policy measures (e.g. through legal supervision) by Member States and provision of positive incentives for implementation (through co-financing mechanisms), involved in inter-agency coordination and streamlining the EPI at the EU level.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>European Commission (Other relevant DGs: Regio, Move, Mare etc.)</td>
<td>Managing various financial mechanisms used for nature conservation policy and project implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National authorities</td>
<td>Often the Ministry of Environment is responsible for general supervision and reporting to the EU. In some countries also supported in implementation by the special expert and managing bodies (e.g. the State Nature Conservation Agencies, scientific institutions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Regional or local authorities</td>
<td>Immediate supervisor of the nature conservation policy implementation. In some countries also manages Natura 2000 sites.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Site managers (e.g. national parks)</td>
<td>Day-to-day management of the sites, direct policy implementation on the ground.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder groups (e.g. landowners, farmers, hunting, forest associations, local businesses, including tourism)</td>
<td>Direct users or beneficiaries from natural resources, may hold an alternative view on the nature conservation and resource use.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local citizens</td>
<td>Some cases coincide with user groups, but directly rely on the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4. DEVELOPMENT OF NATURE CONSERVATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Affected by the Decision</th>
<th>Resource and land use in their daily life.</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National and international experts</td>
<td>Provide various expertise (e.g. scientific) in support to the policy implementation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGOs (international, national and local)</td>
<td>Hold different roles depending on the context, e.g. project implementation, monitoring and reporting of non-compliance cases, providing alternative to existing policy view etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Donor organizations (Swiss, Norwegian Funds for the Development, World Bank, EBRD etc.)</td>
<td>Financing of various nature conservation projects.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

At the supranational (EU) level, primarily different Directorates General (DG) of the European Commission assigned with conservation and land (or sea) management tasks are involved (see Table 9 for overview). At the national level, the variety of involved actors is much greater and could include the Ministry of Environment, expert conservation authorities, and scientific institutions. Some countries decided to establish special committees that act as mediators in conflict situations, hold public consultations, and assist with the development of management plans (Beunen & de Vries, 2011). The hands-on implementation of necessary conservation measures, as well as monitoring and impact assessment, is often assigned to the relevant regional authorities and various site managers. One of the largest groups of actors includes various stakeholders, such as farmers, hunters, and tourist businesses, with interests in Natura 2000 sites. Local citizens affected by the establishment of Natura 2000 sites constitute another group that is often formally included in the consultation processes.

The expert knowledge supporting the designation and implementation processes came not only from scientific institutions but also various NGOs. A special role of environmental NGOs (ENGOs) in the implementation of the Habitats Directive was acknowledged by several studies (e.g., Weber & Christophersen, 2002; Fairbrass & Jordan, 2001; Börzel & Buzogany, 2010). Large international ENGOs offered resources and expertise for habitat and
species assessments, which were lacking at the subnational or national levels, and were involved in drafting the Habitats Directive and in later assessments of its implementation (Weber and Christophersen, 2002). For example, WWF issued The European Shadow List, an unofficial inventory of national designation processes, which was among the documents utilized by the Commission to evaluate the Natura 2000 designation. In some cases, the evaluation resulted in a negative assessment, stating that the designation did not comply with defined standards. ENGOs also pressured national governments by issuing complaints to the EU Commission about non-compliance, which in some cases brought the legal prosecution of the relevant national governments by the European Court of Justice (Weber and Christophersen, 2002).

Following the EPI principle, the Habitats Directive seeks to incorporate compliance with nature conservation legislation at the early stages of decision-making processes. For this, inter-agency consultations among different Commission DGs are conducted. The DG in charge of developing new legislation should incorporate the relevant conservation measures and consult the DG Environment for their opinion and feedback. Individual projects that may impact nature (e.g., infrastructure construction) become a subject of EIA, which determines the scope of the impact (92/43/EEC). The Commission representative suggested that in practice, the EPI is sometimes compromised and decisions are based on current political and economic priorities rather than on nature conservation goals (DG Environment).

To support implementation of the EPI, the financing of the Natura 2000 is integrated into the funding streams of the various relevant policy sectors, such as Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD), Structural and Cohesion Funds, European Maritime and Fisheries Fund (EMFF), European Social Fund, and LIFE+ (EC (b), 2011). The LIFE+ provides direct funding to nature conservation; however, this funding is relatively small compared with the other streams. Such an approach to financing is not optimal, as acknowledged by the Commission representative, since compromises in priorities between financing conservation or development are often not in favour of the former (DG Environment).

Another practical consequence of the EPI is that it creates the basis for the involvement of a broader group of actors from various policy and economic sectors in nature conservation policy. Some of these groups have substantial resources for lobbying in pursuit of their interests, which frequently does not play in favour of nature conservation (Kluvankova-Oravska & Chobotova, 2010). The Commission strives to maintain a regular
dialogue to accommodate these diverse interests, ranging from pure economic and development goals to strict preservationist rhetoric. Thus, there are several formally established dialogue mechanisms:

1. Discussion groups may involve the relevant Commission DGs, representatives of Member States, businesses, NGOs, and experts with knowledge and particular interests in an issue under discussion. Such groups often address technical guidance for a concrete policy matter;

2. European Habitats Forum, an umbrella organization consisting of 22 members, mainly NGOs, meets biannually to discuss and share ideas on relevant nature conservation issues.

3. Various dialogue groups with major financing institutions (The European Reconstruction and Development Bank, European Investment Bank) are also in place (DG Environment).

The governance of this policy sector is based on a complex interplay among diverse actors from several policy sectors. This interplay provides few channels for interactions among these actors, which is particularly demonstrated by the role of NGOs. Governance is built upon both formal and informal consultation and implementation practices. The broadly defined policy jurisdictions bring a variety of interpretations by national and local actors. The next section looks into the variety of implementation practices for this nature conservation legislation.

4.3.2 Implementation challenges of Natura 2000

The generic approach to nature conservation legislation proved to have both pros and cons. The broadly defined goals of the Directives gave flexibility in implementation to the Member States, allowing them to consider specific national and local aspects (Beunen & de Vries, 2011). However, it soon became clear that without further guidance and clarification, the implementation process could not move forward (Paavola et al., 2009; Evans, 2012). The major limitations stemmed from determining national policy priorities for nature conservation to satisfy the EU requirements (see e.g. EC (a), 2013; EC (b) 2013). In particular, there were many disputes about the principles of site designation. Some habitats and species protected by the Directives Annexes were abundant in some countries, which meant that the entire territory could be proclaimed a Natura 2000 site. Another point of debate concerned Article 6 of the Habitats Directives
(see Table 8) and centred on the interpretation of management standards and sufficient assessment procedures for the development projects in/around the sites. At the stage of implementation, the Commission sought to provide additional guidance to respond to these questions (Paavola et al., 2009; Evans, 2012).

In particular, the Commission responded to these difficulties by preparing various guidelines on the most problematic aspects, such as conservation objectives, habitat priorities with relation to the biogeographical regions, financial mechanisms, management of the sites, and the involvement of local stakeholders (Beunen & de Vries, 2011; Evans, 2012). In addition to this, a series of seminars and workshops, as well as web platforms for communication and knowledge exchange, were launched (Evans, 2012). However, some scholars acknowledged that these efforts were reactive, rather than proactive, delaying the process and diverting resources from implementation (Paavola, 2004; Gibbs et al., 2007). Furthermore, critics noted that designated Natura 2000 sites had not formed a coherent network of protected areas, which conflicts with the initial idea behind this conservation measure to ensure ecological connectivity throughout the EU (Paavola et al., 2009). The designation of Natura 2000 in many EU countries was met with hostility, especially by local actors (see e.g Hiedenpää, 2002; Gibbs et al., 2007). This, arguably, decreased overall local support for conservation and created tensions between the authorities and local land owners and users (Paavola 2004; Gibbs et al., 2007). Thus, the overall long-term effects of Natura 2000 on the conservation of habitats and species remained to be seen.

Compliance with conservation measures and Natura 2000 became problematic for both “old” and “new” Member States, indicating the controversies of this policy. The section below examines the examples of Poland and Slovakia and the major implementation difficulties encountered by these countries. It further focuses on the interplay between the EU and the national level, as well as on policy development in these countries as shaped by Europeanization. Last, the key challenges and opportunities encountered in the implementation of Natura 2000 in these two countries are overviewed to advance understanding of the national contexts and governance arrangements shaping the local processes.
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4.4 Policy development in Poland

The scrutiny of the national framework starts with an overview of the policy and legal arrangements for this sector, as well as of the actors’ adaptation strategies to the EU policy requirements. For this, I will examine the development of Natura 2000 in Poland. The overall policy goal for conservation effort as set in the “National Development Strategy 2020 - Active Society, Competitive Economy, Effective State” is to halt the decrease of biological diversity and ensure appropriate conditions for the conservation of the greatest possible number of species and natural habitats (National Development Strategy, 2020).

The key legislative acts supporting the implementation of this goal include documents directly targeting conservation and those targeting other relevant policy sectors that regulate the use of natural resources. The first type could be exemplified by the Nature Conservation Act (2004) and the Environmental Protection Act (2001). The second type includes such documents as the Act on Forest (1991), the Law on Hunting (1995), the Spatial Planning and Land Development Act (2003) and others.

The network of protected areas in Poland is formed by numerous sites covered by different degrees of protection. Thus, there are 23 national parks under the highest degree of protection, along with 121 natural landscape parks, approximately 1,500 nature reserves and more than 960 Natura 2000 sites. All in all, there are ten different forms of nature protection, covering approximately 20% of the Polish terrestrial surface (Iwanska, 2013). The national parks cover an area of approximately 317,000 ha or approximately 1% of the country’s territory. They aim to protect areas with particular environmental, scientific, social, cultural and educational value, with a total surface of not less than 1,000 ha when all environmental elements and landscape values are under protection. The parks are established to preserve biodiversity, as well as to restore resources and environmental elements and reconstruct distorted natural habitats, plants, animals and fungi habitats (GDEP, 2015). The land in most of the Polish national parks is state owned. There were no major changes in land use during the transformation, as no large-scale ownership changes occurred during socialism.

The EPI principle streamlining conservation in other policy sectors is laid down in the Environmental Protection Act. In the Nature Conservation Act, the principle is further specified in provisions on the integration of spatial planning and nature conservation (Iwanska, 2013). The park authorities are responsible for the enforcement of these legal provisions and
the evaluation of proposed development in and around the national parks. At the same time, as defined by the Nature Conservation Act, any extensions or other changes of park borders must be agreed upon with the local authorities. Furthermore, public consultations must be held in relation to the territorial changes or adoption of the park management plan (Niedzialkowski et al., 2012).

The Environmental Protection Act defines the following division of competencies across governance levels. At the national level, the Act assigns major nature protection competencies to the established environmental protection body, namely, the General Directorate for Environmental Protection (GDEP), and the administrative body, namely, the Ministry of Environment. The General Directorate facilitates national policy coordination and implementation, gathers monitoring data, and disseminates relevant information, including official communications with the EU. At the regional level, such competences are assigned to the branches of the General Directorate – Regional Directorates for Nature Protection or voivodship, and other territorial bodies of the government administration acting on their behalf. Finally, at the municipal level, the bodies of territorial self-government are responsible for nature protection (Iwanska, 2013). Locally, where national parks exist, they hold key management responsibilities; namely, they are responsible for the preparation and implementation of the management plans and any further implementation. Otherwise, nature conservation management falls under the responsibility of the regional directorates (Iwanska, 2013).

The financial costs are borne by the public bodies, i.e., the state budget and the budget of the local government. The important mechanism for financing nature conservation is the Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management (FEP). The FEP is formed from collected environmental taxes that are used to finance various environmental policies, including nature conservation (Iwanska, 2013). This Fund can be used by public entities (park administrations, municipalities) and qualified private entities (e.g., NGOs) as a co-financing mechanism with various external funds (e.g., the EU funds, Swiss Contribution Funds). The significance of FEP for nature conservation policy in Poland was stressed by several actors involved in conservation (UNEP-GRID; GDEP (a)). The Fund is especially important for accessing EU financing mechanisms, as most of them require co-financing and the pre-payment of all obligations, and FEP funding can be used for this. The Fund also mitigates disparities in the access to international funding mechanisms and provides structural

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support to local institutions, helping them to receive such funding. Often reported in-kind contributions from state and non-state organizations in CEE regions account for a lower percentage compared to those of Western European countries due to a lower salary level (UNEP-GRID). At the same time, one interviewee suggested that such centralized funding limits the critical role of NGOs in policy processes, as everyone is interested in receiving these funds from the government (NGO 2, PL). Thus, along with increasing financial resources of NGOs, such arrangements potentially decrease their critical role.

Additional sources of funding include various EU instruments, those designed for the support of nature conservation projects (e.g., LIFE+) and types of sectoral financing, e.g., the CAP. Other international institutions and donor organizations, such as Swiss or Norwegian Contributions, provide funding for small- and medium-scale conservation projects focused on linking conservation and the improvement of local livelihoods (GDEP (a); Swiss Contribution (a),(b)). Last, a system of entrance fees is widely employed in the parks and contributes to their income together with the sale of consumer goods and the provision of tourist services (Otto & Chobotova, 2013).

Overall, the Polish policy and legal framework enforce key policy principles defined by the EU, such as EPI, supported by the co-financing of conservation from different policy and economic sectors. Arguably, this suggests formal Europeanization, based on the transposition of the respective EU policy norms into the national legislation. The framework provides for the vertical division of competencies among the relevant institutions. It also sets conditions and requirements for public participation in the conservation matters affecting local citizens, such as changes to the park’s border, new conservation and management plans, etc. The next section provides further insights into the processes of Europeanization and the emergence of multi-level governance in the implementation of the Natura 2000.

4.4.1 Natura 2000 policy in Poland

The Natura 2000 designation started in Poland at the end of the 1990s. During this early stage, the scope of habitats and species included in the Directives relevant to Poland was identified. Simultaneously, the list of species that is under special protection by the Polish legislation was prepared to submit to the Commission for inclusion in the Annexes of the Habitats and Birds Directives (GDEP (a)). The Natura 2000 designation was
under the supervision of the Ministry of Environment and mostly involved conservation professionals, scientists from the Polish Academy of Science, and regional experts (GDEP, 2012).

Starting in 2004, consultations were held with different sectors and municipalities. During these consultations, serious opposition to the proposed plans was encountered from some governmental bodies (Water and Forestry Departments) and municipalities (GDEP, 2012). Consequently, Poland submitted to the Commission a significantly reduced list of proposed sites to avoid further national conflicts among the different agencies on land and resource use modes (GDEP, 2012). This, in turn, resulted in the dissatisfaction of expert circles involved in the development of the initial proposal. In response, the group of NGOs issued an unofficial inventory of the possible Natura 2000 sites (Shadow List) for Poland, which pointed to the shortcomings of the official proposal. The Commission took this unofficial list under consideration and demanded expansions of the network. Poland failed to undertake the necessary changes in due time, and the EU started infringement procedures. The case was later taken to the European Court of Justice, and a decision against Poland was issued for non-compliance with the Habitats Directive (Cent et al., 2013).

In 2008, teams of Provincial Specialists were set up to develop updated lists of Natura 2000 sites. Their tasks included field assessments and rounds of public consultations. The decision on the enlarged list was finally approved nationally and by the Commission in October 2012 (GDEP, 2012). The expansion of the Natura 2000 network in the updated list was mostly done through the designation of those territories already covered by some form of nature protection at the national level, for example, national parks. This overlap brought about the need to coordinate and harmonize existing elements of the nature conservation policy (UNEP-GRID; Niedzialkowski et al., 2013). The further local consequences are discussed in the case chapters. Not surprisingly, conflicts persisted in the areas where sites required designation of previously not protected areas (Kluvankova-Oravska et al., 2009; Paavola et al., 2009).

At the stage of policy adaptation, the Polish government held an ambiguous position by agreeing to the EU requirements but not providing further necessary actions for their implementation either due to budget constraints or conflicting interests. Furthermore, due to already existing national conservation regimes, Natura 2000 was understood solely as a restrictive measure and an “additional burden”, especially at the municipal level (Kluvankova-Oravska et al., 2009; Zawlinska & Mika, 2013). This, to some
extent, limited the possible full-scale restructuring of the policy system and undermined the idea of the common consideration of biodiversity and social well-being behind Natura 2000.

Currently, the key issues for Natura 2000 recognized by the interviewed actors include the update of scientific data on habitats and species, especially outside national parks, the development and implementation of management plans, and further enforcement of laws and conservation measures (GDEP (a), (b), (c); UNEP-GRID). Natura 2000 has played an important role in the implementation and enforcement of nature protection measures in forms of protected areas other than national parks and in introducing in practice public participation (Niedzialkowski et al., 2013; GDEP (a), (b); UNEP-GRID).

Public consultations were conducted during the designation process and the discussion of management plans, which were ongoing at the time of the interviews. Due to this fact, the overall practical implications of consultations for decision-making was not yet articulated by the authorities responsible for it. The representatives of the state institutions at the national level acknowledged the importance of public consultations for the success of medium- and long-term policy implementation (GDEP (a)). Currently, public consultations play only a consultative role and are subject to interpretation by the responsible state authorities. Thus, a few problems related to handling public feedback were mentioned by several interviewees and confirmed by previous research, including the great dependence on the context and economic priorities, scientific data as primary accepted basis for comments, as well as a lack of transparency in the interpretation of the comments (GDEP (a), (b); NGO 2, PL; Cent et al., 2014).

NGO participation in the policy processes was not problematized by their representatives, indicating good working relations with both national and regional authorities (NGO 1, PL; NGO 2, PL). However, opinions differed when evaluating the results of this collaboration. It appeared that the state authorities and NGOs worked closely together when implementing various hands-on conservation projects, whereas the possibilities for their input into political and decision-making processes were limited and often not accounted for (NGO 1, PL; NGO 2, PL). In the case of some systemic problems, NGOs used the ability to reach out directly to the EU. In several cases, this resulted in EU institutions acting upon NGOs requests and national governments being pushed to resolve pending issues (NGO 2, PL). This could be seen as a relatively strong instrument in the hands of the NGOs, allowing them to influence national decision-making.
The implementation of the Natura 2000 policy became a practical tool to streamline Europeanization into Polish nature conservation. The national institutions in the Polish case first reacted with inertia to the induced changes, resulting in delays and reluctance to incorporate the EU norms. Gradually, this initial inertia, followed by additional top-down pressure, shifted into the absorption of norms and the adaptation of national institutions to the proposed changes. The analysis revealed several MLG features, such as the emerging interplay between horizontal and vertical levels and a few mechanisms to reach across levels, which to date have been mostly used by NGOs. However, it seems that the decision-making process continues to be largely dominated by the opinions of the state authorities. The situation in Slovakia, analysed in the section below demonstrated various similar features.

4.5 Policy development in Slovakia

At the time of the interviews, the nature conservation policy in Slovakia was going through a revision process. The updated *National Biodiversity Strategy 2020* had been approved in January 2014, and the related implementation and financial plans were being developed. The Biodiversity Strategy proclamations were similar to the EU goal: to halt biodiversity loss and the degradation of ecosystems, as well as to restore, where necessary, ecosystems and their services. Act No. 543/2002 on Nature and Landscape Conservation (2002) is the primary Slovak legislative document defining nature conservation policy. The Act is based on the transposition of the key EU norms, such as the EPI principle, the integration of social and ecological concerns and others.

The central state authority in the area of nature conservation is the Ministry of Environment. The Ministry of Environment established a specialized body, the State Nature Conservancy (SNC), which is responsible for the management and implementation of the nature conservation policy and the development of environmental education programmes (SNC (b)). The SNC is divided into the National Park Service, the Protected Landscape Areas Service, and the Service of Caves. The State Nature Conservancy is not a decision-making body, but rather advisory and implementation oriented (SNC (a)). On the district level, the District Environmental Authority is the body responsible for managing nature conservation policies (Vozar, 2013). The environmental policy is supervised through the Slovak Environmental Inspection. Overall, the policy system in Slovakia is more centralized compared
4. DEVELOPMENT OF NATURE CONSERVATION

to that in Poland, as the State Nature Conservancy endorses all of the decisions made by local authorities, including national park administrations.

There are six different forms of protection foreseen in the Slovak legislation, including national parks, protected landscape areas, protected resorts, nature reserves, natural monuments, and protected landscape elements. Nine Slovak national parks cover more than 580,000 ha, which is approximately 10% of the state territory. Most of the national parks include in their territory several nature reserves, which are sites that contain natural habitats or habitats only slightly altered by human activities. These sites are under a stricter conservation regime than the national parks, since parks in Slovakia are open to various economic activities, including commercial forestry, agriculture, hunting and others (Vozar, 2013). The Natura 2000 sites have also been included in the net of Slovak protected areas. According to the World Bank data, approximately 36% of the Slovak territory is covered by some form of nature protection.\(^6\)

The specific areas of concern for nature conservation are related to the preservation of endemic flora and fauna and the sustainable use of natural resources (agriculture, forestry, and hunting). As regards development aspects, the main concerns are connected to tourism and infrastructure development, as well as to landscape and urban planning. (Svajda, 2008). The nature conservation policy in Slovakia was greatly affected during early transformation. The country went through a process of re-privatizing land, drastically increasing the privately owned shares of PAs, which in some parks reached 80–85% (e.g., Mala Fatra NP, Pieniny NP). Sometimes even strictly protected nature reserves within national parks were privatized. The nature protection regime has been equally applied to state and privately owned land; thus, new owners are unable to use land and resources freely. The compensation system, in cases of use restrictions, has often not provided adequate contributions. Consequently, owners became disinterested in the land and forest, which resulted in land abandonment and the associated problems discussed earlier in the text (SNC (c)).

The transformation period also resulted in the diversification of natural resource management. The Slovak forest under protection, which constitutes approximately 57% of all Slovak forested land, is under the management of a separate body, the State Forest Enterprise, which is under the

Ministry of Agriculture. The State Forestry has its own expert body, the National Forest Centre, that conducts monitoring and research in protected forests. In practice, foresters and conservationists have very different approaches to nature conservation. The latter support a “less management” approach, while foresters advocate for active management and use, even within PAs. The communication and agreements between these sectors have often been challenging, and controversies sometimes resulted in open conflicts (SNC (a), (b)); FRI (a),(b)).

The funding of protected areas is mainly carried out through the state budget, which is rather limited (SNC (a)). Thus, even state funding of nature conservation is highly dependent on external support, mainly the EU, but also other international funding mechanisms (Swiss Contribution, Norwegian fund). In addition, some costs are covered by the private owners (Vozar, 2013). Consequently, the objectives and priorities frequently change to fit into the focus of the available funding, and no long-term planning is possible. This, according to the Ministry representative, often prevents policy continuity and implementation of the strategic visions in nature conservation (Ministry of Environment, SK).

Additionally, due to a relatively poor tourist infrastructure in the majority of parks (except for several well-known parks, e.g., Tatra NP, and Slovensky Raj NP), income generation from alternative sources has not yet become a feasible option. Only one NP in Slovakia has entrance fees (Slovensky Raj) (SNC (b)). During the interviews, lack of funding was brought up rather frequently by the representatives of both state and non-state institutions from the national and local levels (SNC (b), (d), (e)); NGO 2, SK; PNP (a)). However, even available funds were hard to access, and the application process is connected to lengthy and complex bureaucratic procedures and public procurement (NGO 2, SK).

The principles of participation and public consultation are included in the policy and legal documents; however, practical implementation needs to be further investigated at the local level. Another issue mentioned by several respondents was a strictly centralized character of the Slovak system, namely, the regional and local authorities lack the autonomy and funds to implement policy. The policy and management measures should be approved by the central government in Bratislava, which would then distribute funding accordingly. However, nature protection does not have a high priority compared with other land use sectors. Protected areas are located far from the capital and have lower visibility on the national agenda, as well
as being perceived as unprofitable compared to other land use options, for example, forestry (SNC (b); Ministry of Environment, SK).

Slovakia, similar to Poland, has completed the formal Europeanization of nature conservation policy and aligned existing political and legal frameworks to the EU standards and norms. However, the nature conservation policy structures are centralized, and most of the decisions are taken at the national level. The management of nature conservation policy is based on the dispersion of competencies between the state and the private owners, as well as across different state institutions. Funding comes primarily from the state budget, which, in turn, is dependent on international funding, often constraining long-term policy planning.

Overall, the adaptation to the EU norms and standards went more smoothly in Slovakia compared to Poland. The country addressed the Commission request for adjustments, and the EU did not exert additional top-down pressure for infringement. Despite initial non-compliance, no sanctions were imposed in Slovakia since the authorities never questioned the EU demands. This arguably stresses the normative character of Europeanization in these countries. The next section further illustrates the adaptation to Europeanization processes through the example of Natura 2000 implementation in Slovakia.

4.5.1 Natura 2000 policy in Slovakia

The Resolution on Sites of Community Importance (239/2004) was adopted by the national government in 2004. However, the Commission did not accept the proposal on the basis of the insufficient variation in the habitats and species selected for protection (SNC, 2013). During the next stage (2005–2006), the National List was updated by the State Nature Conservancy and revised by experts. A round of public consultations with landowners and users of newly added areas occurred at this stage (SNC, 2013). After these consultations, the updated proposal came back for interministerial negotiations and was submitted to the government in 2009. The decision, however, was suspended due to persistent opposition from some governmental institutions.

A solution was found in 2011 that added 267 new sites on the condition of full coincidence with already existing protected areas. Exceptions were made for two locations, where users agreed with the designation or where active conservation and restoration was ongoing. The decision was followed by a round of public consultations with municipalities and state land and resource
managers on the proposed plan (SNC, 2013). The newly submitted National List was finally approved by the Commission in 2012, concluding the site designation and closing the formal transposition of the EU requirements.

The pending issue in regards to compliance with the EU norms is wolf hunting. The wolf is a strictly protected species in the EU; however, Slovakia was granted an exception and hunting was allowed. However, one national NGO claimed that the current level of hunting was unsustainable, based on alternative monitoring data demonstrating a lower number of wolves compared to the numbers referred to by the government (NGO 1, SK). In response to the submitted complaint, the Commission requested the Slovak government to enforce a year-long ban on wolf hunting until the updated data becomes available, the ban was still in place in 2014.

Similar to Poland, the public consultation in Slovakia does not have a binding character, namely, it is not required by law to incorporate expressed opinions in the final decisions. This has resulted in problems similar to those in Poland of handling the comments of involved actors. Such comments were frequently not incorporated into decisions, creating discontent among the involved actors. The lack of standards for conducting the consultations and incorporating scientific data into the decision-making created additional difficulties for the process (Svajda, 2008; Svajda & Fenichel, 2011). Legacies of the past were mentioned by several interviewees as a factor obscuring the development of formal participation. The land expropriation conducted during socialism to establish national parks did not entail any compensation to the local citizens. This brought persistent hostile attitudes towards nature protection and a lack of trust in state institutions (NGO 2, SK; SNC (c)).

The representatives of the State Nature Conservancy mentioned that during the consultation processes, they tried to locally promote the idea of economic incentives, namely, compensation that would be provided for introduced conservation measures. However, at the later stage, the available funds turned to be insufficient to cover the landowners’ expenses for nature conservation and land use restrictions, since the central government decided to cut the amount of compensation (SNC (b), (e)). Additionally, it has been difficult for the local land owners to access compensation due to the complex application process. In turn, this resulted in even greater mistrust towards nature protection, as the conservation authorities could not deliver the promised results (SNC (b)).

In contrast, the NGO representatives did not acknowledge major difficulties in accessing state institutions. In fact, it was noted that Slovakia is a small
country and people involved in nature conservation in different capacities often know each other personally. It is also not uncommon for them to change employment between state institutions and NGOs and vice-versa (NGO 2, SK). The interviewees acknowledged that the key problem was related to the lower prioritization of conservation policies in the national agenda, and advice from the State Nature Conservancies often went unheard (NGO 1, SK; NGO 2, SK). Conservation NGOs coordinate their activities through the informal forum changeNET, which functions as a dialogue platform.

The specific management issues in Slovakia were related to the adoption of the management plans for Natura 2000 sites, protected areas zoning, building research and monitoring systems for protected species of European and national significance, and reliable and diversified funding (Svajda, 2008). The national and EU policy components and protection measures also need to be further integrated. So far, the national legislation has still not provided a clear reference for who is responsible for the management of Natura 2000 sites and using which means. Most of the Natura 2000 sites and some portions of the national parks are in private hands. Thus, it is the owner’s responsibility to implement the conservation measures (SNC (b)). However, they are not (or not sufficiently) compensated for this and consequently are not motivated to comply. Thus, the question arises of how to actually enforce Natura 2000? Evidently, negative incentives (fines) do not always work, and positive (compensation) are often insufficient. The section below provides a further comparative perspective on the key characteristics of the existing nature conservation governance in Poland and Slovakia, including the interplay between actors and levels, as well as their adaptation to the EU demands in the context of the post-socialist legacy.

4.6 Policy changes and adaptation strategies in nature conservation in Poland and Slovakia

The differences and similarities in governance arrangements between Poland and Slovakia could be attributed to many factors such as existing national political and institutional structures, inherited legacies, Europeanization and others. The similarities induced by Europeanization have mostly been determined by identical transposed norms. Certain common inherited post-socialist legacies such as top-down government, central planning, a utilitarian approach to nature, and the prevalence of the natural sciences in
conservation decisions have to a large extent determined policy development in these countries. However, socialist regimes also differ, for example, in land ownership structure or the absence/presence of private initiatives.

The initiated transformation brought various governance and policy challenges, including conceptual approaches to the conservation and development of protected areas, the jurisdictions and capacities of state actors and their attitudes towards change, inter-sectoral coordination, financing and management, public participation, the role of NGOs, and vertical and horizontal interplay among the involved actors (see Table 10).

Table 10. Key characteristics of nature conservation governance in Poland and Slovakia

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Poland</th>
<th>Slovakia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Land ownership legacies</td>
<td>No collectivization=no major changes in land ownership</td>
<td>Collectivization=re-privatization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>=&gt;drastic increase of private land within PAs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal transposition of the EU norms</td>
<td>Formal transposition is completed, only minor issues</td>
<td>Formal transposition is completed, issues with wolf hunting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vertical interplay</td>
<td>National authorities saw the EU requirements as “additional burden”</td>
<td>National authorities expressed no open opposition to the EU demands</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>=&gt;delay &amp; infringement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jurisdictions &amp; capacity of state actors</td>
<td>Clearly defined responsibilities, division of competences among conservation administrative and expert bodies, regional and local self-governance</td>
<td>Unclearly divided responsibilities among different state institutions responsible for natural resource management and local self-governance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management responsibilities &amp; inter-sectoral coordination</td>
<td>Coordination through EPI, clearly defined procedures</td>
<td>Coordination through EPI, unclear procedures, lack of coordination among involved institutions and private owners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Better secured and diversified, including special fund for conservation</td>
<td>Primarily state funding, greatly rely on external funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional funding</td>
<td>Funding promoting multi-stakeholder projects as tool for implementation (SWISS, EU LIFE+)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Different legacies in land ownership played a significant role in the adaptation processes. For Poland, the land-ownership legacy did not become a major concern, whereas in Slovakia, it changed nature conservation policy substantially. Both in Poland and Slovakia, formal transposition of the EU legislation is complete, with minor issues. The different attitudes of the national governments towards compliance resulted in a variation in the vertical interrelations between the EU and the national authorities. The EU sanctioned deviation in adaptation and demonstrated the normative character of Europeanization (see Table 10). The current practical extent of Europeanization, however, is comparable and includes enforcement of the Natura 2000 measures, adoption of management plans, the reserved financing and management capacities for its further implementation.

The design of the state authorities for nature conservation in Poland and Slovakia appear to be similar. They include the Ministry of Environment and an expert body in both Poland and Slovakia. The General Directorate for Environmental Protection in Poland and the State Nature Conservancy in Slovakia provide the general management of this policy area. Additionally, in Poland, regional and local self-governance and state authorities have been
tasked with implementation of certain nature conservation provisions. In Slovakia, natural resources within protected areas are open for economic use and managed by separate state entities. This often leads to an unclear management structure and a lack of coordination between different institutions. Private owners have also been tasked with implementation of the applied conservation measures, but these are often not coordinated or supervised.

Management responsibilities have been clearly divided in Poland, and different sectors are coordinated through the enforcement of EPI. Management responsibilities for the Natura 2000 network in Poland have been assigned to the Regional Directorates for Nature Protection. In Slovakia, the management of Natura 2000 sites is the responsibility of the landowner, either state or private. Private landowners could potentially receive compensation, but the procedure is rather complex, and thus not everyone can access the funds.

There has been a key difference between the two countries in funding nature conservation policy. In Poland, funding of nature conservation has been ensured through the Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management (FEP), which is formed through “green” taxes and available for public entities and NGOs. Additionally, Poland benefits from various donor programmes, and at the local level, parks can collect the entrance fees. Multiple sources of funding ensure the diversification of resources for this policy sector. In Slovakia, the funding available for nature conservation mainly comes from the Operational Programme for the Environment – EU funding. Donor programmes also contribute to nature conservation. Previous studies indicate an initial lack of experience in acquiring EU funds for the programme’s implementation and of the capacity to use such funds (Grodzinska-Jurczak & Cent, 2011; Niedzialkowski et al., 2012). This arguably had stronger effects in Slovakia compared to Poland due to limited alternatives.

Public participation has proven to be one of the most challenging areas to adapt to the EU norms. Formally, both countries included public consultation as a part of the policy process. However, consultations did not have a legally binding character, and the procedures and the rules for handling feedback were not always clear. Even when participants expressed opposition to a decision, it was often been moved forward, which, in turn, brought the feeling of distrust and hostility among affected groups.

The role of NGOs in the policy process might be another indicator of available channels for reaching across different horizontal and vertical levels. Both in Poland and Slovakia environmental NGOs are fairly well
developed. Initial funding and support for capacity building was provided by various donor organizations and the EU, leading to an emergent professionalization trend, as recorded in the previous literature (e.g., Carmin 2010). Furthermore, the great reliance on external funding reduced the critical capacity of NGOs to set an agenda. Most of the time, NGOs must fit their project goals within the existing priorities of funding mechanisms. Overall, the interplay among actors appeared through policy coordination across different state institutions, the formal and informal day-to-day collaboration of state and non-state actors, public consultations and occasional reaching out to the EU to ensure the enforcement of relevant provisions.

In conclusion, the Europeanization process arguably provided an impulse to change the legal and institutional frameworks of nature conservation in both countries; however, it has not moved beyond formal adoption. The EU demands introduced a new approach to nature conservation based on the incorporation of biodiversity conservation and social concerns and triggered changes in the approach of state authorities towards protected areas. This initiated the development of a participatory model of decision-making for nature conservation in both countries. However, the rigid top-down character of Europeanization and the lack of an attempt to adapt to existing legacies led to skewed implementation and the watering down of some of the introduced policy requirements.

4.7 Summary

The EU nature conservation policy provides a common framework for policy development in all EU Member States. The implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives caused changes and conflicts with stakeholders and land users both in “old” and “new” Member States. The Natura 2000, however, did not become a coherent network of protected areas and did not reach its initial objective, even though it extended the overall amount of protected land in the EU countries to approximately 20%.

To date, the legal transposition of norms has mainly been completed in all Member States, as both Directives are several decades old. The main issues have been attributed to policy implementation, funding, and the further integration of Natura 2000 measures with other policy sectors, nationally and at the EU level. The EU umbrella provides an opportunity to
various actors for capacity building and knowledge sharing through various activities and available funds.

In Poland and Slovakia, Europeanization resulted in great changes to existing approaches to nature conservation, as well as to institutional, legal, and financial settings. The common requirements determined similarities in the formal transposition processes, however, with differences in the employed management and financial practices. This might be attributed to the differences in inherited legacies and the variations in prioritization and financial capacities of these countries. These national and subnational policy developments and governance arrangements created a framework for local processes that is analysed in the subsequent case chapters.
PART 4
Empirical results
CHAPTER 5

Eastern Carpathians: conserving wilderness?

The territory of the Bieszczady National Park in Poland and Poloniny National Park in Slovakia is often perceived to be a “true” wilderness due to its remote location, dense forest cover, and abundant animal life. In Poland, the East Carpathian, where the Bieszczady NP is situated, is sometimes colloquially referred to as the “Wild East” (UNEP-GRID). The parks indeed host unique old grown mountain beech forests, valuable grassland habitats, and a population of large carnivores, the importance of which is recognized internationally by the EU and the UN protection regimes. Both parks are designated Natura 2000 sites, and together with the Ukrainian partners also form the East Carpathian UNESCO Man and Biosphere (MAB) reserve. The diverse grasslands of these parks are among the most threatened habitat types in both countries and in the EU (Bezak & Halada, 2010).

The fairly early introduction of conservation measures, in the 1950s in Poland and the 1960s in Slovakia, combined with low human pressure due to the remote location and low population density allowed the preservation of an area with a relatively wild, undisturbed nature. At the same time, even during the socialist era, this remoteness led to substantial societal changes. Due to the higher cost of agriculture, forestry, and large infrastructure projects in the mountain areas, these territories were left relatively undeveloped. This, in turn, resulted in mass emigration from these rural areas to urban centres. During the early transformation years, employment opportunities shrank further, leading to even more drastic emigration trends. This depopulation process resulted in land abandonment and the loss of open landscapes formed by traditional agricultural activities. Comprehensive changes in political and legal frameworks, as well as local socioeconomic conditions, affected conservation regimes and the capacities of protected areas.
The two parks in focus aim to protect similar ecosystems and to some extent face similar challenges. However, each park is an independent institution under different national jurisdictions, with its own priorities, resources, and practices. Therefore, this chapter is built upon an analysis of the policies and practices in the two parks across the border. In terms of content, the chapter starts by introducing the key natural characteristics of the area. It then proceeds with an analysis of the historical events of the 20th century that significantly affected natural conditions and nature conservation in the area. Similar to previous chapter, the timeline provided in Figure 5 illustrates major steps in development of nature conservation in two parks in connection to the key regime changes in Poland and Slovakia. The chapter then turns to the socioeconomic characteristics relevant to understanding the current situation in and around these protected areas. Further sections will provide insights into nature conservation practices and management challenges and will introduce key actors, their resources and the interplay of these in each park. The last section will illuminate the state
of transboundary cooperation between the two parks. Finally, the chapter concludes with a summary discussion of the two cases.

5.1 Natural characteristics of the area: wilderness in the heart of Europe

The Bieszczady National Park is situated in south-eastern Poland, and the Poloniny National Park lies just across the border in north-eastern Slovakia (see Figure 4). The Polish park covers the moderate heights of the Bieszczady Mountains, and the Slovak side includes the Bukovsky Vrchy Mountains. The altitudes covered by the two parks vary from 210 to more than 1 300 m above sea level, with the highest peak being Tarnica (1 346 m) on the Polish side. The “wild landscapes” are in fact semi-natural and a result of the intense human use (timber harvesting, livestock grazing, etc.) of the area before the Second World War (UNEP-GRID; BdNP (a)). These parks are among the most valuable landscapes in Poland, Slovakia and even Europe, providing refuge for mammals and birds. Approximately 1 000 species of higher plants have been recorded in the area, of which 14 are endemic to this part of the Carpathians. In addition, more than 3 300 invertebrate and approximately 300 vertebrate species inhabit the area, including more than 140 bird species. For example, the parks are inhabited by various protected species of eagle and owl\(^7\). The approximately 60 mammalian species recorded in this area include the European bison, wolf, brown bear, lynx, Eurasian otter and others (Winnicki & Zemanek, 2009; SNC (a)).

The most widely occurring forest association is the Carpathian beech-wood forest (UNEP-GRID; Winnicki & Zemanek, 2009). The beech forest in some of the least accessible areas of both parks is considered to be primeval. It contains a globally significant natural genetic bank of beech and other species typical for this ecosystem (Solar et al., 2014). Another distinctive characteristic of non-forest habitats is the existence of so-called polonina ecosystems, species-rich mountain grasslands, occurring above the upper forest line (Winnicki & Zemanek, 2009). Polonina is a combination of plants that appeared due to extensive human activities, mostly cattle grazing, and persisted over several centuries (PNP (a)). The present and

\(^7\) For example, the Eagle Owl (\textit{Bubo bubo}), Golden Eagle (\textit{Aquila chrysaetos}), Lesser Spotted Eagle (\textit{Aquila pomarina}) and Long-Eared Owl (\textit{Asio otus}).
future maintenance of polonina grasslands require active management interventions (e.g., shrub removal), as the grazing pressure that helped to form and maintain these habitats has decreased significantly. The current state of nature in the East Carpathians is a result of long-term use, as well as of the significant historical changes in the societal and political conditions that shaped the local environment. The next section illustrates the changes before and during socialism.

5.2 Local legacies in conservation and land use: the nature-society nexus

In many rural areas in Europe, including Poloniny and Bieszczady national parks, the history of socioeconomic development has been tightly interlinked with natural characteristics, which determine economic practices, settlement patterns, etc. At the same time, the scale of human interventions shapes the current state of landscape and biodiversity. Additionally, the legacies of previous regimes, for example, socialism in Poland and Slovakia, greatly influence the policies and practices of nature conservation and land use. This section focuses on the key implications of socialism for socioeconomic development and nature conservation.

The anthropogenic pressure in this part of the Carpathians intensified in approximately the 15th–16th centuries, when Wallachian colonization by shepherds and peasants called Ruthenians occurred. Their activities greatly affected the landscape, as part of the forest cover was removed to free areas for agriculture and grazing (Solar et al., 2014). After that time, the settlements expanded reaching a maximum at the beginning of 20th century. The main landscape changes associated with this early expansion of the human population were driven by the timber industry, trade routes, cattle and sheep grazing, and the extension of meadows, pastures and arable fields (Winnicki & Zemanek, 2009). Thus, the centuries’ long use of these territories shaped the existing composition of diverse landscapes.

The 20th century in the Eastern Carpathians was marked by several dramatic events. The area in focus experienced several devastating wars: the First World War, the Little War, and the Second World War. The Slovak part of the area belonged to Czechoslovak Republic (1918–1939) and partially to Hungary (after 1939), and after the Second World War became a part of Czechoslovakia until the “Velvet Divorce”, the dissolution into the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic in 1993.
5. EASTERN CARPATHIANS

Figure 5. Timeline: Regime changes and nature conservation in Bieszczady and Poloniny NPs

The dates of key regime changes in Poland and Slovakia
The territory of Bieszczady immediately after the Second World War became part of the Soviet Republic of Ukraine. However, in 1947 during the process of so-called ‘straightening the borders’, this territory became a part of socialist Poland. During the Second World War, the border territory of Bieszczady became a scene for the underground national liberation movement. The population of Ukrainian origin fought against the Soviet coalition and the communist regime. Their resistance continued for several years after the official end of the war in 1945. The Soviet Union took over this territory and started the resettlement of the local population to other parts of Ukraine in order to halt the rebellion. Later, the Polish authorities continued this practice and transferred locals to the northwest of the country. Eventually, the area was declared a no-entry zone and depopulated. Almost all of the houses, churches and other buildings in the villages were burned down, resulting in a great loss of cultural heritage (BdNP (a)).

The decreased human pressure brought in favourable conditions for the restoration of natural habitats, i.e., the re-naturalization of polonina ecosystems, the return of the forest stands to their natural conditions, and the restoration or increase of many species.

Landscapes of the East Carpathians

Polonina habitat in Bieszczady National Park, May 2014
5. EASTERN CARPATHIANS

Beech tree stands in Udava Nature Reserve, May 2014

Forest habitats along the tourist trails, Bieszczady National Park, May 2014
Historical events also account for a specific phenomenon of the Bieszczady region’s emergence: the ‘the land of valleys’, characterized by semi-natural landscapes that were formed by an intensive human presence and later abandoned. One interviewee noted examples of clearly visible remnants of orchards converted back to the wild, with trees and other cultivated plants marking existed houses and roads (UNEP-GRID). These specific landscape features together with the remnants of old cemeteries and stone church formations are still characteristic of the area. In the late 1950s – beginning of the 1960s, the area was re-opened for settlement, as it was important to harvest timber from the forests that had overgrown the former agricultural areas. Forestry and, later, conservation became two major sectors in the Polish Bieszczady Mountains (UNEP-GRID; BdNP (a)).

In the Slovak part of the region, the overexploitation of resources during the war brought the degradation of living conditions for local populations in these areas, which were already poor and among the least developed in Czechoslovakia. During this period, forests were logged extensively, and only the end of the Second World War and the rearrangement of national borders stopped extensive harvesting. The national border status of the area between the Soviet Union and other socialist countries made access and the economic use of the territory more difficult, and collectivization of this land was undertaken later (Meessen et al., 2015).

The establishment of a national park to safeguard natural conditions on the Polish side was initiated by the Polish Academy of Science in the mid-1950s, and the Bieszczady National Park was officially designated in 1973 (Winnicki & Zemanek, 2009). Initially, the park covered a territory of approximately 5,500 ha, which was, however, too small to ensure the adequate protection of a characteristic arrangement of altitudinal vegetation/climatic zones and rare flora and fauna species. Thus, the park territory was gradually expanded in 1989, 1991, 1996 and 1999. Eventually, the total area of the park reached approximately 52,000 ha, including 30,000 ha of a core zone with strict protection (BdNP, 2012).

The establishment of the national park was associated with discussions on tourist services. In the 1960s, an idea emerged to develop extensive tourist infrastructure in Bieszczady for winter tourism, such as ski slopes and large hotels. However, this plan clashed with the scientific community and the “hunting lobby”, mostly communist party elite, who wanted to keep these areas wild and inaccessible to tourists. Thus, the alternative approach for the area propagated a view of the Bieszczady Mountains as a “tourist reserve” for experienced hikers, with minimal infrastructure in place. In 1988,
a discussion on the development of mass winter tourism in the area emerged again. However, at that time it was met by significant public protests asking that the Bieszczady be kept as an area not built over by hotels and ski lifts and only open for low-impact tourism (UNEP-GRID; BdNP (a)).

On the Slovak side, between the 1930s–1960s, the population around Poloniny reached its maximum, accounting for approximately 10,000 inhabitants, but then started to decline (Bezak & Halada, 2010). The history of Poloniny NP is also connected with enforced human resettlement. The socialist government in the 1980s decided to construct a water reservoir, Starina, on the Cirocha River to supply drinking water to the urban areas within the Kosice and Presov regions. Because of this, settlements within seven municipalities were completely removed and approximately 3,500 inhabitants evicted. The construction of the reservoir was finished in 1987, but even after the change of regime, the available land around Starina was not returned to the previous owners due to the special hygienic regime that was established around the reservoir (PNP (b); Bezak & Halada, 2010). The resettlement significantly influenced the current socio-demographic context and turned this area into one of the most scarcely populated and least developed regions in Slovakia (Solar et al., 2014; Bezak & Halada, 2010). Several of my interviewees referred to the construction and operation of reservoir as a continuous injustice from the state, since people were deprived of their homes against their will and without adequate compensation or other mitigating measures (Zboj; Ulic; Stakcin; Pension Beskyd). Furthermore, most revenues generated from the water supplies have been collected by the state water management body, and nearby municipalities have not benefited from it (PNP (a)).

Traditional agricultural activities in and around today’s Poloniny NP have been influenced by unfavourable local climatic conditions, less-productive soil, and fragmented landscapes. Traditionally, the key activities were mainly hay production and cattle grazing. In the 1970s, when collectivization reached this area, large farms were created and agriculture intensified, which brought a decline in traditional farming (Bezak & Halada, 2010). Two large forest-agricultural farms were established: the LPM Ulic and agricultural farm Stakcin, which after 1995 became a private farm (Agrifop). According to Bezak and Petrovic (2006), the key ecological causes of collectivization were associated with the merging of narrow fields and grasslands into large blocks, the use of pesticides and heavy machinery, as well as increased pressure from grazing in some areas. Furthermore, the diversity of farming practices decreased, and production mostly aimed to
increase the yields of specific monoculture crops (Bezak & Halada, 2010). Collectivization led to a change in employment type from full-time farmers to hobby farmers, and many people started to commute to nearby towns and cities to work in factories (Solar et al., 2014).

The Slovak Poloniny National Park was established in 1997; however, nature conservation in the area dates back to the 1960s, when the first State Nature Reserves were established to protect rare beech forests. In the 1970s, the initial protection increased and expanded with the formal designation of the Eastern Carpathian Protected Landscape Area. Currently, the national park covers a territory of 30,000 ha and has a buffer zone of approximately 11,000 ha.

The decreased human pressure from the enforced relocation of local citizens and voluntary outer migration to urban centres, on both the Polish and the Slovak sides, created favourable conditions for a rapid increase in forest cover that continued through the 1990s and early 2000s (Griffiths et al., 2013; Munteanu et al., 2014). Forest expansion was coupled with a decrease in agricultural production, especially after socialism. Socialist governments maintained a relatively high ratio of land cultivation through heavy subsidies of agriculture, especially in Slovakia, despite its low profitability (Munteanu et al., 2014; Griffiths et al., 2013). The estimated rate of abandonment during the early transformation decade was approximately 21% to 29%. This is recognized as one of the most drastic recent episodes of land use changes in Europe (Munteanu et al., 2014; Griffiths et al., 2013; Kuemmerle et al., 2008). The recorded consequences of land abandonment in the area include contradictory trends. On the one hand, expanded undisturbed forest habitats now support a significant population of large carnivores and herbivores. On the other hand, studies report the loss of rare, valuable grassland communities and their rich biodiversity due to natural succession (Bezak & Halada, 2010).

The park institutions in both countries were embedded in a strictly hierarchical socialist government system that proved to have limited means to halt these changes. This system also did not envisage attempts to mitigate the social implications of conservation in the area. The next section will further explore the socioeconomic characteristics of the rural areas around the two parks.
Culture and nature in the East Carpathians

Wooden church St. Michael the Arcangel, Ulicke Krive (1718), Poloniny NP, May 2014

Water reservoir Starina – man-made ecosystem, Poloniny NP, May 2014
5.3 Understanding the socioeconomic landscapes of the Bieszczady and Poloniny National Parks

5.3.1 Polish Bieszczady: population trends, the economy and tourism potential

The Bieszczady NP special protection regime partially covers three municipalities, Lutowiska, Cisna and Czarna, located in the Bieszczadzki and Leski districts of the Podkarpacki region. These municipalities are, in many regards, similar in their socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. Lutowiska is one of the biggest municipalities in Poland, with an area of 47 500 ha and an average population density of four people per square kilometre. It has 2 092 inhabitants and a registered unemployment rate of 18% (see Table 11). Cisna has a territory of 28 700 ha inhabited by 1 726 people, which makes the average population density close to six persons per square kilometre. The unemployment rate is comparable with that of Lutowiska and is approximately 19% (see Table 11). Czarna is the smallest and most densely populated municipality, compared with the other two, with an average den-
The number of inhabitants in this area was greatly affected by depopulation, though the area was later re-opened for settlement. The population trends did not follow the natural fluctuation, since only a certain number of people were allowed to return, and their relocation was supported by the state. During socialism, the combined number of inhabitants of the three municipalities was approximately 6,000 people (see Table 11). Additionally, the territories of the Polish municipalities changed in 2004, so it is hard to directly compare the historical data with the current numbers.

The trend observed in recent years demonstrates negative migration balances, meaning that people leave these territories, and the population is decreasing. The highest rate is in Czarna, at -24, the lowest is in Cisna -9 and Lutowiska has is at -12 ratio (SVS (a), (b), (c)), 2014). Several interviewees acknowledged that mostly young people leave the area, increasing the proportion of retired people (UNEP-GRID; Lutowiska (a)). The poor access to health care and education services contributes to the decision of many to leave. A local citizen recalled,

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Table 11. Socioeconomic data on municipalities in and around the Bieszczady NP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Territory, ha</th>
<th>No inhabitants 1974</th>
<th>No inhabitants 2010</th>
<th>No inhabitants 2014</th>
<th>Population density people/km²</th>
<th>Budget M. EUR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cisna</td>
<td>28 700</td>
<td>1720</td>
<td>1741</td>
<td>1726</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czarna</td>
<td>18 500</td>
<td>2048</td>
<td>2421</td>
<td>2413</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>1.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lutowiska</td>
<td>47 500</td>
<td>1981</td>
<td>2164</td>
<td>2092</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>94 700</strong></td>
<td><strong>5 749</strong></td>
<td><strong>6 326</strong></td>
<td><strong>6 231</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Author’s compilation from SVS a, b, c*

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8 The number of inhabitants in 1974 was kindly provided by the Statistical Bureau in Rzesow, Podkarpacki Branch.
... when I lived in Bieszczady, my kids had to travel for approximately 25 km one way to go to school. The nearest hospital was 50 km away, not always accessible in the winter time... (UNEP-GRID).

Park representatives also noted a tendency towards slowly increasing immigration to the Bieszczady NP. This mostly occurs in the form of second homes for people from cities or as a place for retirement for those who want to be closer to nature. To date, this tendency has been rather marginal and has not posed any significant threats. However, it could become problematic in the future, both for nature conservation (e.g., through additional barriers to animal migration) and for the socioeconomic situation through aggravating the problem of an ageing population that requires increased social services (BdNP (b)).

The budgets of municipalities were also comparable, amounting to approximately nine million zloty (~2 M EUR) for each municipality (see Table 11). The budget of Cisna showed a deficit, whereas the two other municipalities had slight surpluses. At the time of the interviews, no subsidies for the amount of protected land had been allocated to the municipalities by the central authorities. Economic activities harming nature are prohibited inside the park, but low-impact tourism and extraction of non-timber products (mushrooms, berries, etc.) are allowed. Employment opportunities are mostly related to forestry (outside the park boundaries) and tourism. Several specificities of forestry sector employment were mentioned by the respondents. First, the expansion of forestry is naturally limited, meaning, forested areas are finite, and even commercial plantations take several decades before they can be harvested. Thus, this sector provides limited employment opportunities (UNEP-GRID). Second, this sector has also been impacted by the transformation during the 1990s. The state ceased subsidies, making the management and harvesting of mountain forest less profitable compared to the lowland forests (BdNP (a)). Third, forestry provides mostly low-skilled employment. In contrast, the demand for higher education among young people increased from the 1980s and onwards. Employment opportunities in Bieszczady after the completion of higher education were and are rather limited and reserved to municipality administrations, schools, or park institutions (Lutowiska (a)).

Tourism is an important economic sector in Polish Bieszczady. To date, the Bieszczady Mountains have mostly been unaffected by large-scale tourist infrastructure, following the socialist legacies, which makes it one of the top destinations in Poland for “soft” tourism (Winnicki & Zemanek,
5. EASTERN CARPATHIANS

The combined tourist capacity of the three municipalities is approximately 59 facilities (SVS (a), (b), (c)), 2014). However, this number only accounts for facilities hosting more than ten people at a time. Additionally, a large portion of available tourist accommodation is provided through agritourist farms, namely, small pensions, hotels and sometimes just extra rooms in houses rented to tourists. Through these, tourists have a chance to experience local life: as one interviewee said, “…the hosts treat their guests like a family and people like it…” (Lutowiska (a)). Another contributor to the popularity of these establishments among local citizens is that farms with not more than five beds are exempted from taxes. It is, therefore, hard to estimate their exact number and the amount of generated income. Municipality representatives noted that such tax system leads to the provision of seasonal employment opportunities for local people, as well as to the development of tourist services (shops, equipment rental); however, it contributes little to the municipal budget. (Lutowiska (a)).

Agriculture has never been a significant sector for employment in the area and currently produces products for household consumption. Traditionally, agricultural practices focused on cattle and sheep grazing, but this became too risky and unprofitable when the large predators returned. The park representatives mentioned that some attempts to reintroduce traditional sheep grazing were made in the 2000s. Locals, interested in sheep grazing, were given subsidies to re-establish this practice. The municipality representative recognized that this appeared to be an attractive and relatively easy business opportunity for many. In practice, shepherding turned out to be rather difficult for the inexperienced, and many lost animals to predators and diseases. Some people gave up the project as support ran out over time, while others were better trained and learned to improve their shepherding practices (UNEP-GRID; Lutowiska (a); BdNP (c)). The situation in Polish municipalities varies significantly compared with their Slovak counterparts, who struggle even more when searching for employment, as illustrated in the section below.

5.3.2 Slovak Poloniny: drastic changes in socioeconomic development

Poloniny NP is located in Presov Region and occupies significant parts of Snina district. There are ten municipalities within the NP borders (see Table 12). All ten municipalities show similar socioeconomic and demographic characteristics. Their territory ranges from 5 054 ha (Zboj) to 279 ha (Jalova). Thus, they include both relatively large and small units that are characterized
by settlement structures from 59 to 916 people, the smallest being Prislop (59) and the largest being Ulic (916), as illustrated in Table 12. The unemployment rate is high, varying from 22% to 42%. The proportion of people over 55 years old is also high, reaching 30% in some areas (Solar et al., 2014).

The combined population of these municipalities in 1970 was approximately 6,064 people. However, the construction of the water reservoir in the 1980s resulted in forced resettlement, and several villages were permanently flooded. This, along with voluntary emigration, led to a rapid decline in population, and in 1991, only 3,385 people still inhabited the territory (see Table 12). Overall, approximately 60% of the inhabitants left the area after 1970. This alarming decline continues to date, and within the last decade, over 18% of people left the area (see Table 12). The population density varies from approximately 3 to 36 inhabitants per square kilometre, which is well below the Slovak average (110 per km²) (see Table 12). The municipal budgets vary significantly from approximately 32,000 EUR to 450,000 EUR. This could be explained by the different size of these municipalities and the varying number of inhabitants; on average, the larger municipalities have higher budgets. Rapid depopulation around Poloniny NP led to land abandonment and a complex situation regarding land use in/around villages. Private property (houses and land) cannot be used without the owner’s permission, but it is often complicated to find the owner to ask for permission. Thus, several interviewees representing different occupations noted that these territories are deteriorating and that no mechanism to halt this has yet been found (Pension Beskyd; PNP (b), (c)).

The population has an ethnically mixed structure (e.g., Slovaks, Ruthenians, Roma) (Solar et al., 2014), and interviewees noted that its cultural diversity was an asset for the area (Ulic). This region is furthermore rich in cultural heritage, particularly in its typical wooden architecture, and fine examples of typical wooden churches can be found in Ulicke Krive, Rusky Potok, Topola, and Jalova. Similar wooden architecture was spread all over the Eastern Carpathians, but the best-preserved examples remain in Slovakia, serving to date as one of the key tourist attractions.
Forestry provides critical employment opportunities, constituting from 60% to 96% of the revenues in the focal municipalities. Only modest revenues from tourism were recorded, except for Ulic, which provides ten percent of the revenues in the local budget since the municipality owns the accommodation facility (Solar et al., 2014). “Soft” tourism is still in a developing stage and has certain potential due to the unique combination of natural and cultural heritage. Currently, it is questionable whether local people recognize the possible economic benefits of this sector. So far, mostly “backpacking” tourists, namely, experienced hikers staying in tents, visit the...
area. The representatives of municipalities noted that this typically does not result in significant revenues (Stakcin; Zboj).

Further describing the employment changes, interviewees noted that during the socialist period, people used to commute to the nearby towns to work in factories (mostly armoury and other military productions). These factories were closed down after the change of regime, as they became unprofitable, and this employment opportunity ceased (Stakcin; Zboj; PNP (b)). Additionally, the area around Poloniny NP is a border territory between EU (Slovakia) and non-EU (Ukraine) countries, so there is a significant presence of border police. The mayors noted that the border police are employed by the state and do not contribute to local employment (Zboj; Ulic). A plan to construct an aqua park, which, however, did not move forward, was the only substantial development project in the recent years that interviewees recalled. In addition, this project met certain local resistance, as inhabitants feared it would disrupt the image of a “wild and quiet” place, the current perception of Poloniny, and not necessarily bring adequate revenues in return (Pension Beskyd).

Due to limited opportunities, segments of the young and economically active population move to urban areas or abroad in search of employment. One interviewee mentioned that only five of her 30 previous classmates still work in the region (PNP (a)). Overall, high unemployment rates, a high proportion of the population being retired and the substantial emigration of young people make this area dependent on state subsidies. Additionally, the situation is aggravated by the poor technical infrastructure in these territories. Almost none of the villages have canalization or running water, despite being adjusted to the water reservoir. There is only one road leading to the valley and connecting it with the outside world. Furthermore, the municipalities do not have the opportunity to apply for extra funds to build the necessary infrastructure, since the number of inhabitants is too small (the minimum number to apply for such funds is 10 000 inhabitants) (PNP (b)). The area appears to face structural developmental challenges that leave very few alternatives to the local inhabitants.

The second part of this chapter turns to the closer scrutiny of nature conservation policy and practices, the involved actors and the interplay between them using the examples of the two case parks, starting with the Bieszczady National Park.
5.4 Local governance of nature conservation: Bieszczady National Park, Poland

5.4.1 Implementation: a strong park safeguarding wilderness

In accordance with Polish legislation, a national park is the highest form of nature conservation regime. The park administration, included in the organizational structure of the Ministry of Environment, is directly responsible for all conservation activities and the implementation of policy provisions. In cases where land in the park is state owned, as in Bieszczady, where 96% of the territory belongs to the state, the park administration holds a significant degree of autonomy. The headquarters of the park are located in Ustrzyki Gorne, whereas Tourist Information and the Education Centre is in Lutowiska, and the Museum and Educational Centre of the park is located in Ustrzyki Dolne (BdNP (a)). The park representatives are firm in evaluating existing policy frameworks, stating “Policy structures are sufficient for the conservation of nature in Bieszczady…” (BdNP (a)).

The key document setting long-term priorities and conservation measures for national parks is the Conservation Plan, a document containing detailed provisions on the park’s tasks. At the time of the interviews, Bieszczady NP did not have a valid Conservation Plan. The Ministry of Environment was reviewing the standard national format of such plans; therefore, all of the submitted plans were put on hold. In the meantime, the park staff had to work with Annual Action Plans. This significantly limited their flexibility, since activities for the following year had to be decided well in advance to receive the respective funding (BdNP (b)).

There were three main goals for the park institutions: i) nature conservation, ii) environmental education, and iii) public access to the park (BdNP (a)). Each of the goals was addressed through a set of concrete measures. Since the territory of the park is mostly forested, forest management is crucial for adequate conservation. Thus, the territory of the national park has been divided into 10 forestries, each supervised by two staff members responsible for conducting the necessary conservation measures in the field. There were also five field rangers, operating throughout the park, conducting monitoring and assisting with hands-on tasks when necessary. Various conservation measures included clearing the forest of non-native spruce and other species, environmental monitoring, including particular species of flora and fauna, anti-fire monitoring, and the identification of other emerging problems. To protect the meadows in the low-
lands, the park administration keeps a population of *Hucul* horses, a traditional local breed, to ensure necessary grazing level.

The park representative evaluated the state of nature in the following terms:

...the fauna within the park is in excellent condition. We conduct several wildlife monitoring programmes, and we know species populations are in a good state... BdNP (c).

This opinion was partially supported by the local entrepreneurs engaged in tourism: “...the nature conservation is a high priority in the region, and for nature it certainly means good...” (Local entrepreneur). Hunting in the park vicinity was not mentioned as an issue for the species, as stable population numbers demonstrate. The threats from illegal activities, for example, poaching, illegal timber harvesting was also evaluated as low (BdNP ((a), (b)).

The second goal of the park is the education of both local citizens (e.g., school pupils, local inhabitants) and the general public (e.g., park visitors). The main objectives of environmental education consequently were formulated as raising environmental awareness among local citizens, the education of visitors, and improving the skills of the park’s staff (BdNP ((a), (b)). For example, every year park institutions hold an ecological competition for school children from the area to increase knowledge about the local environment and cultural heritage. For the general public, the park administration holds various events dedicated to Earth Day, the European Day of Parks and others. Visitor education is also conducted through exhibitions in the park museum, which is visited by 25 000 to 30 000 tourists annually. Several educational trails in the field introduce key flora and fauna species of the area, also contributing to visitor education (BdNP (a)). Informational support to visitors is provided by the Information Centre in Lutowiska, where they can find various information brochures, flyers, and maps.

The third goal is related to the management of park access: collecting fees, supporting tourist infrastructure, and assisting visitors in getting around. Approximately 350 000 people visit the park annually. Most of the tourists come during the period from the end of April until mid-September, with the peak months being July and August. The park has a system of fee collection, and the entrance cost seven zlt. (~1.7 EUR), collected at 20 entry points. The rules for tourists prohibit the collection of any flora or fauna species, off-trail hiking, littering, or overnight stays in tents. Assessing the
number of tourists on the trails during the high season, one of the local residents said:

I try not to go to the mountains in the summer because the only thing you will end up doing is to greet someone every five minutes, as it is really crowded up there… (UNEP-GRID).

The pressure during these months increases significantly, especially along the most popular trails leading to the peaks, causing degradation of the areas around the trails (BdNP (a), (b)). In contrast, other areas remain relatively undisturbed or even closed for tourists. One of the park representatives provided the following assessment:

It is both good and bad that we get most of our visitors during the summer. On the one hand, the areas in the immediate vicinity to the paths are degrading during these months. On the other, for the rest of the year, the number of visitors is minimal, and it gives enough time for these areas to recover. The same with animals: for most of the time the disturbance is minimal (BdNP (b)).

The interviewees noted that in order to reduce localized tourist pressure, future tasks need to be planned to channel tourist traffic inside the park along different routes and create some low-impact attractions on the park borders (folklore museums, horse-riding, workshops for traditional handcraft making, etc.) (UNEP-GRID; BdNP, (a)).

The responsibilities for performing various functions are divided between different park entities. In addition to field tasks and implementing hands-on conservation measures, the park headquarters are occupied with administrative work, whereas the Tourist Information and Education Centre addresses research, monitoring and tourist management. The Museum and Educational Centre is tasked with environmental education and tourism management. Administrative work constituted a large part of working time, and the park representatives acknowledged that the amount of paperwork was increasing, even for the field staff (BdNP (a)). The absence of a long-term management plan and a high number of ad hoc tasks, especially in reporting, were mentioned among the key problems in the administrative work. The introduction of the Natura 2000 conservation regime in parts of the Bieszczady NP was mentioned as another challenge for policy implementation in the park. The next section scrutinizes the introduction of Natura 2000 and the associated changes in Polish Bieszczady.
5.4.2 Natura 2000 in Bieszczady NP

Natura 2000 was introduced in the park during the EU accession. The park staff noted that in terms of the applied conservation measures, Natura 2000 did not change their practices greatly, as the existing protection regime was stricter than the introduced norms. The main administrative changes from Natura 2000 included new requirements for planning and reporting. In many cases, this increased the amount of duplicate paperwork, as similar documents in different formats must be produced for the national and the EU levels. The following evaluation was provided by the park representative:

...I am not a specialist in Natura, but for my work, it is like double activities, which are almost the same. For instance, we have to prepare the Annual Action Plan for the Birds and Habitats Directives [Natura 2000], but we also anyway prepare the park Annual Action Plan. The areas are almost identical, and to much extent, the activities are the same, but it is still two different documents... (BdNP (a)).

The existence of such duplications potentially indicates the lack of practical integration between two conservation regimes, supranational and national.

At the same time, representatives of NGOs noted that the EU legislation provided an opportunity to improve law enforcement and protection status in the immediate vicinity of the national park (NGO 2, PL). Bieszczady NP is surrounded by the San Valley Landscape Park, which serves as a buffer zone and has a lower degree of protection, allowing various economic activities. This landscape park, as other similar parks in Poland, has less administrative and financial resources compared to the national park, and this often impedes the implementation of required conservation measures. The designation of landscape parks as Natura 2000 sites increased their profile in the national policy by placing them under international supervision. This also created an opportunity to apply for extra funding both nationally, due to the increased profile, and at the EU level.

In terms of conservation measures, the following effects strengthening conservation outside NPs were particularly noted:

The ecologists or NGOs may come to the Natura 2000 area, and if they find some iconic species, like wolf, bear or others, they lobby to establish no harvesting zones in these areas... (BdNP (c)).
Several interviewees pointed out that the introduction of Natura 2000 regulation made it possible to address the EU Commission directly. In a case where a development project receives a controversial assessment and may potentially harm designated sites, interested stakeholders can seek EU assistance to demand further information from national governments. EU inquiries often help to bring the attention of national authorities, as they prefer to avoid possible EU sanctions (NGO 2, PL; UNEP-GRID). Various interviewees recognized that this provides grounds for empowering NGOs and grassroots movements.

Another significant change related to Natura 2000 was the increased availability of funding for scientific and rural development (e.g., through LIFE+) projects. The implementation of administrative and planned conservation costs are usually covered by the state budget or park income, whereas research and development projects need to search for external funding (BdNP, (a), (c)).

Nature 2000 also impacted the division of responsibilities for the Environmental Policy Integration (EPI) principle incorporated into national legislation. This principle is implemented at the local level mainly through two procedures: Spatial Planning and Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). Nature conservation measures are embedded into municipal spatial planning requirements. The park is involved in the review of municipal Spatial Plans and ensures compliance through approval of the plan.

Infrastructure and other development projects planned in the core and buffer zones of the park must obtain permission from the park authorities after the formal EIA has been done. The Regional Directorate for Environmental Protection similarly manages the Natura 2000 areas outside the national park. The Regional Directorate often consults with the park to assess the development projects for Natura 2000 and the landscape parks because due to their expertise and knowledge, the park staff is trusted for such assessments (BdNP (c)).

The formal competencies in approving Spatial Plans and EAIs comprise a relatively powerful instrument in the hands of nature conservation, supporting a strong position of conservation compared to other land use sectors. However, it also created certain tensions between the municipality offices that often advocate for these development projects, some local citizens, and the park institutions.

10 The actual budget and resources are overviewed in the section below
... Natura 2000 is seen as a bottleneck for local development, especially by the local authorities, since it is impossible to have here some small factories, ski resorts, etc. (Local entrepreneur)

The park representatives were aware of these tensions, stating

... it is not impossible, but almost impossible to build something here, since large parts of the park call for strict protection, so no activity is allowed there. That is why we receive negative comments from local communities. (BdNP (c)).

Overall, the park and municipality representatives have had rather different views on the future of this territory. The park staff mentioned the necessity of park enlargement, as currently some habitats of key species (e.g., large carnivores) lay outside of the park borders. However, in order to increase park territory, consent from the local communities is needed. Municipality and park representatives acknowledged that the likelihood of the park expansion is low, as local citizens are not in favour of it (BdNP (b); Lutowiska (a)). The existing tensions contribute to the dynamic of local processes formed by the interplay between different actors. The following sections explore the composition of actors on the ground, their resources, and the interplay between these to better understand how current governance fits nature conservation policies and practices.

5.4.3 Actors and resources: tensions between conservation and development

The mapping of actors in Bieszczady NP revealed their division based on two different categories: actors directly involved in nature conservation and those influenced by it. Table 13 provides an overview of the actors around Bieszczady NP. The scrutiny is built upon respondents’ evaluation of actors’ responsibilities and the scale of engagement in nature conservation. Three identified groups of actors directly involved in nature conservation include state authorities, local self-governance, and NGOs (Table 13).
Table 13. Key actors in nature conservation and related practices in the Bieszczady NP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Responsibilities and actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State authorities</td>
<td>Park institutions; Regional Directorate for Environmental Protection of Podkarpacki Province;</td>
<td>Park is directly responsible for policy implementation in its territory, whereas Regional Directorate on Natura 2000 sites</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authorities</td>
<td>Municipality offices in Lutowiska, Cisna, and Czarna;</td>
<td>Municipalities are responsible for provision of social services and local spatial planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local and national NGOs</td>
<td>Bieszczady Foundation; Carpathian Foundation, the Polish Naturalist Club and others;</td>
<td>NGOs implement various projects for tourism development and nature conservation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, several other actors were mentioned by interviewees:

- **Donors** were not directly involved in local policy implementation but contributed financially to the implementation of nature conservation policy. Among such contributions were various projects supported through the framework of the Swiss-Polish Cooperation Programme aiming at the development of tourist infrastructure in the park (sanitary facilities, tourist shelters, etc.). There is also a similar Norwegian Grant Programme within other sectors funding nature conservation projects;

- **Partners in the neighbouring parks** (Poloniny NP in Slovakia, Uzansky NP in Ukraine) constituting the UNESCO MAB Reserve. The section below scrutinizes transboundary cooperation in the East Carpathian MAB reserve.

- **International NGOs** interested in launching research and conservation projects inside or in the immediate vicinity of the park. For example, the ongoing discussion with the NGO “Re-Wilding Europe” on the re-introduction of ponies (*Polski* horse) to support the state of grassland habitats;11

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- Expert/scientific milieu conducting various types of research in the field. The results of these research efforts are usually collected and published annually in so-called *Monografie Bieszczadzki*\(^{12}\) and *Roczniki Bieszczadzki*;\(^{13}\)
- Volunteers, mostly students from Jagellonian and other universities in Poland, studying nature related professions (ecologists, foresters, etc.);

The Bieszczady National Park, a primary *state authority* responsible for nature conservation in the park, employs approximately 110 people on a permanent basis and approximately 80 for seasonal jobs from May to September (BdNP (a)). In comparison, local municipalities’ employ from 15 to 20 people (Lutowiska (b); Local entrepreneur). The park annual budget was approximately 12 million Polish zloty (circa 2.9 M EUR), including ~4 million (approximately 950 000 EUR) from state subsidies, 3 million (~710 000 EUR) income from entrance fees, and the rest derived for different projects, mostly from the National Fund for Nature Protection and Water Management and external funds (e.g., Swiss Contribution, the EU). In comparison, the budget of Lutowiska (*gmina* in Polish) municipality was approximately 10 million zloty (2.4 M EUR). The financial resources of the park were relatively high and secure, since key operations were covered by subsidies and a number of alternative income sources (e.g., entrance fees, project funding) were available. The park institutions provide locally significant employment opportunities. However, no benefit sharing schemes (e.g., from entrance fees) with local municipalities were in place. None of the interviewed stakeholders recalled any discussion on the possible introduction of fee sharing schemes. The park institutions are rather independent financially, politically, and legally from other local stakeholders.

There are *three municipalities* situated fully or partially within the borders of the park: Lutowiska, Cisna, and Czarna, although the special nature protection regime of the park buffer zone covers more municipalities (e.g., Ustrzyki Dolne, Solina). The restrictions associated with conservation regimes are rather similar for all three municipalities in focus. Thus, the encountered problems have also been similar. The limited time and

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\(^{13}\) *Roczniki Bieszczadzky* [http://www.bdpn.pl/index.php?option=com_virtuemart&page=shop.browse&category_id=1&Itemid=179](#) (accessed 16 May 2014)
resources did not allow me to engage in in-depth studies of all three municipalities. Thus, I have chosen gmina Lutowiska for closer scrutiny, mostly for practical considerations, as the park institutions are located in this municipality.

The mayor of the municipality is elected, and the municipal office permanently employs 20 staff members. There is also an elected representative body (Rada gminy) consisting of 15 people. Municipal institutions were occupied with local development, such as economic development and budget, education, culture and health, environmental protection, tourism and monuments (Lutowiska (b)). The annual municipal budget was approximately 9–10 million zloty (2.1–2.4 M EUR), with deficits in the last 3 years. The financial situation has been evaluated by the gmina representative in the following terms:

… the well-being of local community is based on money: we need it to teach our children, to preserve the roads. However, the national park is established to only preserve the nature, and they have money for this, but we do not… (Lutowiska (a)).

Until recently, the government provided part of its subsidies to the municipalities based on the amount of protected land. This practice was stopped due to the financial crisis and the overall cut of the national budget. Thus, municipalities were no longer compensated for the amount of protected land in their territory, resulting in the budget deficit. The possibilities for any large-scale development are constrained due to the special conservation regime and the distance from the major transportation hubs and markets. The options to gain income from other sources have also been rather limited. Tourism, according to the gmina representative, did not bring sufficient income to the municipal budget due to the special taxation regime for agri-tourist facilities, which constitute the majority of the accommodation provided in the area. The municipality office has been rather successful in applying for the EU funding. Only recently, the community offices of Lutowiska were completely renovated and now host a modern library, a bank, a municipal social welfare centre, and a tourist information centre. Other social infrastructure include primary and secondary schools and a health centre providing basic medical care (Lutowiska (b)). The municipality representative acknowledged the complex situation for local development:
…we do not want more inhabitants here. I think we have enough, and we want to preserve the view on the mountains and other nature, but we also want money for schools and roads, so we need some way to earn the income… (Lutowiska (a)).

This rather constrained view might be attributed to several facts including the limited capacities of social infrastructure and higher competition for income sources for extensive development.

Last, there have been several local NGOs actively working in the field of nature conservation, tourism, and community development, e.g., the Bieszczady Foundation (Fundacja Bieszczadzka based in U. Dolne)¹⁴ and the Carpathian Foundation (Fundacja Karpacka – Polska, based in Sanok).¹⁵ It is also fairly common for people to work as self-employed entrepreneurs involved in either the implementation of small-scale projects supported by external funding or the provision of some small nature-based enterprise (e.g., bird watching, tourist guiding). Local NGOs and small enterprises sometimes switched their roles, depending on funding opportunities. It is, therefore, hard to define a clear focus for the local NGOs and entrepreneurs, since their work is project based and often funding driven. Several interviewees confirmed this, recognizing that the work of local NGOs heavily relied on external funding, EU funding mechanisms, and Swiss and Norwegian Cooperation programmes. It was also noted that NGOs mostly work in the areas outside the national park (BdNP (a); Local entrepreneur). NGOs regularly advocate for the closer incorporation of local development issues and the nature conservation agenda, as this could be potentially beneficial for everyone. As one of the local entrepreneurs put it, “…conservation of nature could mean not only good for nature but also for people, as they can earn income from it…” (Local entrepreneur).

Practically, NGOs actively engaged in projects for the promotion of tourism, development of tourist infrastructure, and implementation of Natura 2000 measures outside of the national park (Local entrepreneur). Various interviewees acknowledged that politically, NGOs did not hold a strong position locally and had not engaged in the political discussions (Lutowiska (a)); Local entrepreneur; UNEP-GRID). However, the park representatives mentioned that with the implementation of Natura 2000 and the EU regulations, their voices are becoming stronger. Furthermore,

¹⁴Bieszczady Foundation http://www.fundacja.bieszczady.pl/ (accessed 16 May 2014)
¹⁵Fundacja Karpacka http://www.fundacjakarpacka.org/ (accessed 16 May 2014)
the interviewees recognized the gradually increasing expert knowledge of NGOs. Some NGOs have worked in the area for more than a decade and have closely followed the dynamics of socioeconomic and environmental change (Local entrepreneur; BdNP (b)). All in all, the local NGOs occupy a specific niche implementing small- or medium-scale hands-on projects. Their expertise and capacities have been increasing over time, but to a considerable extent depend on external funding, and their involvement in political discussion remains limited. The local composition of the actors and resources available to them set a background for emerging formal participatory practices and ongoing local dialogue that is scrutinized in the section below.

5.4.4 Interplay: formal channels and informal practices

The interactions among stakeholders at the local level can take many different forms. This interplay can be based on the formal requirements defining public participation and planning procedures, as well as on informal interpersonal relationships. In Poland, the EPI principle is enforced. Therefore, the park administration provides formal consent on the Spatial Plans of municipalities partially covered by the special protection regime. At the same time, the park administration is obliged to discuss and consult with affected municipalities on its Conservation Plan. Namely, the plan must be presented to the local elected representatives (Rada gminy). However, the outcomes of the consultations with the Rada are not legally binding, whereas Spatial Plans cannot go ahead without park approval (BdNP (a); Lutowiska (a)). The consent of the local municipalities is needed in the case of expanding park territories, which at the time of the interviews was not under consideration. The process of Natura 2000 site designation included public consultations open to all interested stakeholders. However, as the newly designated Natura 2000 sites were already protected under the national legislation, the plans could go ahead without the formal approval of the local communities.

The park has an established consultation body, a so-called Scientific Council (Rada Naukowa), consisting of scientists, mostly from the Polish Academy of Science and Jagellonian University in Krakow, and representatives of local municipalities. They meet 3-4 times per year to review the Conservation Plan and other relevant conservation measures. The role of this institution is to ensure inclusion of the latest scientific knowledge and expertise in park activities. The park representatives, however, stressed that
advice from Scientific Council is not legally binding, since the park is ultimately responsible for the outcome of policy implementation. Therefore, as a land manager, it has a right to make the final decision (BdNP (a)). The interviewed municipality representatives noted that the Scientific Council does not focus on a discussion of the social aspects of nature conservation plans and instead gives technical and scientific advice on conservation measures (Lutowiska (a)).

The representatives of municipalities were rather harsh in evaluating the role of the park and formal collaborations, stating that:

the park is a country in the country… they have their own ministry, and the director is independent... It is easy to approach them, they listen, but usually do not act as we ask. The problem for us is that the park influences the life of our community… (Lutowiska (a))

Another representative stated the following:

sometimes we meet and exchange information with park representatives because they also have a tourist office here. I personally think that the park is a rather closed institution and they have very ecological positions… it differs between park institutions we collaborate with the tourist centre. However, in the administration, they do not like to share the information and their plans (Lutowiska (b)).

The legal disparities around the possibility of influencing each other’s work, namely, park institutions have more influence over municipal planning, affect current relations between these institutions. Furthermore, the park administration has not expressed interest in initiating collaboration with other actors “… we do not have many projects together with other organizations, and I am not so sure we are actually interested…” stated one of the park representatives (BdNP (c)). Thus, the concept of broader public engagement and a local public-private partnership for conservation policy has not yet taken root in the park institutions’ approach. One of the interviewees acknowledged this: “… we do not really need much collaboration; we can implement our tasks ourselves…” (BdNP (a)). However, he mentioned a particular case where collaboration with NGOs might be beneficial:

… sometimes we can use NGOs to raise attention on some issues violating the law or potentially harmful to nature. This was the case with the plan to construct the border crossing here in Bieszczady, which
would increase transportation traffic. We used NGOs help to raise awareness and stopped this construction… (BdNP (a)).

This allows the conclusion that the park institutions employ an instrumental approach to collaboration, turning to potential partners only when needed. In contrast, municipality offices often collaborated with NGOs in project implementation, since they did not have enough capacity to fulfil all of the project obligations themselves (Lutowiska (a)).

Arguably, recognition of possible profits could serve as a start for establishing closer cooperation. Certain shifts have already been noted by representatives of the local civil society:

… I think the mentality of the park about cooperation is changing now. Five, ten years ago, the park was very closed, like an island. The institutions were subsidized by the state and were very powerful politically at the local level. However, for a few years now, the park is more open for collaboration with NGOs, partially because external projects (Swiss) were encouraging such collaboration… (Local entrepreneur).

According to this interviewee, the major problem with such external projects was a lack of continuity, and the practices and approaches introduced were rarely adopted for the long run. It is an interesting trend that funding requirements from external actors shift, albeit slowly, local practices by demonstrating the concrete benefits of cooperation, such as transparency and decision ownership.

Another possible reason for limited collaboration is a staff capacity problem, especially as related to international cooperation, which often requires language skills and additional administrative and paperwork. One staff member said,

…Bieszczady is of interest to international collaboration, but sometimes it might be a problem that our managers do not want to cooperate. It is much work for us and not so many people speak English to do so (BdNP (a)).

The distribution and availability of resources have been acknowledged by several interviewee groups as a key to the current disposition of power and the strong position of the park in local political processes:
…ultimately, it is all about distribution of money… park gets a lot, and we [municipalities] do not. Therefore, they are not interested in collaboration and sharing (Lutowiska (a)).

The same applies to NGOs, as most of them rely on project funding, which is often unstable.

Informal collaboration based on personal connections is often used to substitute limited formal cooperation. Respondents noted that since these are small communities, people know each other relatively well. It is also not uncommon for people to change their occupation, and those who leave, for example, park institutions become employed by NGOs or start to run their own tourism-based enterprises. “… I can talk to the director informally it is not a problem, we sometimes meet have a coffee, discuss things…” said the representative of the municipality office (Lutowiska (a)). The interviewed local entrepreneur provides the following account of the importance of informal connections:

… I used to work in the park for a while, so of course, I know people there, and if I really need something, I can always meet them informally to see first if they are interested in the idea… (Local entrepreneur).

To some extent, informal connections serve as a basis for the exchange of information and opinions and substitute for the need for formal dialogue. The reliance on interpersonal connections potentially challenge the inclusion of interested stakeholders from outside of the established networks in the collaboration. Thus, being born or growing up in the area was stressed as a significant asset by various interviewees. This could potentially indicate the conservative character of these interpersonal connections, as life-long relations were needed to make such interactions possible. Furthermore, a personal dislike may prevent collaboration among certain actors and halt a dialogue, something also mentioned by interviewees.

On a formal level, the existing policy framework supported a strong local position of the park and ensured sufficient funding and staff capacity for policy implementation. These strong park institutions did not perceive broader public participation as essential to long-term nature conservation and were not interested in cooperation to extend their capacity for hands-on projects. This exclusionary vision could arguably be linked to persistent post-socialist legacies. Many of the park employees were trained and started their work in the park during socialism or early transformation, when the
“fortress” approach to conservation dominated. Consequently, engagement with other stakeholders was rather limited and determined by pragmatic considerations and was conducted when necessary to promote park interests or when obligatory by law or project requirements. In general, the formal division of competencies results in significant power disparities in favour of the park administration, and nature conservation has a stronger position than local development.

5.5 Local governance of nature conservation: Poloniny National Park, Slovakia

5.5.1 Practising nature conservation under diversified management and ownership

In Slovakia, the political and legal framework regulating land ownership and management rights changed greatly during regime transformation. The restitution of land to the previous owners, the division of resource management rights between different state institutions and the lack of formal competencies and resources in the park administrations greatly constrains nature conservation. This section provides insights into the interplay of these factors in Poloniny NP. I focus on land management arrangements within the park, as well as on the responsibilities of the national park administration and the consequences of such arrangements for nature conservation practices.

The role and management capacities of the national parks in Slovakia vary greatly compared with those in Poland. Park administration is directly responsible only for the management of strictly protected areas, namely, the most valuable habitats within the park, designated as national natural reserves and nature reserves, where no human activities are allowed. In the case of Poloniny NP, the state owns approximately 50% of the park’s territory. However, the park administration directly manages only approximately 2200 ha (~8.5%), which is mostly so-called primeval forested areas under strict protection. Other parts of the park are open for various economic activities such as tourism, agriculture, water management, sustainable forest harvesting, and hunting and are managed by different state institutions and private actors. The harvest of non-timber resources for local citizens is allowed outside of strictly protected zones (PNP (b)). Parts of the park have also been designated Natura 2000 sites. This structure brings complex management arrangements within the park’s borders, with more
actors directly involved in land management and consequently conservation efforts. One park employee described it as follows:

…organizational structure within the national park is very complex, because we [the park administration] are not administrators of the land, even in the state-owned land… if it is not within a strictly protected area, the only thing we can do is to monitor… (PNP (a)).

Several state institutions are responsible for nature resource management in Poloniny NP. The state-owned forests of Poloniny are managed by the Forest and Agriculture Enterprise located in Ulic and subordinated to the Ministry of Agriculture. Some smaller agricultural areas are managed by the private farm Agrifop. Additionally, the Association of Forest Owners (urbariat) manages community and privately owned forests. The Water State Enterprise is responsible for water resources in the area. All of these institutions are obliged to comply with nature conservation legislation. However, these organizations are independent of each other and report to different ministries and management authorities.

The relations between park administration and various management bodies are not always without controversy (PNP (a)). These controversies, first and foremost, concern the management of the forested areas, which occupy most of the park’s territory. The park representative defined the problem as follows:

… it is often difficult for us [the park administration] to find common ground with the forestry sector, as we want to preserve the key characteristics of the existing forest ecosystems, so advocate for less timber harvesting. They need to make money from timber production, thus need to cut more trees… (PNP (b)).

In practice, this means that the park administration provides recommendations on the management of forests, but these recommendations are not legally binding, and forest enterprise is free to interpret the nature conservation requirements differently (PNP (a)). The representative of the State Nature Conservancy (expert national nature conservation body) noted that they generally advocate for a “less management” approach, under which the forest is left to the reign of natural processes (SNC (a)). In contrast, the representative of the National Forest Centre (national expert forestry body) argued that only “proper management” supports a healthy forest ecosystem (FRI (a)).
The management of other resources was somewhat less controversial. Parts of the protected grasslands were managed by the park administration through regular cleaning of shrubs and mowing. Other protected grasslands were managed by the private farm Agrifop through limited cattle grazing and mowing. The latter was paid for its services through a Common Agricultural Policy subsidy scheme distributed by the Ministry of Agriculture (Agrifop). The water management body was also independent within its sector. The key conservation problem was related to the management of grasslands within the special hygienic zone (approximately 100 m) of the Starina reservoir. There were no targeted conservation measures applied in this zone, and grasslands have been overtaken by shrub, as no grazing was allowed (PNP (b)).

Rather complex management arrangements have been defined for Natura 2000 sites. There are four Special Areas of Conservation (SACs) designated under the Habitats Directive in and around the park territory, and the whole park is a Special Protection Area (SPA) under the Birds Directive. The SAC sites are located both within the park borders (e.g., along the Ulicka River and the adjacent forest) and right outside the park boundaries (e.g., the Ublenka River and the forest around it) (PNP (a)). The management plans for these sites were still under preparation by the State Nature Conservancy. The sites were designated into levels of protection according to Slovak national legislation, and the restrictions were based on this unified approach. According to the law, landowners must conduct management and conservation activities as defined by the Conservation Plan and supposedly would be compensated for these. However, the park representative recognized that the conservation activities have so far been limited to mapping and monitoring habitats and species on these sites and that active conservation measures were mostly not yet in place (PNP (a)). Thus, the practical implications of the park’s designation as a Natura 2000 site have not yet become clear. The allocation of adequate funding to support the foreseen Natura 2000 measures, including those on private land, is likely to become a factor determining the implementation pattern.

The park did not have a long-term management plan and operated on an annually adopted management plan. Consequently, the finances were distributed yearly by the State Nature Conservancy, and no financing for long-term planning was available (PNP (a)). The plan must be agreed to by the State Nature Conservancy, since according to Slovak law, parks are not independent entities and are included within the State Nature Conservancy’s structure (PNP (a), SNC (b)).
The park representative formulated the existing problems in the following terms:

…without the long-term management plan and land supervision rights we are acting more like a pro-forma organization: we exist, but cannot apply necessary conservation measures… (PNP (a)).

The allocation of natural resource management rights to different organizations and private owners without a coordination mechanism to align their, often contradictory, goals creates significant challenges for nature conservation on the ground. The park administration is responsible for active conservation measures and monitoring. However, their competencies to engage in these locally are formally limited because they have to be agreed upon with the responsible institution. Furthermore, the State Nature Conservancy also needs to authorize the prepared plans (SNC (b)).

Nature conservation activities included various active management measures (mostly cleaning shrubs and mowing) of the key habitats, as well as monitoring of the habitats and species. In practice, monitoring activities were one of the key occupation of the park’s field staff. The administration conducts day-to-day administrative work and provides input, mostly data, to various national strategy and programme documents. During the high tourist season from July to mid-September, the park administration opens the Tourist Information Point in the field, in the village Nova Sedlica. The NP administration did not have a research unit or funding for targeted research. Therefore, scientific research has mostly been performed by external researchers and driven by their scientific interests and funding availability. The park representatives noted that this results in limited long-term systematic observations and analysis (PNP (a)).

The sources of park funding were scarce, compared to those in Poland, and mostly came from the state budget. There was no entrance fee collection in place, so it was hard for the park administration to generate additional income. The administration acquired its extra funding through project work financed by the Swiss Cooperation Fund, EU LIFE+, etc. However, given the moderate staff capacity, the actual ability to apply and implement such projects was limited because the application and reporting processes occupy too much working time (PNP (a)).

Despite limited capacities, the park aimed to support a wide range of educational and public awareness campaigns. The administration works with several local schools and regularly supports their environmental edu-
cation portfolios, conducts lectures and exhibitions about local biodiversity, and hosts students in the park (School Snina; PNP (c)). “…I think it is important to develop an interest and respect for local nature among kids, as they will be the ones in charge of it in the future…” said the director of the local school, to stress the importance of such environmental education activities conducted in collaboration with the park (School Snina). For the general public, the park administration holds various public events such as excursions for the European Day of Parks and other occasions, festivals, and exhibitions on environmental topics.

Overall, the state of biodiversity within the park borders was evaluated differently between areas and had a patchy character. Thus, there were significant areas of preserved unique primeval beech forest, and in contrast, there were extensively managed forested areas. The administration capacity to practice all necessary conservation measures was rather limited. Thus, local partnerships among actors involved in nature conservation become crucial for long-term policy implementation. The following section will provide further analysis of the actors active in the area.
Conservation activities and tourism in the East Carpathians

Group of tourists exploring Poloniny NP on an excursion organized for the European Day of Parks, May 2014

GTrail information stand in Bieszczady NP, May 2014
5. EASTERN CARPATHIANS

Information stand on the joint Udava-Solinka trail, introducing fauna of the East Carpathians, May 2014

Hucul horses are kept by Bieszczady NP to maintain park grasslands, May 2014
5.5.2 Actors and resources: balancing between conservation and resource use

The current legal and policy framework provides conditions for the engagement of various stakeholders in nature conservation and natural resource use in Poloniny NP. In addition to the state authorities responsible for the direct management of natural resources, local municipalities, the owners of small tourist enterprises, resource users, and NGOs were active in the area. All in all, there were more actors involved in nature conservation and other related activities in Poloniny than in Bieszczady. This section provides an overview of the key actors and the resources available to them (see Table 14).

Table 14. Key actors in nature conservation and related practices in the Poloniny NP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Responsibilities and actions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Actors responsible for the management of natural resources</td>
<td>Park administration; The state Forest Enterprise; The Water Enterprise;</td>
<td>Park administration directly responsible for management of strictly protected areas; Others responsible for management of respective resources on state-owned land;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipalities</td>
<td>Municipality offices in the communes in and around national parks;</td>
<td>Provide social services and responsible for local socioeconomic development and spatial planning;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local NGOs</td>
<td>NGOs supporting mainstream conservation; NGOs advocating alternative conservation approach;</td>
<td>Implement hands-on project mostly in tourism development; Advocate for rather ambitious “more nature” approach and try to attract financing for this;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resource users and local entrepreneurs</td>
<td>Private forest owners; Hunters; Agriculture producers (e.g. Agrifop);</td>
<td>Use natural resources within the park boundaries, engaged in assisting park with active management;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First, there are actors responsible for the management of various natural resources, namely, park administration, forest, agriculture, and water enterprises. Second, there are municipality administrations, which are not directly involved in conservation but are responsible for socioeconomic development and spatial planning. The third group of actors involved in
nature conservation in the area is NGOs. There were about five organizations actively operating in the area. Most of the local NGOs worked with hands-on projects focused on tourist infrastructure, promotion of the area and the conservation of cultural and natural heritage. There was also one NGO that engaged in promoting different conceptual approaches towards conservation, propagating a “more nature, less management” approach and expanding wilderness areas. Fourth, there are local entrepreneurs running small-scale tourist enterprises and other related services and various resource user groups (e.g., hunters). It is often difficult to distinguish which of these groups individuals belong to, since a person can be simultaneously involved in various activities and belong to several groups.

The administration of the NP is directly responsible for conservation activities on the Slovak side of the East Carpathians. The park administration employs 12 people, including three field rangers. It has a relatively modest budget that is mostly based on state subsidies; these are not always sufficient to cover the planned activities. The limited scope of park competencies makes the staff capacity adequate, as acknowledged by the park representative:

… as our model of national park differs greatly from Polish or Ukrainian ones, we do not need as many people, as we directly manage much less territory and are not involved in the research as they are… (PNP (a)).

However, park representatives also noted that the situation is not optimal:

… as it is now, we [park administration], simply cannot engage with all the landowners and ensure they comply with conservation measures… we cannot do everything ourselves, as we do not have management rights and resources… (PNP (b)).

According to the park representatives, the assignment of management rights over the whole NP territory and long-term financing and planning were two key policy changes needed to improve conservation on the ground (PNP (a), (b)).

To overcome capacity shortcomings, the park administration worked in close collaboration with local NGOs. Certain funding opportunities in Slovakia and internationally are open only to NGOs. To diversify funding sources, the park administration has often sought to build partnerships for project applications with local NGOs and municipalities. Most of the
projects implemented through such partnerships aim to develop the tourist infrastructure, including new walking and cycling paths, educational trails, popularizing cultural heritage (wooden churches) and others (PNP (a, c); NGO3, SK). Furthermore, some small hands-on conservation tasks, e.g., shrub removal, cleaning and path maintenance is done by a group of local volunteer rangers coordinated by the park administration (PNP (a)). It is important to mention here that not all local NGOs support the park’s approach to conservation; some advocate for a more radical “nature, taking back approach”, as reviewed in detail in the section below.

Other management institutions in Poloniny have greater staff and economic resources. The State Forest Enterprise LPM Ulic employs approximately 190 people, plus 50–70 for seasonal jobs. The company manages approximately 24,759 ha of mostly forested land (LMU, 2015). The revenues generated from timber harvesting go to the state budget. Thus, forestry is perceived as a profitable activity compared to subsidized nature conservation (PNP (a)). In addition to timber harvesting, LPM Ulic is involved in agriculture, including farming and hunting (LMU, 2015). As the representatives of municipalities pointed out,

“… LPM Ulic is the key employer in the area. The revenues from forestry are much higher than from tourism and from the national park; thus, naturally, they [foresters] have a great role in local life…” (Zboj).

Another actor involved in forest management in the area is the Association of Forest Owners (Urbariat). The members of the Association, managing small holdings of privately and community owned forest, derive their major profits from selling timber for heating to the local inhabitants. Sometimes, forest owners are employed by the State Forest Enterprise for seasonal work, which brings them additional income (Urbariat). Their representative acknowledged that the forest owners could receive compensation for the amount of strictly protected land. An owner had to apply for compensation annually, and according to the Association representative, the application process has often been over-bureaucratized and difficult for inexperienced individuals (Urbariat).

The agriculture enterprise Agrifop is another institution directly involved in land management. It employed approximately 135 people plus five additional workers for seasonal jobs. Agricultural activities are especially important for grassland management both in the park and on the Natura 2000 sites. The Agrifop representative acknowledged the complex bureau-
cratic procedure required to receive compensation from the state for these activities. Finally, the water reservoir Starina is managed by the State Water Enterprise. The reservoir covers an area of 311 ha and is the largest drinking water reservoir in Slovakia. To maintain a high level of sanitary protection for the drinking water, no other types of exploitation (e.g., fishing, bathing) are allowed (PNP (a)). The park employees acknowledged that due to the limited human access, the area around the reservoir has a high conservation value, especially for certain bird species (PNP (b)).

The municipalities must comply with various conservation measures during spatial planning and other associated activities. However, this was not seen as a potential issue by either park or municipality representatives, as none recalled any proposed large- or medium-scale development projects that would threaten biodiversity conservation. The modest budgets of municipalities vary from approximately 33 000 EUR to 450 000 EUR (Solar et al., 2014). Their administrations employ between three and five people, some of them part time (Ulic). The municipality representatives also noted that the system of state subsidy distribution in Slovakia is highly centralized. The ability of mayors to lobby the central government for the allocation of state subsidies becomes the key to gaining local support during elections. According to the same municipality representative, this competition for subsidies challenges cooperation among municipalities because they compete for the same limited resources and do not want to share or coordinate their plans (Ulic). The search for employment opportunities has had the highest priority in the area and, to a large extent, define the relations among involved actors:

…What we need here, in our municipalities, is jobs. Unfortunately, we are located far away from any industries, and no one is interested in investing here. Tourism does not bring us much money, as we have very few visitors and they rarely stay overnight… (Zboj).

The dispersion of formal management authority over the land and natural resources inside the park among five different state institutions and private land owners provides a major challenge for the coherent practice of conservation. This also means that a greater number of actors is directly involved in conservation. In the case of many local actors directly and indirectly involved in nature conservation, the establishment of local partnerships and dialogue is crucial for information exchange, coordination, and the mitigation of any
confrontations. The next sections scrutinize the existing interplay in Poloniny NP and its contribution to nature conservation practices.

5.5.3 Interplay: managing diversity without coordination

The formal basis for cooperation in Poloniny NP was rather limited by the existing legislative framework and management arrangements. The current legislation required public consultations while establishing new protected areas or adopting management plans. The need for consultations was foreseen for the adoption of the Natura 2000 management plans, but these were still in the pipeline at the moment of interviews, so it was difficult to assess their practical influence. There were no policy requirements to establish a coordination body in national parks involving different land management entities; consequently, no such body existed. The same goes for the coordination of nature conservation measures: no formal bodies were established to address this issue. On the municipal level, one interviewee recalled regular meetings among mayors; however, this practice has ceased (Ulic). He explained this change by the increased competition for state subsidies and the unwillingness of mayors to share their plans (Ulic).

The representatives of park administration acknowledged the potential benefits of regular public consultations. They suggested that this might be done through the establishment of an advisory committee similar to the Polish one. This body could include a wide range of stakeholders, providing space for a dialogue and scientific advice (PNP (a), (b)). A recent Swiss cooperation project supported the park administration in conducting public consultations to identify development priorities. This helped to mobilize local stakeholders and allocate money for the development of tourist infrastructure in a visible and fair way. Almost all the interviewed stakeholders mentioned this project as a positive example of cooperation between the park administration and others.

The representatives of various stakeholder groups also acknowledged that the park administration is open to cooperation. However, the limited staff and financial capacity make it a less attractive partner for some local actors, particularly municipalities and representatives of other economic sectors. The representative of one municipality expressed the limitation to collaboration as following:

…the cooperation with the national park administration works well. We act as partners in some projects, we also work with the park partner NGO Čemerica and every year do some tourism development projects
together… The administrative routine and lack of human resources often slows down the park administration work. I think there is more potential for cooperation there… (Ulic).

Furthermore, the same interviewee acknowledged that the joint projects with the park have not brought significant financial contributions (Ulic). From the viewpoints of the park administration and local stakeholders, there was a willingness to cooperate, including through formal channels, e.g., project implementation and regular public consultations.

At the same time, the municipalities’ representatives expressed a sense of unjust treatment from the state side concerning the development of these areas:

…we have here the water reservoir that provides drinking water for Presov and Kosice regions, but we [municipalities] do not have any revenues from this. We also have the national park here, but again no compensations… it is hard for people to make a living in such a situation… (Ulic).

The position taken by one local NGO has recently contributed to the perception that nature is valued over people and initiated a heated discussion. This NGO promoted a project to expand wilderness areas and proclaim Poloniny to be a strict nature reserve closed to any exploration of natural resources. According to this NGO, such an approach will lead to “nature taking back” the area, i.e., re-wilding, including an increase of megafauna species, in particular wolves. It is assumed that the area will attract safari style tourists “who will come with photo cameras, not rifles” to observe this wilderness and thus contribute to the local economy (NGO 6, SK). This NGO works by purchasing or renting private forests in the vicinity of the designated protected areas or other natural areas in order to expand the range of protected habitats across Slovakia. Their funding mostly comes from private donations (NGO 6, SK). However, such activities antagonize most of the local stakeholders, including the park administration, and they try to distance themselves from this unpopular approach. Previous studies have shown that this extreme position of “wilderness taking over” is unacceptable to most local stakeholders (Bezak & Petrovic, 2006). The project has been recently supported by the international NGO’s partner, which invested in public consultation and mitigation of the conflicting positions of the NGO and local stakeholders (NGO 6, SK). Thus, the particular development of this project remains to be seen.
The cooperation in Slovak Poloniny, similar to that in Bieszczady, was largely based on personal connections, such as informal discussions and meetings. To some extent, personal connections have served as a functioning channel, since the group of involved stakeholders is relatively small. They can easily approach each other and meet without necessarily creating a special forum. However, in cases when personal connections failed, cooperation and dialogue have become almost impossible. Furthermore, certain actors can exert pressure and cause the permanent exclusion of some people from the dialogue. Since there were no formally established alternatives for maintaining a dialogue and cooperation, excluded actors had no opportunities to express their opinions. In a way, this issue contributes to conserving existing problems and escalating conflicts. Under the current management arrangements, there was a clear need to establish a coordinating body for various land management entities. Personal connections often could not provide a platform for negotiations among various actors to develop agreed-upon coherent management arrangements that could incorporate existing nature conservation measures, especially when economic stakes are high. Another possible limitation lays in a lack of transparency in decision-making, as decision-making has been subjective and the reasoning is often not known to other involved actors.

The situation with the opposing NGO illustrates the shortcomings of the informal approach and the need to establish regular dialogue. Paradoxically, it appears that all interviewed stakeholders would be willing to have regular fora for cooperation where they can exchange their views and opinions. The park administration is also keen to engage in dialogue with the local communities on a more regular basis to build up and maintain cooperation. Ultimately, the involved stakeholders tend to realize that their input is crucial for cooperation. However, so far, this willingness has not resulted in any tangible outcomes.

5.6 Transboundary cooperation in biosphere reserve

Cooperation among partners across national borders can be motivated by various reasons, with one obvious reason being to protect similar natural

\[\text{\textsuperscript{16}}\] It is important to mention, however, that the representatives of the State Forest Enterprise did not find time to meet with me. Thus, their view and position are taken from the resources available on the internet.
The two partner parks differ in their staff and resource capacities, as well as in the competencies defined by national legal systems. In this light, the well-resourced Polish park was better placed for leading the cooperation. This was acknowledged by the interviewees from both the Polish and the Slovak parks.

The cooperation with the Slovak park is fine; we constantly have common projects. However, if we want to achieve good results, we need to help them, as their capacities are very limited…. (representative of the Polish park, BdNP (a)).

The Slovak counterparts described the ongoing cooperation in the following way:
the cooperation with the Polish side works well. We know each other personally and have exchange visits and implement projects together. We can see that they are very much advanced in some aspects compared to us… (PNP (a)).

The common hands-on projects have mostly focused on the development of the joint tourist infrastructure and area promotion. Two new circular routes, Runina (Slovakia) – Wetlina (Poland) and Nova Sedlica (Slovakia) – Wyznianski Wierch (Poland), connecting the two parks were recently developed. The employees of both parks noted that the interest in cooperating is also enhanced by cultural similarities and the absence of any historical conflicts between the Slovak and Polish people.

The personal connections and established long-term relationships among park employees were acknowledged to significantly contribute and sometimes act as a force driving the ongoing cooperation (PNP (a); BdNP (a)). The regular exchange visits help to maintain these connections. However, this might prove to be a fragile arrangement, especially for supporting formal commitments within the UNESCO framework, which requires institutional support. Informal relationships between staff members can dissolve quickly if they leave the administration, and crucial knowledge could be lost.

The national budgets from the Polish and Slovak sides fail to allocate funds for transboundary cooperation. In fact, most of the funding from the state is earmarked and can be spent only nationally. Therefore, transboundary projects have almost exclusively relied on external project funding by the EU LIFE+, Swiss and Norwegian Cooperation programmes and other donor support (BdNP (a), PNP (a)). Most of these external funds actually set multi-stakeholder partnership as one criterion for project application. Thus, the ability to demonstrate ongoing cooperation increases the chances of receiving funding. The internationally mainstreamed principle of transboundary conservation and cross-border partnership, promoted through project funding, in this case resonates well with local interests.

Transboundary cooperation, especially in terms of tourism and the popularization of the area, goes beyond cooperation among park administrations and engages a wide range of stakeholders, including municipalities and local NGOs. The student exchange between the municipality of Stakcin (Slovakia) and that of Lutowiska (Poland) to visit the observatory at the
Poloniny Dark-Sky Park\textsuperscript{17} is a good example of such a cultural exchange. A number of local NGOs have been engaged in supporting authentic local practices and traditions (e.g., food) and a good standard of tourist services (accommodation, excursions, etc.). For this, they maintain a certification system and a website, “Go to Carpathia”,\textsuperscript{18} in Polish and Slovak where up-to-date information on responsible tourism service providers can be found. NGOs also developed new tourist infrastructure, e.g., bicycle routes, and promote cycling within the parks (NGO 4, SK; NGO 3, SK).

The strong focus on infrastructure development might be due to a lack of existing roads connecting Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine (the third partner in the biosphere reserve). It was not in the interest of states to provide an extensive transportation network connecting countries during socialism. During transformation, the development of transboundary transportation networks did not receive special attention, unless there was a clear economic interest (Wieckowski, 2002). The area in focus is still an important border territory between EU (Poland and Slovakia) and non-EU (Ukraine) countries. More infrastructure would then be associated with higher costs related to additional security measures (e.g., guarded border crossings). From a nature conservation point of view, new infrastructure may serve as a barrier for animal movement and the overall connectedness of ecosystems. This may also increase disturbances and pollution through greater traffic volume and visitation. On a positive note, better infrastructure may help to promote transboundary public transport and more sustainable tourism practices. To date, the transboundary connection through existing roads remains poor, and even during the high tourist season, no public transport is available between the parks. This illustrates the local dilemma of balancing conservation and development, where a lack of trans-border infrastructure and poor accessibility is beneficial for nature and the “wild” landscapes of the East Carpathians but disadvantageous for local citizens.

\textsuperscript{17} The Dark Sky Park, an area unaffected or minimally affected by anthropogenic light pollution, aims to protect nocturnal wildlife and provide good conditions for astronomic observation

\textsuperscript{18} Go to Carpathia http://www.gotocarpathia.pl/ (accessed 16 May 2014)
5.7 Summary: nature conservation in peripheral rural areas

The two parks in focus are characterized by similar natural characteristics: the prevalence of beech forest ecosystems mixed with valuable grasslands and meadows and a great variety of flora and fauna species, including endemic and megafauna species. The area also serves as an important ecological corridor for the dispersion of species. The historical perspective on socioeconomic development and land use patterns provides insight into the state of the environment and current land use changes. Reduced human pressure in the area during socialism resulted in the “re-wilding” of these territories. Consequently, the socialist regimes in both countries assigned a value to protecting these territories and designated them as protected areas. From a socioeconomic perspective, this led to limited employment opportunities and the lack of communal infrastructure, enhancing emigration from these areas.

Currently, the emerging patterns of emigration, especially of young people due to limited employment opportunities; the prevalence of economic sectors relying on natural resources, e.g., forestry, agriculture, and tourism; and the relative marginalization of the territories due to the distance from major cities and poor transportation routes continue. At the same time, differences in national policy and governance between Poland and Slovakia, as well as variation in the chosen post-socialist transformation paths, set rather different frameworks for local policy processes in general and nature conservation in particular.

The legal and political system in Poland supports conditions for the strong profile of nature conservation institutions on the ground, especially in cases when the state owns the land for the protected area. The national park administration, in this case, has management and supervision authority over the land. Formally, the park administration is only subordinate to the Ministry of Environment and has a rather high degree of autonomy within its borders. The park also receives funding to cover administrative and salary costs, as well as for project implementation through the National Fund for Environmental Protection. Furthermore, park institutions collect entrance fees, which form a significant part of their income, and apply for extra funds from donors and the EU. Bieszczady National Park is an important employer in the area, since there are few employment alternatives available; further, of those available, most are closely related to nature, for example, in the tourism sector, enhancing the role of the park in local life. All in all, the park is perceived by other local stakeholders as a strong local independent player, which results in sufficient enforcement of
nature conservation goals and supports conditions for the preservation of flora and fauna.

The strong position of the park institutions makes them less interested in developing close partnerships with local stakeholders. Municipal offices, another key stakeholder, expressed dissatisfaction with the existing situation, since they felt that the compensation system for the special conservation regime of the area was not adequate and that thus local socioeconomic development was doomed. The civil sector is constituted by NGOs and local entrepreneurs, mostly implementing small- and medium-scale projects in tourism, including the development of infrastructure and promotion of the area. They rely greatly on donor and EU funding; they often switch their attention based on the priorities of these funds and do not have the capacity to engage in local political processes. The park administration takes mostly a utilitarian approach to cooperation with NGOs, mobilizing them for lobbying and for help with local resistance on some high-profile political issues.

The mechanism of public consultation in the case of designating new protected areas and discussing management plans is anticipated in the national legislation. However, local experience with public consultation has been rather limited. There were no regular meetings or other mechanisms that allowed the expression of public opinion and the regular exchange of information. The existing consultation body was restricted to the scientific discussion of the conservation plans. The park administration has been formally involved in a discussion of the municipal Spatial Plans and must agree to these plans and any large development project. This gives the administration significant political power in local development. Informal cooperation to some extent substitutes for the absence of a formal forum, especially in regards to information exchange. These connections, however, have not provided other stakeholders with the power to influence the decision-making process. Local stakeholders around Bieszczady appeared to have similar ideas for preserving the undisturbed natural conditions of the area. However, little has been done so far to align conservation and development goals. The limited opportunities for local dialogue and resource redistribution create tensions among local actors, and these are currently not addressed by any of the sides.

In contrast, nature conservation in Slovak Poloniny NP has been to a great extent constrained by the existing national policies and practices. Two major constraints for the park administration that influence nature conservation were a lack of management rights over the land and the absence of long-term planning. There are approximately five different state
institutions and many private owners that have a right to land and resource management within the border of the national park. This sometimes put the park administration in the ambiguous position of “campaigning for nature conservation” rather than implementing policy. The administration capacity to conduct systematic work on policy implementation is largely constrained, and staff members are left to implement some immediate tasks and monitoring. The centralized structure of the Slovak governance system makes the park administration more dependent on decisions at the national level, even for some everyday tasks. Financing has also been distributed centrally based on annual tasks, and the capacity of the park administration to apply for external funding is rather limited due to a staffing shortage.

There were no institutionalized formal arrangements for cooperation or the coordination of land and resource management among local stakeholders. However, due to a relatively small circle of involved people, informal cooperation to some extent substitutes for formal institutions. The park administration is relatively open to cooperation with local partners, municipality offices, NGOs, and volunteers, as to some extent, this helps to overcome staff shortages in the implementation of hands-on projects. In cases of conflictual situations or when personal connections fail, cooperation again stumble. Due to rather limited negotiation experience among the involved stakeholders, any conflict has the potential to become systemic, halting personal connections and further constraining dialogue. Furthermore, informal negotiations and decision-making often tend to exclude actors with different opinions. The current conflictual situation around the introduction of the “more nature” approach illustrates this argument. Additionally, the absence of a formal platform for coordination could potentially lead to even more complex management arrangements in the future due to the implementation of the Natura 2000. The development of a functioning Natura 2000 system in the area may be further hampered without proper coordination. Overall, existing legislation and policy settings at the national level provide rather limited incentives for changing the policy practices.

Furthermore, the difficult socioeconomic and demographic situation in and around the national park, partially inherited from the socialist era, significantly contributes to the challenges faced by nature conservation. Rapid depopulation causes a high rate of land abandonment. A great reliance on income generation from forestry leads to increased pressure on some forested areas and their possible degradation. Tourism, which is often seen as the key development alternative for rural municipalities around protected areas, currently does not bring significant revenues in Poloniny.
The reasons for this are potentially manifold, including complicated and over-bureaucratized procedures of enterprise registration, a lack of financial resources and investment, and a lack of entrepreneurship initiatives and tourist infrastructure.

The key challenge for the socioeconomic situation in both Poland and Slovakia lies in the structural marginalization of the areas due to their remote location, poor infrastructure and limited employment opportunities. Alarmingly high rates of depopulation and cultural and natural changes also constitute problems that need to be addressed. However, the most acute challenge is to find viable, alternative employment opportunities that can support the local population and be compatible with conservation regimes. These common challenges are recognized by partners on both sides of the border. Local stakeholders must work together for the development of common infrastructure and common solutions for the preservation of cultural and natural heritage.
CHAPTER 6

Conserving heritage: the case of the first transboundary park in Europe

The Pieniny gorge between Poland and Slovakia is protected on both sides of the border by a transboundary protected area established in 1932 that is the oldest in Europe. This protected area functioned through several political regimes and presented a rich case study for investigating the consequences of political changes on nature conservation regimes. This chapter aims to illuminate the role of historical legacies and their influence on the transformation of practices in local nature conservation and on socioeconomic development in the Pieniny Mountains. The chapter follows a structure similar to the previous chapter. It starts with an introduction of the key natural characteristics of the area followed by the history and key legacies of nature conservation in Pieniny. The chapter continues with a scrutiny of the major socioeconomic trends on the Polish and Slovak sides of the border. Finally, it focuses on illuminating policy practices in nature conservation, the actors and resources involved in conservation and associated sectors (tourism), the interplay between them, and the state of transboundary cooperation between two parks. Similar to two previous chapter, the key steps in nature conservation development in two parks and key regime changes are presented in the timeline provided in Figure 7.
The great variety of habitats and plant and animal species in Pieniny makes it a high priority for the conservation of mountain biodiversity in Europe. The preservation of especially non-forest habitats relies greatly on the performance of traditional agricultural activities and sustainable farming practices. As elsewhere in the European mountain regions, in Pieniny, traditional farming practices have been in decline due to their low profitability, posing significant challenges for the current composition of nature (Munteanu et al., 2014). The area is rich in cultural heritage, including the number of historic castles, monasteries and folklore traditions. Furthermore, rural municipalities in and around Pieniny face challenges similar to those previously discussed in terms of high emigration due to limited employment opportunities and poor social services.

The early start of conservation measures helped to preserve the natural values of Pieniny despite relatively high population density and intense land and resource use around the protected areas. Similar natural and socio-economic conditions have not led to similar conservation practices and out-
comes in the two countries due to differences in local policies and decision-making. Therefore, as in the previous chapter, each park is analysed as a separate case. The differences have appeared due to the variance in national policies and governance between Poland and Slovakia. The study of the Pieniny parks provides further insights into the challenges and opportunities for local nature conservation in Poland and Slovakia.

6.1 Natural characteristics of the area: habitat diversity and the role of traditional practices

The Pieniny gorge is a distinct mountain range stretched approximately 550 km along the border of western Slovakia and southern Poland (see Figure 6). The Dunajec River cuts through 35 kilometres of the range in length and six in width and divides it into three parts: Pieniny Spiskie (or Czorsztyńskie), Central Pieniny, and Small Pieniny. The most attractive area, with scenic views, is Central Pieniny, where the peaks of the Three Crowns (982 m) and Sokolica (747 m) are situated. Most of the area is at altitudes between 400–700 metres above sea level. The highest point is Vysoke skalky (or Wysoka in Polish), which is 1 050 metres above sea level (Danko et al., 2011).

The two national parks cover a territory of approximately 6 000 ha and share common natural characteristics, forming a coherent ecosystem (PIENAP (a)). The landscapes of Pieniny are mostly semi-natural and were formed by traditional pastoralism, agriculture and timber harvesting (PIENAP (b)). Another characteristic feature of the area is the particular geological structure dominated by the presence of towering limestone crags separated by deep ravines. Complex topography and extensive human activities have resulted in the mosaics of habitats, which support biodiversity richness, including a high number of endemic species. There are approximately 1 100 vascular plants, 6 800 invertebrate species, including more than 900 species of butterflies, approximately 190 bird species, and more than 60 mammalian species (PPN, 2007).

The area is rich in endemic flora; for example, the Pieniny dandelion, Pieniny treacle-mustard can be found here, whereas the rare Lady’s Slipper orchid is considered to be a symbol of Pieniny. As regards fauna, several rare bird species, including the eagle owl, pygmy owl, black woodpecker, and black stork nest in the area. The rare Apollo butterfly can also be found here. There are approximately 30 known caves not open to the public and
serving as a major refuge for several bat species, including the Lesser Horseshoe Bat and the Greater Mouse-eared Bat (PPN (a)).

The original structure of agricultural lands has largely been preserved in the area and today is highly relevant for nature protection (Danko et al., 2011). The selected territories of both parks have been designated Natura 2000 sites. The Pieniny is of high conservation value for both non-forest and forest habitats. Among the most important non-forest habitats are various types of meadows and grasslands, including lowland and submontane hay meadows, xerothermic grasslands, grazed meadows, and floriferous alpine and mountain grasslands. Several types of valuable wetland habitats can also be found across Pieniny. The key forest habitats include beech and fir-beech forests and calcicolous beech forests, occurring on the steep rocky slopes. The lime maple rubble forests and the bottomland willow, poplar and alder forests are among the priority habitats for Natura 2000, as these habitats are threatened across Europe. Finally, relict calcicolous pine and larch forests are also among the protected habitats (PPN, 2007; Danko et al., 2011). Forest habitats provide refuge to a number of large and small carnivores, such as the Eurasian lynx, the wildcat, and the European otter.

The concentration of such habitats, the biological diversity within a relatively small territory and the picturesque landscapes of the Pieniny Mountains made the area attractive for research, conservation, and tourism as early as the 19th century. The section below scrutinizes the history of conservation in Pieniny in connection with political changes.

6.2 The history of conservation in Pieniny

The mountain landscapes of Pieniny had already attracted the attention of early environmentalists and nature enthusiasts in the 19th century. They made a strong claim for the preservation of the fragile mountain environment, which was under pressure from various human activities such as mining, grazing, and logging (Danko et al., 2011). Historically, tourism has played a prominent role, especially on the Polish side of Pieniny. During the 19th century, the area attracted a significant number of tourists, as allegedly healing mineral water was discovered.

The first spa facilities were built in Pieniny in the 1850s and have continually expanded. It is believed that in 1933, the single village of Czorsztyn hosted approximately 1 000 holidaymakers per year (Zachwieja,
The first private nature reserve on land owned by a local entrepreneur was established in 1921. At the state level, a first step in advancing conservation in the area was made in 1924, when representatives of Poland and Czechoslovakia signed the so-called “Protocol of Krakow”, which among other things recommended the establishment of protected areas along the Czechoslovak-Polish border to solve tourism and communication problems in Pieniny (Danko et al., 2014). It was not until 1932 that the first protected area was established, namely, the Polish National Park Pieniny and the nature reserve on the Slovak side (Danko et al., 2011). The emerging cooperation was interrupted by the Second World War.

The emerged socialist regimes continued enforcing a nature conservation regime in the area. Protected areas were re-established in the 1950s and renewed on the Polish side in 1954. In Slovakia, the natural reserve of Pieniny was reinstated in 1957 and later designated a national park in 1967 with the territory expanding over time from an initial 200 ha to the current size of 3 750 ha (Danko et al., 2011; PIENAP (a)).

During socialism, the national parks in Pieniny were used for the mass recreation of the working class. Large-scale tourist facilities (sanatorium) operated on the Polish side, providing health treatments, especially to mining sector workers (Spa Szczawnica). The Slovak side remained largely unbuilt and hosted individual tourists. Even though tourism grew steadily throughout the socialist period, it never reached a level similar to Polish tourism (PIENAP (a)). This could be connected to the vicinity of the Tatra National Park, which was built up with large-scale tourist facilities, absorbing significant investment from the Slovak socialist government and mass visitors.

The Polish side of Pieniny, as with the rest of the country, did not go through a collectivization process. The land remained privately owned, and local people conducted small-scale agricultural production or were employed in tourism. Instead, the area around the Slovak Pieniny was used for large-scale agricultural and light industry (PIENAP (a)). During socialist times, the residents of the villages who were not employed locally commuted to nearby towns to work in heavy industry. Mass emigration did not occur in Pieniny during socialism, as it did in the previously discussed Poloniny area.
Figure 7. Timeline: Regime changes and nature conservation in the Pieniny NPs in Poland and Slovakia
6. CONSERVING HERITAGE

Landscapes of Pieniny

Dunajec River, September 2014

Foothills of Pieniny, September 2014
The park administrations were embedded in the existing hierarchical government structures. These structures did not always take into account the needs of conservation. Thus, the Polish socialist government decided to build a dam on the Dunajec River for flood control and electricity production. The plans did not account for possible negative impacts on this fragile freshwater ecosystem or the opinion of local citizens, but despite numerous protests by local inhabitants and scientists, the construction proceeded (Bajorek & Zielinska, 2010). Another implication of the socialist regimes included limiting transboundary contact both between the two park administrations and between the local citizens, as the Pieniny were divided by a border.

The socialist regimes in Poland and Slovakia allowed the preservation of local cultural heritage. Spiritual sites, such as Cerveny Klastor monastery, which for centuries were sites of religious pilgrimage, were converted into museums but nevertheless preserved and opened for visitors (Museum). The culture and identity of local people, “gorals” (highlanders), was also largely preserved, including the traditional rafting practices (Danko et al., 2014). Historically, the local highlanders floated wood and transported goods on wooden rafts along the Dunajec River. Later, these raftsmen began to offer boat tours for the first tourists to enjoy the beauty of Dunajec Gorge. This activity remains one of the key tourist attractions on both the Polish and Slovak sides and to date is still entirely provided by local communities (Zachwieja, 2013).

Overall, different territorial development and land use patterns in Polish and Slovak Pieniny enforced during socialism such as the prevalence of small-
scale agriculture in Poland vs. collectivization and intensification of agriculture in Slovakia, the primary use of the area for tourism and recreation in Poland, determined the local socioeconomic structure. To date, this continues to play a role in both socioeconomic development and conservation. The following section takes a closer look at the current socioeconomic characteristics of the Pieniny Mountains, highlighting post-socialists patterns and exploring the changes occurred during the transformation process.

6.3 Socioeconomic characteristics of Pieniny Mountains: similar, but different neighbours

6.3.1 Slovak Pieniny: rural areas in decline

The Slovak park is located in two districts of north-eastern Slovakia: Kežmarok and Stara Ľubovňa of the Presov Region. The territory of the Pieniny NP covers parts of six municipalities (obec in Slovak) and one municipality fully (Lesnica) (see Table 15). The territory of the municipalities varies, from being relatively small such as Červený Kláštor (304 ha) to being fairly big such as Veľký Lipník (2 751 ha) (see Table 15). The population density also varies and includes both scarcely populated (e.g., Stráňany – 17 people/km²) and relatively densely populated units (e.g., Kamienka – 105 people/km²) (see Table 15). In absolute numbers, the settlements in focus range from 1 379 inhabitants to only 195 citizens (See Table 15).

The buffer zone of the park covers more than 22 000 ha and the partial territory of 15 other municipalities, with the total population of approximately 12 000 people (Bacik, 2013). Furthermore, the protected countryside landscapes of the districts Kežmarok and Stara Ľubovňa were transferred under the supervision of the Pieniny NP administration in 2000. This enlarged protected zone accounts for approximately 142 000 ha and more than 105 000 inhabitants (PIENAP (a)).

The population dynamic shows a negative trend, meaning that people are emigrating from there as in many other rural areas in Europe. Veľký Lipník and Lesnica, with a slight increase in the number of inhabitants, are rather exceptions from this trend. Overall, in 1970, the population of these municipalities was approximately 4 774 people, whereas in 2013, only 3 437 people lived there, which reflects a decline of approximately 30% (See Table 15). The rate of the decline, however, is slower than in Poloniny. This could be explained by the enhanced depopulation of Poloniny during water reservoir construction, whereas in Pieniny, emigration has developed gradually, following changes in functional land use.
As in other cases, depopulation led to land abandonment and the discontinuation of certain land use practices that used to shape the landscapes, such as cattle grazing or haymaking. This affected the state of biodiversity and drove a loss in habitat diversity. However, the overall local effects of depopulation and land abandonment on ecosystems in Pieniny is hard to determine, and no comprehensive study has been conducted there.

Table 15. Socioeconomic data on municipalities in and around the Slovak Pieniny NP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Territory (ha)</th>
<th>No of inhabitants 1970</th>
<th>No of inhabitants 2001</th>
<th>No of inhabitants 2013</th>
<th>Population density People/km²</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Červený Kláštor</td>
<td>304</td>
<td>303</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Haligovce</td>
<td>1 136</td>
<td>784</td>
<td>683</td>
<td>649</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kamienka</td>
<td>540</td>
<td>1 440</td>
<td>1 408</td>
<td>1 379</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lechnica</td>
<td>1 243</td>
<td>478</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>270</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stráňany</td>
<td>1 161</td>
<td>369</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>195</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veľký Lipník</td>
<td>2 751</td>
<td>948</td>
<td>1 010</td>
<td>977</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesnica</td>
<td>1 460</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>519</td>
<td>504</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8 595</strong></td>
<td><strong>4 774</strong></td>
<td><strong>4 369</strong></td>
<td><strong>3 437</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author compilation from Bačík, 2013 and DSR, 2015

The agricultural and forestry sectors currently provide major employment opportunities in the area, and both of these sectors are tightly related to conservation. Agriculture, especially sustainable grazing, potentially contributes to the maintenance of meadows. However, unsustainable practices such as overgrazing, the use of pesticides, and large-scale mono-crop production may also present a threat to protected landscapes. The forest industry is often controversial in Slovakia, as conservationists and foresters

19 The data on budget of focal municipalities was not found.
20 The data from 1970 was kindly provided by the Statistical Office of the Slovak Republic.
have different approaches to management. However, the forest industry is still an important employer in the area and fulfils several social functions, e.g., the provision of firewood for households. Tourism provides increasingly more employment opportunities, although this sector is still less developed than in Poland, and competition is often not in favour of Slovak entrepreneurs. The Slovak side lags behind in infrastructure, the diversity of tourist offers, and experience in services provision (Association Pieniny).

The share of agricultural land in the seven municipalities is relatively high, ranging from 37% to 78% (DSR, 2015). These are mostly small-scale agricultural farms employing not more than 20 people (Agorfirma 1; Agrofirma 2). Despite a rather large share of the forested land, this area has provided only limited employment opportunities and revenues, as most valuable areas are protected. According to municipal representatives, tourism has not provided significant revenues. The majority of visitors have been day tourists coming either from the Polish side of Pieniny or from the nearby Tatra Mountains (Researcher). Tourism provides mostly seasonal summer jobs, as winter offers are not so diverse in the Slovak Pieniny. For many families, the provision of tourist services has been a way to earn additional income, rather than serving as full-time employment (Cerveny Klastor; Lesnica).

The overall proportion of the economically active population was similar in all municipalities, ranging from 42% to 45% (Bacik, 2013). The area was characterized by a relatively high share, from 35% to 59%, of the working population leaving their municipality to work, including both daily commuting and seasonal jobs in other regions of the country and abroad (Bacik, 2013; Danko et al., 2014). The unemployment rate varied from a rather low 4.5% to a moderate 12% unemployed (Bacik, 2013). This highly mobile workforce to some extent resolved the problem of limited local employment opportunities. The situation in the Slovak Pieniny differs significantly from its Polish counterparts analysed below.

6.3.2 Polish Pieniny: tourism-driven rural development

The Polish Pieniny NP is located in the southern part of the Malopolsko region in the district of Nowy Targ. The park and its buffer zone partially cover the territory of four municipalities (gmina in Polish) (see Table 16). These are mid-sized municipalities, the smallest being 5 700 ha (Kroscienko n.Dunajcem) and the largest being 12 600 ha (Lapsze Nizne). The population density varies significantly and ranges from 73 inhabitants per square kilo-
metre in Lapsze Nizne to 121 inhabitants per square kilometre in Czorsztyn (see Table 16). This is a relatively high population density compared to other municipalities in and around the national parks analysed in this thesis. However, the number of inhabitants is still below average (221 people/km²) in Malopolsko region (SVS (d), 2014). In absolute figures, the number of inhabitants varies from 6 702 to 9 182 people (see Table 16). It is difficult to directly compare the historical population data and current numbers, as administrative divisions changed in Poland in 1999 to align with EU requirements. Thus, Szczawnica and Kroscienko n.Dunajcem formed one municipality in 1976. When the municipalities split, some territories were added, increasing the overall number of inhabitants. Several interviewees mentioned that on their accounts, the population numbers did not change greatly from socialist times (PPN (a), Kroscienko n.Dunajcem). The current trend demonstrated stable population numbers with a slight increase in past years mostly due to the natural population growth (see Table 16).

*Table 16. Socioeconomic data on municipalities in and around the Polish Pieniny NP*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Municipality</th>
<th>Territory (ha)</th>
<th>No of inhabitants in 197621</th>
<th>No of inhabitants 2010</th>
<th>No of inhabitants 2013</th>
<th>No of inhabitants 2014</th>
<th>Population density people/km²</th>
<th>Budget M. EUR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Czorsztyn</td>
<td>6 200</td>
<td>7 905</td>
<td>7 373</td>
<td>7 496</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>5.1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kroscienko n.Dunajcem</td>
<td>5 700</td>
<td>9 29022</td>
<td>6 619</td>
<td>6 702</td>
<td>117</td>
<td>4.2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lapsze Nizne</td>
<td>12 600</td>
<td>6 743</td>
<td>9 043</td>
<td>9 182</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Szczawnica</td>
<td>8 900</td>
<td>9 29023</td>
<td>7 425</td>
<td>7 472</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>23 938</strong></td>
<td><strong>30 460</strong></td>
<td><strong>30 852</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Author compilation from SVS d, e, f, g, 2014*

21 This data was kindly provided by the Malopolska Regional Research Center of the Statistical Office in Krakow
22 Formed municipality Szczawnica-Kroscienko from 1945–1999
23 Formed municipality Szczawnica-Kroscienko from 1945–1999
Culture and nature in Pieniny

Cerveny Klastor Monastery, September 2014

Flisaki (rafters) on Dunajec River, September 2014
Bridge, built with the EU funds, now connects communities in Poland and Slovakia, September 2014

Traditional small-scale agricultural practices, September 2014
6. CONSERVING HERITAGE

The level of unemployment varied among municipalities from 5.7% (Lapsze Nizne) to 11.8% (Szczawnica) compared with an average of 8.3% in the Malopolsko region (SVS (d), 2014). This number is similar to that from the Slovak side. Municipal budgets show a stable surplus and account from 18.8 million Polish zloty (4.2 M EUR) (Kroscienko n.Dunajcem) to 27.8 million zloty (6.3 M EUR) (Lapsze Nizne).

In contrast to the Slovak side, tourism is one of the key economic sectors in the area. In Szczawnica, where tourism has long been established, the current number of accommodations hosting more than 10 people reaches 61 (SVS (g), 2014). About half of these facilities provided accommodation year round. According to the official statistics, Szczawnica alone hosts approximately 310 000 tourists per year (Szczawnica). As in the municipalities around Bieszczady, a significant number of accommodations have been provided by locals through agri-touristic farms (PPN (a)). The share of these farms is difficult to account for, since they are exempted from taxes.

The agricultural and forestry sectors did not provide any significant budget revenues in these municipalities. Agriculture accounts for not more than 1%, and forestry, despite a relatively high percentage of forested land in each municipality, and does not account for any significant income (SVS (d), (e), (f), (g), 2014). However, subsistence agriculture is common, and many households have small plots to produce fruits and vegetables for their own consumption (Dannenberg & Kuemmerle, 2010).

Overall, the socioeconomic situation of municipalities around Polish Pieniny differs than those on the Slovak side and in two previously analysed parks, creating different challenges to nature conservation in the area. Namely, a higher population density and a large number of visitors put pressure on the natural habitats and biodiversity, especially at park borders. The sections below look at nature conservation practices, focusing on key challenges for park institutions.
6.4 Local governance of nature conservation: Pieniny National Park (Poland)

6.4.1 Engaging with multiple use: nature conservation practices in Polish Pieniny

The practices of nature conservation in Polish Pieniny NP have, as in other cases, been embedded in a broader policy context. At the time of the interviews, the Pieniny was the only Polish park with an approved Conservation Plan (2014) that defined long-term conservation priorities and measures. The park representatives noted the importance of the adopted Conservation Plan, as it addressed certain gaps in national legislation by officially recognizing implementation practices. For example, national legislation does not contain measures to protect ecological corridors essential for landscape connectivity. Thus, the Conservation Plan defined requirements for designating such corridors around the park. Such measures are especially significant for small parks, like Pieniny, where the pressure on park borders can halt conservation efforts inside the park (PPN (b)).

There are four priority areas defined in the Plan: 1) conservation of the park’s landscapes, habitats and species; 2) scientific research; 3) public access to the park and environmental education; and 4) management and administration (PPN (a)). The first group of goals related to conservation included all of the measures on protecting the particular combination of fauna, flora, hydrology, geomorphology, and soil inside the park. The park administration supported the view of “letting nature manage itself” for most of the habitats. The park director defined this approach as

no active management of habitats and species, but rather monitoring, observing, and trying to understand natural processes and relations among species forming these landscapes…. (PPN (a))

Following this approach, the primary tasks of the park administration centred on monitoring the state of the environment, the relevant species and any emerging threats. This approach has been shared by the other focal parks. The park administration has mostly interfered when anthropogenic influence or other factors, such as invasive species, threatened the habitats and biodiversity.

The management of the grasslands and meadows presented a rather outstanding case. The use of meadows was part of the local landscape for centuries, but with reduced pressure from cattle grazing and agriculture,
these habitats have been overtaken by natural succession and could be lost without active management. The continuation of traditional land use practices could support the preservation of grasslands; however, this has not been the case, and agriculture has been declining. The representatives of the park administrations stated

…private landowners are mostly not interested in working their fields or grazing cattle, as it became unprofitable for them. We cannot force them to do so, and compensation or profits they get are not considered adequate. We want to buy their land, as otherwise we cannot access this private property and lose these habitats and biodiversity they support. (PPN (a))

One of the key tools employed by the park administration to address this situation has been to increase the share of state-owned land within the park’s boundaries. The administration had a primary right to purchase land from private owners when plots are for sale. This way, the park institutions believed they could ensure proper conservation and active management, where necessary. The state owned approximately 55% of the territory within the Pieniny NP, unlike in Bieszczady, where almost all of the land belongs to the state. Land purchases have been financed by state subsidies and park revenues (PPN (b)). The employees of the park observed land purchases as an important but time-consuming task, as negotiations with landowners often take “a difficult route”, as they always want a higher price (PPN (b)).

Nature conservation measures have applied to privately owned land, and owners must comply with them. The owners must submit their plans for economic activities in forestry or agriculture for approval by the park administration. The administration can monitor implementation but has had limited access to private land (PPN (a)). The representatives of the park administration were critical about the private management of protected land, observing that it was hard to ensure coherent implementation. In addition, private property limited the use of these areas for other purposes, for example, tourist trails (PPN (b), (a)). The park employees suggested that private landowners and municipalities were mostly interested in building up the area with hotels and pensions, since tourism is a profitable business in Pieniny.

The Conservation Plan has allowed the integration of different conservation policy instruments. Specifically, approximately 2 346 ha of park territory have been designated SAC and SPA sites under Natura 2000. The management of the sites within the park boundaries has been assigned to the park administration and included in the same plan (PPN (c)). The park
representatives noted that the Natura 2000 policy did not bring significant changes to the conservation regime, as similar to the other Polish case, the existing protection measures were stricter.

Inside the park core zone, almost no economic activities, except for traditional (small-scale agriculture and cattle grazing), are allowed, whereas Natura 2000 allows more use options not leading to the degradation and destruction of habitats…. (PPN (c))

The park representatives acknowledged the duplication of paperwork, since Natura 2000 employed different reporting and monitoring methodologies. At the same time, they acknowledged that a major asset of Natura 2000 was providing international status to Pieniny and the EU’s supervisory role. This latter may play a crucial role in the event of a major disagreement between the park administration and the national government on developmental or other related issues. Furthermore, the interviewees considered Natura 2000 to be a useful tool for accessing extra funds (PPN (a), (c)).

The EPI principle has been enforced locally, and nature conservation authorities provided consent for the plans of other economic sectors, for example, municipal Spatial Plans and Water Management Plans (PPN (a)). Agreement on the Spatial Plans of four municipalities have not been easy to reach. Both municipality representatives and park employees acknowledged that the usual disagreements between them were about the scale of possible development. In recent years, discussion related to expanding infrastructure for winter tourism, such as ski lifts and pistes, became more prominent (Kroscienko n.Dunajcem). The municipalities advocated for the further development of tourist infrastructure, whereas park institutions objected to large development plans and argued in favour of better maintenance and improvement of the existing infrastructure (PPN (a)).

Development and investment pressure has been especially strong on park borders. The Regional Directorate for Environmental Protection in Krakow manages the protected areas (e.g., Natura 2000, Landscape Park) in the vicinity of the national park. The Directorate, responsible for the Environmental Impact Assessment on these territories, has often asked the Pieniny NP administration for evaluations of submitted development projects.

It is easy for us [Regional Directorate] to ask for feedback from the Pieniny administration, as they know local environmental conditions and have all the data and the most up-to-date scientific research results”, acknowledged the Regional Directorate representative. (RDEP)
These informal practices (feedback on the EIA) between employees of two state authorities arguably allows the park administration to extend their influence over local development in the park’s vicinity. The municipalities’ representatives mentioned the financial crisis as being among the key external factors influencing the low profile of the developmental agenda. Recently, there were a few developers ready to come in with investments (Krosienko n.Dunajcem). The park representatives also noted that the pressure for investment in the area has been lower compared with that for more popular parks, such as nearby Tatra NP (PPN (b)).

The second priority area for the park administration is scientific research.

The scientific research in the park covers various fields: botany, zoology, geology and others, and within one year, we conducted studies on about 70 different research topics. (park director, PPN (a))

He also noted that the majority of the research was conducted by external scientific institutions, since the park administration had limited capacities. A significant amount of long-term data and observations were available in Pieniny, as the park has existed for more than 80 years, making it attractive to various research fields (PPN (a)). The park administration recognized the fundamental ecological research needed to understand ecosystem dynamic as being the key to sound conservation practices. Recently, some of these research efforts have been supported by EU funds, as improved scientific knowledge is among the overall priorities of Natura 2000.

Tourism management and environmental education constituted the third group of goals. The Polish park collected moderate entrance fees (~1 EUR) for water tourism (rafting on Dunajec) and visits to mountain peaks and other points of interest (PPN (b)). The primary goal related to infrastructure was to maintain the existing infrastructure:

we work a lot on the preparation and maintenance of the trails, paths, and roads, as well as other small-scale field infrastructure such as benches, handrails, and shelters. Good infrastructure is a matter of safety and positive visitors’ experience, and we aim to provide it…. (park employee, PPN (b))

Additionally, the park rangers monitor tourist traffic and provide assistance in the field.

The key difference from other studied parks was a high number of visitors (~ 700 000 per year) and the associated pressure. The park admini-
stration, thus, did not conduct any active promotion of the park (PPN (a), (b)). Instead, they concentrated on diverting the tourist traffic by promoting attractions on the park borders.

Recently, we produced a brochure “What is interesting around the park” to encourage people to visit places of natural and cultural attraction around the park, consequently spending less days inside the park.... (park representative, PPN (b)).

There were a few trails (the peak of the Three Crowns) and attractions (rafting) particularly frequented by a large number of tourists (PPN (a)). The park administration considered water tourism to be a less invasive way to explore the park. In addition, it generates significant income for the park administration and local service providers.

Education efforts included signposts on the trails providing information about nature in Pieniny and some practical advice. During the high season (July-August), the park staff holds free thematic lectures and guided tours on the natural and cultural heritage of Pieniny (PPN (a), (b)). Additionally, the park administration hosts a museum and conducts thematic exhibitions, as well as a number of events dedicated to raising awareness on environmental issues.

Another part of the park’s educational efforts included various training courses (e.g., on monitoring) for staff from other parks and relevant institutions (PPN (b)). Staff members teach and examine the knowledge on, for example, safety and first aid of the rafters, mountain guides, and mountain rescue teams. Finally, the park hosts a volunteer programme open to anyone in Poland and abroad who wants to assist in Pieniny. Through this programme, the park received assistance with field work and allowed volunteers to get hands-on experience (PPN (b))

Other educational activities targeted local teachers, helping them to run environmental education programmes in local schools. Approximately 30 schools, from primary to high schools, from four park municipalities have participated in this programme (PPN, (a)). The programme aimed to show the natural value of Pieniny and its different habitats, as well as to increase interest in traditional occupations. The study modules included such topics as “I will be an owner of the farm”, “I own the forest”, and “I will host tourists”, helping pupils to learn about the importance of these professions (PPN, (b)).
Finally, the fourth priority area included everything related to administration.

If you want to function and perform all the necessary activities, you need to have personnel and a financial basis; you cannot do it without proper administrative processes .... (park director, PPN (a)).

The day-to-day office tasks, financial and project management and the preparation of necessary reporting documents, policy papers, and briefs are part of the administrative routine. In addition to managing internal administrative processes, the park administration has also been responsible for compensation payments to the local inhabitants in the case of damage from wildlife. Similar to the other studied parks, employees mentioned an ever-increasing amount of paperwork and the over-bureaucratization of management processes as being among the key problems that, among other things, limited the administration’s capacity to apply for external projects (PPN (a, b)).

Overall, the presence of various economic sectors and interested actors creates a dynamic socio-political situation around nature conservation in Pieniny and results in the closer engagement of the park administration in local processes. The next two sections examine the existing constellation of actors and their resources, as well as the interplay among them to further understand nature conservation practices in Polish Pieniny

6.4.2 More actors, more resources: actors mapping around Polish Pieniny

The area in and around Pieniny NP is used for various economic activities, especially tourism. Consequently, there have been more actors involved in nature conservation and related practices. The key groups of actors actively involved in this sector are given in Table 17:

Table 17. Key actors in nature conservation and related practices in the Polish Pieniny NP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Responsibilities and activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State authorities</td>
<td>Park institutions; Regional Directorate for Nature Protection of Malopolska Province;</td>
<td>Park is directly responsible for implementation of nature conservation measures foreseen by legislations; Regional Directorate manages Natura 2000 sites outside park borders.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Local authorities
- Municipality offices in and around NP

**Municipalities** are responsible for the provision of social services and local development, including promotion of tourism.

### Institutional tourist service providers
- Association of Raftsmen; Spa Szczawnica;

**Provision of tourist and recreational services mostly to the organized group of tourists.**

### Private service providers
- Pension owners; Transportation providers; Mountain guides etc.;

**Provision of tourist services.**

### Other business
- Czorsztyn-Niedzica and Sromowce Wyzne Water Reservoir Complex;

**Water management, including flood prevention, electricity production, provision of tourism services.**

### National NGOs
- Workshop for all beings; League of Nature Conservation etc.;

**Various usually short-term conservation projects.**

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*The park administration* employs approximately 30 permanent staff members and approximately 20 more for seasonal jobs. The headquarters are located in Kroscienko n. Dunajcem together with the park museum and library. The park maintains several field tourist information centres, which among other tasks collect entrance fees (PPN (b)). Volunteers recruited by the administration assist with tourist management and other field tasks. The mountain rescue service (*Grupa Podhalanska GORP* in Polish) helps the park administration in emergency situations, especially during the high tourist season (PPN (a)).

Approximately 50% of the park’s annual budget comes from state subsidies, another 25% from their own income (entrance fees and other revenues) and the remaining 25% from external funding. The key limitations associated with funding were linked to the absence of a long-term budget plan, which made it difficult to invest strategically. A mismatch between the park’s administrative priorities and the types of funding provided was another common problem. For example, the park needed to improve and modernize the existing field infrastructure, such as rebuilding existing shelters, repairing trails, and updating information signposts, but money for this was rarely available (PPN (a)). The problem has been further exasperated, as the park is not allowed to accept funds directly from NGOs and private foundations (PPN (b)).
The local authorities work to provide basic social services, such as roads and infrastructure, schooling and medical care. The main sources of income are taxes collected locally, state subsidies and various projects co-financed from national and EU funds (Szczawnica). Tourism has been one of the key sources of income in the area. Municipalities have been engaged in various promotion activities, including organizing different events promoting folklore culture and natural heritage within Pieniny (Danko et al., 2014).

The strategic priority for all municipalities has been improvement of the basic infrastructure, for example, the sewage system and a centralized water supply (Szczawnica). Air quality was another matter of concern, as coal is still used as primary source for heating. Thus, municipalities sought to invest in renewable energy, often supported by EU funds (Szczawnica). Nature and nature conservation have been recognized as an essential part of the municipal strategic development plans (Kroscienko n.Dunajcem; Szczawnica).

Water management was among the locally important economic services, represented by the Czorsztyn-Niedzica and Sromowce Wyżne Water Reservoir, a multi-functional complex protecting the area from floods and generating electricity (Niedzica). The first works associated with the construction of the reservoir started in the second half of the 1970s and took almost 20 years to complete (Niedzica). The construction of the reservoir significantly changed the surroundings and generated mixed reactions from local residents and nature conservationists, who feared that this complex would have various adverse long-term impacts on natural river regulation (Bajgier-Kowalska & Rettinger, 2014). To partially mitigate large-scale environmental impact, several measures were applied during construction and operations (Bajorek & Zielinska, 2010). The ongoing monitoring and studies have confirmed that construction of the reservoir reduced the number of devastating floods in the area and therefore serves a considerable social function. The results for ecological impacts are inconclusive, and together with a recorded shift in some natural parameters, the artificial regulation of the water level was beneficial for certain species (Bajgier-Kowalska & Rettinger, 2014). Interestingly, the reservoir institutions have also engaged in providing tourist services due to the high economic potential of this sector in the area (Bajorek & Zielinska, 2010).

The important tourist attraction, rafting, is managed by the Polish Association of Raftsmen on the Dunajec River, which was established in 1934. This association consists of 900 individual members, each paying a membership fee to finance the operational costs of the Association. The Association maintained a visitor centre and other infrastructure facilities to
support smooth operations. The revenues to an individual raftsman come from the fee paid by tourists (Raftsmen Association).

Another representative of the institutionalized service providers was the spa complex located in Szcawnica. The spa complex is a privately owned recreational facility founded at the end of the 19th century. During socialism, the complex belonged to the state and was returned to its previous owners in the 1990s. The complex provides various medical treatments based on the local mineral water. They also own several hotels and pensions in the area. In addition to private investments and revenues, the complex attracts various state and EU funds for the reconstruction of the area (Spa PL).

Small- and medium-scale local entrepreneurs engaged in the provision of tourist services, for example, pension owners, providers of transportation, rental services, and mountain guides as a group that by far outnumber others. However, they did not have any form of self-organization, and in the case of any problems, they were dealt with as individuals, which limited their capacity to promote joint interests and influence local decisions. It is hard to estimate the economic and other resources at their disposal.

Finally, several stakeholder groups have been sporadically involved in conservation and tourism in the area. It was recognized by several interviewees that there were no local environmental NGOs active in nature conservation. The environmental NGOs were mostly represented by the national NGOs, which have held activities in the park periodically but have not been permanently involved (PPN (c)). The absence of strong local NGOs is uncommon compared to the other focal cases. This may indicate that mobilization at the local level occurs on different grounds, for example, in the preservation of local culture and traditions.

Overall, the diverse combination of actors in Pieniny creates a dynamic local situation where actors are prone to cooperate. The strong position of tourism brings all types of large-, medium- and small-scale enterprises into the provision of tourist services and involvement in local processes. Most of them, including the owners of the large spa complex, are locals or have strong connections to the area. Therefore, much of the tourist revenues have been reinvested in the local economy. The stricter alliance between nature conservation and tourism is a common feature for the areas in and around national parks, though it is often characterized by a certain degree of embedded contradiction. Unspoiled natural conditions attract tourists to Pieniny and are of interest to all actors; despite this, some local groups lobby for more infrastructure and mass tourism to increase economic gains,
which may negatively affect nature and their common interests in the long run. The next section will examine how existing formal and informal practices of participation shape local decision-making and cooperation.

6.4.3 Interplay driven by mutual interest

The park administration works with local stakeholders both formally, through consultation processes on Spatial Planning and Environmental Impact Assessments, and informally, through meetings, personal connections, and project collaboration. One of the key formal mechanisms for stakeholder involvement is the Scientific Council of the park, which holds an advisory function similar to that of the scientific council in the other Polish case. The Council consists of representatives from academia, NGOs, and local municipalities. It holds regular meetings and provides feedback on the park’s conservation plans and other relevant matters (PPN (a)).

Negotiations on the adoption of the park Conservation Plan lasted approximately four years and included several rounds of public consultations and together with the Natura 2000 consultations provide an example of formal stakeholder engagement in Polish Pieniny. The interviewees from the park administration acknowledged that these consultation processes helped them to learn more about local stakeholders and their interests and to identify the different groups that exist in the area.

Public consultations were required for the adoption of the Conservation Plan. They were open to anyone, and comments could be submitted in person, via email and telephone, or during meetings. The park administration and the company that prepared the Conservation Plan (Bureau of Forest Management and Geodesy in Krakow) provided responses to the submitted comments, explaining why they were included or excluded from the final version (PPN (b)). The interviewees from municipalities, however, mentioned several times that they felt like their extensive critique of the plan was not adequately reflected in the adopted version (Kroscienko n.Dunajcem; Szcawnica). The major disagreement between the park and municipalities included the scale of possible development in the area. Municipalities lobbied to open up certain areas and for further development of tourist infrastructure, whereas the park administration thought that this would increase tourist traffic and threaten the state of certain habitats and species (Kroscienko n.Dunajcem; PPN (b)). The municipalities’ suggestions were dismissed for lack of scientific ground and contradiction with the conservation goals (Kroscienko n.Dunajcem; PPN (a)). Other forms of formal
consultation by the park administration and municipalities included consultations on municipal Spatial Plans and Environmental Impact Assessments. These consultations were often accompanied by tensions, since municipalities advocated for more development, while the administration tried to limit the scope of planned projects (PPN (b); Szczawnica).

Furthermore, the park administration engaged bilaterally with other relevant stakeholders both formally and informally. For example, the park administration signed a contract with the Association of Raftsmen, which utilizes park facilities and collects fees in a harbour on Dunajec River that allowed both sides to profit from a public-private partnership (Raftsmen Association; PPN (a)). Rafters help the park with various activities, such as annual clean-up actions and other small-scale assistance. It has been more challenging for the park administration to engage with the more diverse group of small-scale tourism service providers, such as hotel and pensions owners and transportation firms, as they are numerous. Most of them operate independently and approach the park institutions informally in the case of any enquiries.

Various stakeholders acknowledged that the park had become a well-known local brand that they used in their promotional and information materials; these often use an image of ideal rural landscapes. Furthermore, describing the role of the park, several interviewees acknowledged that the current generation of local inhabitants live side by side with the park, and for them, it has always been there (Szczawnica). Local citizens recognize the park’s value and its importance to local tourism, yet some local groups expressed discontent with the associated developmental limitations (Szczawnica; (PPN, (a)). The park administration has undertaken several attempts to address these concerns, and park management regularly meets with the municipality offices and local citizens. For the latter meetings, compensation payments for damage caused by wildlife have become centre of the discussions (PPN (c)).

The informal cooperation among various stakeholders and institutions was mentioned as a crucial part of local processes. Informal practices help to avoid lengthy official negotiations and to speed-up implementation by reducing the bureaucratic workload, which was identified by several respondents as a problem (PPN (b), (c); Krosценko n.Dunajcem). The park representatives mentioned that there are formal requirements regulating many aspects of their work, including public consultations, feedback on EIA and Spatial Plans, and requests for official data and information from the park. These procedures regulate inter-agency relations, as well as rela-
6. CONSERVING HERITAGE

The administration staff acknowledged that if they always followed these procedures, they would not be able to perform their work and react to arising problems in a timely manner (PPN (a)). Therefore, they often relied on informal practices, addressing various urgent issues through personal communications because it was a more efficient way to solve problems compared to official channels (PPN (c)).

The notion of unique natural and cultural conditions was expressed by all of the groups of interviewees, including state officials, local authorities, local businesses and representatives of the tourism sector. The importance of “organic” infrastructure development that takes into consideration the ecological conditions and does not compromise landscape features has been central to the park administration’s approach to local development. The existing arrangements of medium- and small-scale tourist facilities, where guests have direct contact with their hosts and can experience local “goral” culture and traditions combined with beautiful natural scenery, has attracted tourists to Pieniny (Spa PL; PPN (b)). Building up the area with major tourist infrastructure, spoiling the view, and potentially harming the landscapes and biodiversity could play a negative role, and this specificity would be lost.

The existing formal practices have demonstrated rather limited stakeholder inclusion in the decision-making and implementation processes, and it is not clear the extent to which they provided a platform for sharing decision-making power, incorporating different interests and solving conflict. The park administration has advanced, compared with the other focal parks, in building a public-private partnership with local stakeholders for mutual assistance in their tasks. It seems that local stakeholders apply a pragmatic approach to the park and to nature conservation, which allowed everyone involved to benefit from it. The informal relations, to a large extent, helped the establishment of such cooperation. The next section turns to the Slovak Pieniny Park and looks at the processes occurring there.

6.5 Local governance of nature conservation:

Pieniny National Park (Slovakia)

6.5.1 Constrained conservation practices in Slovak Pieniny

The park’s main goal, as in the other analysed cases, is to preserve local biodiversity. Other priority areas include environmental education and the development of tourism infrastructure (PIENAP (a)). The Slovak adminis-
The administrative system is characterized by a higher degree of centralization than the Polish one. The State Nature Conservancy defines common conservation priorities for all Slovak parks, and each park administration fits concrete activities under these priorities. All plans and the respective funding must be officially approved by the State Nature Conservancy. They also formally endorse agreements between the park administration and external actors (PIENAP (a)).

Conservation practices in Pieniny, similarly to the Poloniny case, have been constrained by a high share of private land and an unclear inter-agency division of responsibilities. The state owns approximately 11% of the park’s land; however, the administration directly manages only the 7% of the territory designated as a strictly protected nature reserve. Numerous state authorities have management responsibilities over the territory of the Slovak Pieniny. The State Forest Enterprise “Forest of TANAP” (Lesy TANAPU in Slovak) manages the state-owned forests of Pieniny and of the nearby Tatra National Park. The operational plans of the Forestry Enterprise do not require consent from the park administration. This has often caused tensions between foresters and the park administrations because, similar to the other Slovak case, their approaches and goals contradict each other. The River Basin Authority (Sprava Povodia in Slovak) manages all water resources in the park. Private owners, including those who own plots under strict fourth and fifth degrees of protection, have been responsible for the implementation of conservation measures. Additionally, three agricultural farms operate in the area (PIENAP (b)). The subsidies for agriculture have been allocated through the Ministry of Agriculture, which has often advocated for a different approach to environmentally sound agriculture compared with that preferred by the park administration. The primary concerns for the Ministry include profitability; consequently, they mostly support monocropping and the use of heavy machinery, as it allows for the quick increase in yields. The nature conservation authorities, in turn, would prefer small-scale multi-cropping farms (PIENAP (b), Agrofirma 1). Overall, the Pieniny park administration, similar to that in Poloniny, has had limited possibilities to formally coordinate the conservation activities of other state management authorities and private owners. The approval of their management plans by the park administration is not obligatory and a process for this approval is not in place. The administration is rarely able to monitor the implementation of conservation measures or the lack of thereof due to a lack of resources (PIENAP (a)).
At the time of the interviews, the Pieniny NP did not have a long-term Conservation Plan. The only plan the park administration had executed was for the active protection of six areas, mostly peat bogs (PIENAP (b)). The representative of the park administration indicated several areas that could benefit from active conservation measures, including the grasslands and cliffs that form typical scenic views of the park and have been overtaken by natural succession.

We understand that if we do not interfere with active conservation of some landscapes now, they will be lost forever in a decade or so… (park representative, PIENAP (a)).

The employees currently work with a number of monitoring projects, as well as projects on transboundary cooperation and other related topics. The related administrative and bureaucratic tasks have taken up a significant amount of the day-to-day work and were mentioned by several interviewees as a limitation to applying for new projects that could cover some of the necessary conservation measures (PIENAP (a), (b)). Similar to the other Slovak case, the park representatives mentioned over-bureaucratization and a lack of financing and land management as among the major constraints for conservation.

Approximately 80% of the park territory has been assigned as Natura 2000. The designation process required the better mapping of habitats in the park territories that have not been in focus previously, and increased the up-to-date knowledge about the state of biodiversity and landscapes (PIENAP (a)). The management plans for designated Natura 2000 sites were under preparation, and active conservation measures were not yet elaborated except for the monitoring system for species of community importance (e.g., various cormorant species). The Natura 2000 regime has also been extended to private areas already covered by conservation measures. Thus, the actual implementation may run into problems similar to those already existing, such as a lack of monitoring capacity, supervisory rights for the park administration, and adequate incentives for owners to practice conservation.

They key issue related to conservation on private land for both the park and the Natura 2000 sites was a compensation system. Subsidies had only been paid for the fifth level of protection, the strictest degree at which no human interventions could occur. Some landowners involved in agriculture expressed their discontent with the existing system, since they did not receive compensation even though the scope of use options were limited.
The park employees recognized that extending the progressive compensation system to land users whose property was under other degrees of protection could contribute to the overall implementation of conservation measures by private owners (PIENAP (a)).

Tourism in Pieniny

*Busy tourist traffic along picturesque Dunajec trail, September 2014*

*Water traffic on Dunajec River, September 2014*
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Tourist on the top of Sokolica, 2014

Visitors’ queue to access the top of Three Crowns, September 2014
The second priority area for the park administration was environmental education for local citizens and visitors. A recently implemented project financed by the EU allowed the renovation of park facilities and modernized the visitor centre and museum. Multimedia equipment was installed that made the centre and exhibitions more interactive and attractive to tourists. The park administration supported an environmental education programme for local schools. For example, they provided relevant training for teachers, hosted school field trips, and gave thematic lectures. The park employees organized various events open to the general public, such as Earth Day, World Water Day, thematic exhibitions and others. The field infrastructure, for example, signposts and information boards, presents information on the history and natural features of the Slovak Pieniny. In regards to professional development, park employees participated in various training and conferences to increase their competencies. The park administration had not had the capacity to conduct scientific research. However, they did host researchers from Slovak institutions and from abroad (PIENAP (b)).

The third priority area was tourism management. The primary work of the park administration included the maintenance of tourist infrastructure such as trails, field shelters, and information boards (PIENAP (a)). The exact number of tourists was not known, as the park did not have entrance fees or other traffic monitoring systems. Estimates suggested approximately 600,000–700,000 visitors per year, similar to Polish park, as much of the tourist infrastructure is shared. Consequently, dispersing visitors to various zones in and around the park was also a high priority on the Slovak side. Among possible improvements, the park representatives mentioned the establishment of a guide service that could assist tourists throughout their journey and ensure visits to different parts of the park (PIENAP (a)). To date, cycling has been one of the most popular types of tourism in the park. Winter tourism has been less developed in the Slovak Pieniny, so most visitors come during the three summer months (PIENAP (c)). One of the serious consequences of such concentrated traffic has been garbage left behind by tourists, especially alongside the most attractive trails. At least twice a year (spring and autumn), the park administration conducts a clean-up with the help of volunteers from many local organizations (PIENAP (b)).

The tourist economy was affected by the fact that the vast majority of tourists were Polish, and they often chose to stay overnight on the Polish side, since it was cheaper based on the exchange rate of euro to zloty.
Additionally, interviewees from both sides noted the better developed infrastructure on the Polish side (PIENAP (a); PPN (a)). The park administration shared several thoughts on the future development of tourist infrastructure:

We are currently facing a problem related to the type of tourism we get here. The large amount of cyclists can be damaging to our natural environment, especially if they do not follow the rules and go off trail. Others want to open a climbing route on the cliffs that are home for the colony of rare bats. We, as the park administration, often have to stop certain development in order to prevent damage to the fragile environment…. (PIENAP (a))

Several interviewed stakeholders observed that opening a climbing route (via ferrata) on the attractive limestone gorge or opening up existing caves for visitors would be ways to diversify tourist offers (HZS; Cerveny Klastor). The park administration, however, held a firm stand against proceeding with these plans. The absence of entrance fees could contribute to this position, as the park administration did not directly profit from tourism.

Overall, the scope of influence of the park administration on the local political and developmental processes remains limited due to the centralized character of the Slovak administrative system and the lack of formal land management competencies. Slovak legislation does not provide a strong foundation for the park administration to prevent large-scale development projects or other potentially harmful practices. From an organizational point of view, the absence of long-term conservation and financial plans often leads to ad hoc management. The Pieniny NP has not been the focus of large-scale development projects, but the example of nearby Tatra NP sets a rather distressing precedent. Development projects there proceeded despite strong opposition from the Tatra park administration and the State Nature Conservancy. Under these circumstances, engagement with stakeholders active in the area plays an even more prominent role, as a functioning public-private partnership and cooperation with local municipalities may help to ensure long-term conservation. The next section turns to the mapping of local actors involved in nature conservation.
6.5.2 High diversity, fewer resources: actors in Slovak Pieniny

The variety of different groups of actors involved in nature conservation and tourism in Pieniny is similar to the previously analysed Slovak Poloniny NP. In addition to the park institutions, local authorities, and other state institutions directly tasked with land management, various private businesses and NGOs were active in the area. Table 18 provides an overview of the different actors present in Pieniny.

Table 18. Key actors in nature conservation and related practices in the Slovak Pieniny NP

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Responsibilities and activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State authorities</td>
<td>Park institutions;</td>
<td>Park institutions conduct day-to-day operations in the field, manage tourist traffic, environmental education. The State Nature Conservancy is responsible for approving plans, provision of financing and supervision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>State Nature Conservancy;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local authorities</td>
<td>Municipal administrations;</td>
<td>Responsible for provision of social services, spatial planning and local socio-economic development, including promotion of tourism.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Land owners and managers</td>
<td>The State Forest enterprise;</td>
<td>Each of the group is responsible for the management of the respective resources.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>River Basin Authority;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Private land-owners;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture sector</td>
<td>Agro-firms operating in the area</td>
<td>Agricultural production, receive subsidies for operating in protected area.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private service providers</td>
<td>Pension owners; Transportation providers;</td>
<td>Provision of tourist services.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rental service owners;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rafters; Spa owners;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Developmental association | Association for the Development of Pieniny and Zamaguria region | Aims to bring a coherent approach to the development of the area and implement projects aiming at extending tourist infrastructure and promotion.

Local NGOs and other organizations relevant for conservation | Friends of PIENAP; Cyprian Mountain rescue service; Museum authorities; | Provide voluntary support of the park operations, work with various aspects related to tourism.

The park headquarters is located in the town Spisska Stara Ves together with the information centre and an exhibition, altogether employing 10 people (PIENAP (a)). The park representative noted that the staff capacity was not adequate for the existing conservation needs (PIENAP (a)). The Slovak administrative system had not envisaged a separate budget for the park; instead, the administration receives funding from the State Nature Conservancy for planned conservation activities (PIENAP (a)). A portion of the funding came from project sources and other external funds. The administration’s capacity to generate their own income has been limited, as they did not have a system of entrance fees or other forms of visitor contributions or merchandise. Recent changes in legislation did allow the park administration to collect entrance fees and receive funds from visitor contributions or merchandise sales, so the Pieniny administration advocated for the State Nature Conservancy to introduce a pilot project on entrance fee collection. From their point of view, this could help to diversify park income sources and cover the most urgent conservation needs, as well as provide useful insight into feasibility and profitability of introducing fees in other national parks in Slovakia (PIENAP (a)).

The municipalities in and around the park have similar characteristics. These were rather small entities that received their income from taxes, collected mostly from local tourism services, and state subsidies. Privately owned land creates limitations for possible use options by municipalities:

we would like to work more with the development of tourist infrastructure, but every time we want to do something, for example, build a new cycling route or hiking trail, we need to ask for landowner permission, which is not always easy to accomplish, as they do not feel they will get enough in return…. (municipality representative, Cerveny Klastor)
All municipalities’ representatives acknowledged the importance of EU funds for local socioeconomic development, including projects related to tourism and infrastructure development. EU funds were used by the municipalities of Cerveny Klastor to build a waste water treatment plant that improved the overall environmental situation in the area (Lesnica; Cerveny Klastor; Spisska Stara Ves). Some municipalities owned recreational facilities and directly engaged in the provision of services (Lesnica). They also hosted major folk events, concerts and sport competitions, which serve as key tourist attractions. The issue of over-bureaucratization was mentioned by the representatives of municipalities as a limiting factor to engaging into projects and receiving subsidies.

It is hard to directly estimate the resources available to the forests enterprise TANAP, as it was not possible to conduct an interview with the representatives of this organization. The secondary sources indicated that the TANAP organizational structure included forest management departments, as well as units for environmental education and research (TANAP, 2015). Interviewees from other organizations mentioned that TANAP was highly visible in the area. For locals, they offer seasonal employments, whereas tourists could visit some of their facilities and trails to learn more about the importance of forest management (PIENAP (b), Cerveny Klastor).

TANAP often tries to claim that only proper management, including sanitary clear cutting, is necessary for our forests, which goes in contradiction with the State Nature Conservancy approach that advocates for natural forest processes; so they claim management is better for the forest than conservation…. (Association Pieniny)

It is possible to assume that whatever resources are available to foresters are used to implement their own agenda, which traditionally has not corresponded with the park administration’s agenda.

It is hard to provide common information on resources and the scale of engagement of private land managers and owners. Some have decided not to work the land, finding it unprofitable. Others tried to receive compensation for protected land and used the area in accordance with existing conservation measures. For example, the three farms operating in the area do not employ more than 20 people and work with cattle grazing (cows and sheep) for meat production and crop production for feeding their animals (Agrofirma 1). The farms acknowledged that it has been possible to find compromises with the park authorities on the use options beneficial for
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grasslands (Agrofirma (1), Agrofirma (2)). Despite the complex application procedures, the farms have benefited from the state subsidies paid by the Ministry of Agriculture to farms operating in protected areas (Agrofirma 1). Compensation has also been paid for the damage from predators. The expansion of services and the introduction of agrotourism has become increasingly common and allowed agrofirms to diversify their source of income (Agrofirma 1).

The providers of tourist services were, in general, less organized compared with Poland. There was no organization similar to the Polish Association of Rafters (PIENAP (b)). Instead, there were several smaller organizations that united individual rafters. This has led to increased competition among these organizations and a fluctuation in prices. The representatives of the local service providers operated as private entities and did not pay any direct contributions to park or municipal budgets (Local Raftsman; Cerveny Klastor). In Cerveny Klastor, the privately owned spa facilities were recently renovated using a partial contribution from the EU funds (Spa SK). Other tourist facilities in the park include municipally owned cottages (Pieninska Hata), a restaurant, hotel, and information centre (Pieninska Hata).

More recent attempts to bring a more strategic approach to socio-economic development by increasing the attractiveness of Pieniny for tourism and reinvesting the revenues locally were made by the “Association for the Development of Pieniny and Zamagurie region”. The Association was led by the former director of the Pieniny NP and aimed to unite various stakeholders to join resources for project implementation (Association Pieniny). Initially, the organization was created to unite municipalities to apply for an EU “Leader Project”, an instrument provided to municipalities for building and upgrading infrastructure. The Association expanded its activities to include other various projects promoting the cultural and natural heritage of Pieniny, especially folk traditions.

I try to explain to people we can only reach good results if we work together and support our strong sides, like traditions and folklore we have here…. (Association head, Association Pieniny).

Various local NGOs operate in the area. One of the oldest, “Friends of PIENAP”, has been active for more than 30 years. It used to attract many local members, including schoolchildren and youth. However, the number of members has dropped as young people leave the area. The members of this NGO have been helping the park administration with small field
activities and clean-up campaigns (PIENAP (a)). Another local NGO, “Cyprian”, supports one of the key tourist attractions – the museum Cer-veny Klastor. The museum, as a public entity, is limited in its ability to access external funds. The museum representative said that the NGO has helped it to access such funds and to implement projects to renovate the interiors of the old monastery and open thematic exhibitions about traditional activities in the monastery (Museum).

Furthermore, there were several national NGOs involved in the implementation of various short-term projects. The representative of the park administration suggested that these NGOs became interested and active in Pieniny following their close engagement with the Tatra NP, located just 50 km away from Pieniny. NGOs have contributed additional resources for awareness-raising campaigns, active protection measures and the maintenance and development of tourist infrastructure (PIENAP (a)).

The promotion of tourism seems to be a common interest across the involved stakeholders because it is the key source of income and employment opportunities for many. However, economic competition between entrepreneurs and differences of opinion on how to actually proceed with tourism development seem to have a strong influence on cooperation opportunities. Despite all difficulties, the dialogue still continues, not least due to the active individual engagement of a few people who aim to unite local actors. The next sections take a closer look at the interplay among the stakeholders mentioned above.

6.5.3 Interplay through politicizing local conservation

The Pieniny NP was the only park in Slovakia that had a consultation body, which was established in 2008 on the initiative of the former park director to improve cooperation with local municipalities and scientists (PIENAP (a)). Until recent changes in the Nature Conservation Act (in 2014), there was not even a legislative clause that regulated the work of such body. This consultation body consisted of 23 members and included representatives of municipalities and scientific experts. The consultation body did not issue legally binding advice, but rather provided their opinion on the park’s conservation plans and other relevant measures (PIENAP (a); Spisska Stara Ves).

Both the park’s employees and municipality representatives acknowledged the importance of this formal representative body. Even though the advice only served as a recommendation, the consultation body provided a regular forum for transparent information exchange. The park administra-
tion acknowledged that this body allowed them to monitor local public opinion. Additionally, they noted that the independent scientific opinion provided by researchers from the consultation body has been used in the event of disagreement with local stakeholders. The proposal to open *via ferrata* on the park’s cliff was assessed by geologists and zoologists, and they agreed with the administration opinion to not open the climbing route, as it could have adverse impacts on this habitat (PIENAP (b)).

All official agreements of the park administration with stakeholders must be formally approved by the State Nature Conservancy. Therefore, formal processes can become lengthy, and park authorities have often simultaneously engaged in negotiations with stakeholders and the central authority. The park director recognized that this not only slows down the process but also undermines the administration’s authority in the face of external actors (PIENAP (a)).

All in all, the park employees acknowledged that it has often been challenging for them to balance the diverse interests of many actors and ensure their engagement. For example, the park administration tried to mobilize local resources from stakeholders working in tourism to upgrade some of the existing infrastructure, but without much success.

I personally went around, asking local business to support a new educational trail in the park, but no one was interested. Therefore, it was easier for me to attract resources from outside…. (park director, PIENAP (a))

The Natura 2000 designation in Pieniny became the first experience of official public consultation related to conservation measures. These consultations helped the park administration to learn about the opinions of different actors, with whom they lacked previous contact (e.g., small-scale tourist service providers) (PIENAP (a), (b)). The park representatives acknowledged the importance of such consultations. However, the lack of staff capacity prevented them from conducting consultations on a regular basis. The park director occasionally held public meetings, and these raise great interest in some municipalities (PIENAP (a)).

Municipality representatives, in general, expressed positive attitudes towards the park administration and acknowledged a good working dialogue with the park director and relevant staff (Lesnica; Cerveny Klastor). The attitudes and willingness to comply with nature conservation measures was, to a large extent, determined by an economic component,
i.e., the ability to profit from compensation, subsidies or project funding. Many municipalities could profit from the extra funds and projects available for Natura 2000 sites and were mostly supportive of conservation (Lesnica; Cerveny Klastor; PIENAP (a)).

However, the park representatives recognized that the cooperation between them and municipalities sometimes became politicized. The municipality representatives could react to the demands of specific interest groups or inhabitants if they thought this would be beneficial to their political position. When landowners claimed that they did not receive adequate compensation for the amount of protected land they own, local politicians, running for posts, sided with them and blamed the park for local socioeconomic problems (PIENAP (a)). Generally, the elected representatives of the municipal offices sought to satisfy demands of local citizens to ensure re-election. The municipality representatives expressed an opinion that personal connections had been an important mechanism for problem solving and that the voice of the local inhabitants had a strong effect on local political processes (Lesnica; Spisska Stara Ves).

It seemed from the conducted interviewees that the forestry authorities also sought to establish cooperation with the local inhabitants and municipality offices (PIENAP (b)).

Forest enterprise not only provides permanent employment to some local people but also offers seasonal jobs to many locals such as cleaning from shrubs, planting seedlings, mowing. It might not be huge money, but people clearly see their own benefits from forestry. We [the park administration], unfortunately, cannot offer them anything like this. (park management representative, PIENAP (a))

He also mentioned that this situation further contributed to the rather positive perceptions of forestry over conservation among local inhabitants (PIENAP (a)).

The overall attitudes and willingness of locals to engage with nature conservation and the park vary greatly. Stakeholders working with tourism see nature as a source of income and recognized the role of the park and the park administration in attracting tourists and securing their income source (Cerveny Klastor). Others thought that the park constrained development projects and land use modes, preventing further the diversification of tourism offerings and economic activities (HZS). Nevertheless, the park administration had successfully used informal mechanisms to mobilize local NGOs
and entrepreneurs for the implementation of field work. The interviewed local entrepreneurs acknowledged that

it is good for our image to say that we work together with the park administration and help to preserve beautiful nature around, so we do not mind helping with some clean-ups or other work when the [park] director asks us…. (Pieninska hata)

Overall, the difficulties in advancing cooperation in Pieniny seem to lay in the absence of a formal forum that can steer and support multi-stakeholder dialogues and the coordination of management activities. Meanwhile, dialogue seemed to be occurring bilaterally, for example, between the park administration and municipalities, between municipalities and tourist entrepreneurs, between the park and tourist entrepreneurs. The highly centralized Slovak administrative system provides further limitations on the park administration and local authorities in engaging in the dialogue. The municipalities in the centralized system, similar to the Poloniny case, often had to compete at the national level for subsidies and had limited intentions of sharing their plans and cooperating. Cooperation in Pieniny spans across territorial borders due to its specific transboundary location. The next section will provide an overview of the history and ongoing transboundary cooperation in the area.

6.6 Transboundary cooperation in Pieniny

Institutional cooperation between the two parks started with the establishment of protected areas on both sides of the border in the 1930s. Contacts focused on the exchange of knowledge and data on flora and fauna, as well as on an interest in developing joint infrastructure (Danko et al., 2014). This early cooperation was interrupted by the Second World War. The re-establishment of protected areas in Poland and Slovakia in the 1950s did not follow with close cooperation, as the socialist regimes in these countries did not encourage trans-border movement and exchange.

…We had some knowledge on what is occurring on the other side of the border; however, our contacts with colleagues were sporadic, and no systematic exchange was possible…. (representatives of the Polish park administration, PPN (a))
The parks’ representatives mentioned that travelling was controlled, although still possible because the two countries belonged to the same ideological camp. This made cooperation and timely updates about the other park’s plans difficult. Common management and scientific projects were not encouraged, and consequently, no financial support was allocated for it by the state (PPN (a); PIENAP (b)).

The change of regime resulted in better conditions for transboundary cooperation between the park institutions and other interested stakeholders.

…For the past twenty years, we have had very intense cooperation with the Slovak partners; we meet at least once a year to discuss common problems and the way to solve them…. (representatives of the Polish park, PPN (a))

The formal framework is set by a cooperation agreement signed by the park directors. The range of activities includes an annual meeting between park employees, joint meetings of the consultation bodies of the two parks, scientific conferences, joint field projects and daily contact about relevant matters. Most of the common infrastructure is maintained in both the Polish and Slovak languages. Similar to the East Carpathians parks, representatives of both Pieniny park administrations acknowledged that longstanding personal contacts and the lack of a language barrier, since Polish and Slovak speakers understand each other, have helped this cooperation and speeded up feedback and information exchange.

Common projects are funded independently by each park, since it has been difficult to allocate and manage finances for projects across the borders (PIENAP (b); PPN (a)). The representative of the Slovak park acknowledged that since their Polish counterpart has a higher budget, many meetings, conferences and exchange visits have been supported by them.

Several representatives of the Slovak park mentioned that the Polish park was an example of “good practices” that they would like to have in Slovakia.

In Slovakia, we have a different policy framework compared with Poland, and often we cannot do much to implement conservation… I sometimes share Polish practices with colleagues from other parks or with the State Nature Conservancy. Who knows, maybe it will change something one day…. (representatives of the Slovak Pieniny, PPN (a))
The exchange of experience, therefore, can be relevant not only for conservation and field projects but also for management processes in the parks and nationally. All in all, park representatives from both sides of the border repeatedly characterized ongoing cooperation as fruitful, productive, well-established and beneficial.

The Slovak representatives also noted the difference in the attitudes of central authorities towards this cooperation.

If we have a conference, there will always be someone from the Polish Directorate, whereas our bosses [The State Nature Conservancy] appear rarely at such meetings…. (PIENAP (a))

At the same time, he acknowledged that generally, the central authority has had a positive view of such cooperation and has engaged in various trans-boundary or international projects (PIENAP (a)).

Cooperation expands beyond park institutions, and similar to the previously analysed case of the East Carpathians, includes other actors. Municipality offices in both Poland and Slovakia mentioned cooperation on common projects, including projects based on EU funding. In 2009, the bridge between Cerveny Klastor (Slovakia) and Sromowce Nizne (Poland) was built. The project was initiated by municipality offices and financed by EU funds. The bridge has not only connected the inhabitants of the two sides but also served as an important link for tourism infrastructure. Previously, there was no opportunity to cross the river other than by raft (Cerveny Klastor, Kroscienko n.Dunajcem).

Interestingly, local entrepreneurs both in Poland and Slovakia either did not mention any examples of transboundary cooperation or directly noted the competition in some areas for the same income source (tourists). Tourist offers were rather similar and, in addition to accommodation and rental services, included rafting and spa centres. NGOs were more internationalized compared with other stakeholders and had experience in working together on field projects across the border. Examples of such projects included the development of common bicycle routes and the preservation of cultural heritage and common folklore traditions (Association Pieniny).

Overall, the existing formal frameworks for cooperation was often driven by personal connections and informal interests. This is similar to the local situation in all four parks and helps to avoid often lengthy official processes.
6.7 Summary: historical trends and the modern development of local governance in Pieniny

The case of two national parks across the border from each other demonstrated how existing national policies may influence the state of affairs. Natural conditions and existing challenges are rather similar for the two parks. Both the Polish and Slovak parks are rather small, covering 2,372 ha and 3,750 ha, respectively. Despite this, both parks are among the most visited national mountain parks in these countries (Zawilinska & Mika, 2013; PIENAP (a)). Easy access to the parks and a concentration of habitats and species diversity with a relatively small territory increasingly attracts nature lovers from Poland, Slovakia, and abroad. The growing number of tourists poses challenges for conservation in both parks, as they share the most scenic tourist routes. The discontinuation of traditional land use practices, especially on privately owned land, leads to the loss of valuable meadows and grassland habitats.

The impact of Europeanization and the designation of Natura 2000 sites in these parks have not greatly changed the conservation regimes but have contributed to law enforcement and improved access to funding. Natura 2000 also introduced different practices for monitoring and reporting that needed to be incorporated into the parks’ routine, increasing knowledge about some parks’ habitats but leading to additional paperwork.

The parks and local municipalities inherited markedly different legacies from their respective socialist regimes. In Slovakia during socialism, all the land was collectivized, and it was re-privatized and returned to the previous owners with the regime change. This led to drastic ownership changes over just a few years. Currently, a high proportion of the park is privately owned, and owners are assigned responsibility for land management and conservation. In Poland, the land remained in private ownership throughout socialism. A large share of the park land is also privately owned, and the administration has engaged in negotiations with land owners over the continuation of traditional use and land purchases. The limited contact between the two parks during socialism led to a lack of cooperation in infrastructure development and weakened social and economic connections in the areas.

The capacity and resources to address these and other challenges vary greatly between Polish and Slovak Pieniny. Polish legislation and policies enforce relatively strict conservation measures. This has helped to support the strong position of the park despite the rather high share of privately
owned land. In addition, the park administration has had the resources to purchase any private land available for sale, which they considered to be the way to overcome management limitations. This resulted in a steady increase of the territory under the direct supervision of the park administration. The existing long-term Conservation Plan has defined park priorities and guides day-to-day practices, allowing more strategic conservation approaches. However, the funding perspectives do not match the length of the Conservation Plan and potentially compromise the effectiveness of implementation over time. Furthermore, development pressure has been much stronger on the Polish side than the Slovak. This has created tensions between the park administration, which wants to restrict potentially harmful development, and local municipality offices lobbying for more development. Whether nature conservation measures would stand against major political and economic interests remains to be seen. The ultimate decisions about major projects have been taken at the national level.

The Polish Pieniny is a highly attractive area for tourism, which to some extent explains the existence of the many actors involved in nature conservation and nature-based tourism. The Polish park has successfully engaged in a public-private partnership with some of the local entrepreneurs to overcome its rather modest staff capacity. Another particular characteristic of the composition of actors in that area is the absence of local environmental NGOs. This potentially demonstrates that the mobilization of civil society in Pieniny is based on other matters, such as cultural heritage and folklore. The informal channels of cooperation and information exchange, similar to the other cases, have been greatly utilized in Polish Pieniny. The park administration maintains a permanent consultation body that provides a forum for scientific discussion of the administration’s plans.

In Slovakia, the existing national policy provides various constraints to park administration operations on the ground. The administration is understaffed and under-financed and cannot fully engage in the implementation of measures necessary to maintain the existing state of biodiversity or to improve it, where required. Preventing a natural succession on grassland and cliff habitats are among the needed active conservation measures. Furthermore, the Slovak system of nature conservation is highly centralized, and the park institutions are built in the structure of the State Nature Conservancy. As in the other analysed Slovak case, the park administration is only directly responsible for the management of the small parcel of strictly protected zones inside the park. The rest is managed by other state institutions and private owners. The lack of long-term financial resources
and of a Conservation Plan add to the limitations to management competencies and capacities. The park administration has nevertheless been actively involved in local cooperation. The formally existing consultation body provides a forum for regular contact with scientists and municipality representatives. The absence of large-scale development plans has contributed to the smooth relations between the park administration and municipalities. The administration has mobilized local stakeholders for assistance with field work, thanks to the informal connections of the park director with many local entrepreneurs and NGOs. However, the mobilization of local financial resources has been difficult to achieve. Similar to the case of Poloniny, there is no formal forum allowing the consolidation and exchange of information on management plans or the expression of interests and concerns by different stakeholders.

Overall, in both countries, the nature conservation regimes have a strong influence on socioeconomic development. The scenic natural landscapes of Pieniny are a great attraction for tourists, and tourism provides the key employment possibilities in the area. Paradoxically, some local stakeholders have blamed the parks for limiting infrastructure development and reducing economic potential. These national parks were introduced to conserve the Pieniny Mountains many decades ago, shaping both the natural and the political landscapes of these territories. The early trans-boundary contact contributed to the recognition of a common natural and cultural heritage. In the two most recent decades, with intensified contact between the park administrations and other local stakeholders, there is an increasing number of joint efforts to preserve this heritage. The local actors often recognize that the current challenges in rural areas, such as limited employment opportunities, the associated emigration, a lack of infrastructure and others, can only be addressed in partnership. Increasing competition for tourists among European national parks and protected areas will further demand the diversification of tourism offers and the quality of provided services. Thus, even an attractive and easily accessible area such as Pieniny will need to make an effort to maintain the quality of provided services. Under these conditions, a balance between local economic interests derived from nature-based tourism and the long-term preservation of landscapes and habitats is likely to remain a priority for both parks.

These four cases presented four stories of conservation and rural development in the context of post-socialist legacies and Europeanization. It appears that some parts of these stories sound similar and that remotely located rural areas lag behind in development and are currently not in the
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spotlight of national agendas. Nature seems to be undergoing various ecological changes that are tightly interlinked with the ongoing social changes. The legal and political frameworks in these two countries provided rather different tools and resources to the parks to cope with change, leading to two different outcomes. Thus, the next chapter will provide further exploration of the empirical results and attempt to answer the research questions and illuminate the contribution of this thesis in advancing understanding of the theory and practice of ongoing nature conservation governance changes.
PART 5
Analytical discussion
CHAPTER 7
Practising nature conservation policy
in post-socialist EU countries

You should understand that we [municipality administration] have good working relations with the park administration, but they are limited in what they can do. They report to their bosses in Banska Bystrica and do what they say. Their vision is, however, heading in only one direction – nature conservation, but not development of the area – and it seems that they only want to forbid things to us. However, I would like to stress, it is not a problem of the park staff, it is how the state system works…. (Ulic).

This opinion, expressed by a mayor of one municipality near Poloniny NP, encompasses several findings of this study related to the transformation of nature conservation governance in Poland and Slovakia. The local actors primarily link political and socioeconomic changes to national and local conditions and are less aware of EU influence. These perceptions form the actors’ understanding of the major drivers of ongoing changes. The empirical material demonstrates that regime transformation requires rethinking of the roles parks play in local lifestyles; it further illustrates the need to reflect upon how adaptation to new economic and governance conditions influences local development. Both aspects appear to be missing from the current national agenda.

The first part of this chapter discusses the interplay between local nature conservation and socioeconomic development objectives. The transformation period resulted in new challenges associated with the experienced large-scale socioeconomic and political restructuring. EU accession brought a demand for the closer integration of socioeconomic development into nature conservation policies. This was a relatively new perspective compared with the previous policies, which had followed a “fortress” conservation approach. The widely promoted idea of balancing nature conserva-
tion and socioeconomic development proved to be problematic in the studied cases due to the many embedded contradictions.

Part two analyses how EU norms and associated factors shaped changes in local governance. Europeanization, namely, the adoption of EU norms and practices, provided a unified framework for reforms in these countries. The introduction of participatory decision-making clashed with existing legacies of low trust and a lack of experience with formal participatory processes. The local experiences of public consultations raised questions about transparency, inclusiveness and accountability, as many participants felt these aspects to be missing.

Part three highlights the role of post-socialist legacies in local conservation and socioeconomic development. The initial choices made during the post-socialist transformation in terms of nature conservation and land use were substantially influenced by inherited legacies. The Polish institutional heritage was less centralized than that of Slovakia. This paved the way for associated reforms in both countries but resulted in a smoother transition in Poland compared with Slovakia. Finally, in part four, I reflect upon the broader implications of these changes for local policy processes and their role in multi-level governance.

7.1 Nature conservation and socioeconomic development: friends or foes?

It is widely recognized in research and practice that there is no universal model or strategy that can be applied for nature conservation everywhere and under all circumstances, since what works is always context specific (Adams, 2004; Sandbrook, 2015). Decisions on appropriate conservation objectives and management models are, therefore, based on various considerations such as the availability of resources, the interplay between different interests and the scope of needed and feasible interventions (e.g., Larsen et al., 2014; Watson et al., 2014). The interplay between nature conservation and local livelihoods is one such consideration in decision-making on conservation (Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997; Brockington et al., 2006). In the studied cases, the notion of sustainability promoted by the EU shaped both conceptual and policy discussions, which implies that finding a balance between environmental and developmental objectives is possible (see Chapters 2 and 4). In practice, tensions between the restrictions to the economic uses of areas
implied by the conservation regime and the lack of rural development options for municipalities in and around the studied parks was a recurring issue.

Thus, tensions emerged in the interviews around i) disconnected objectives for conservation and rural development; ii) a lack of alternatives for local economic development; iii) the importance of external factors such as a lack of investor interest and unclear national priorities. The following sections elaborate on the role of these tensions.

7.1.1 Disconnected objectives for conservation and rural development

All four park administrations were clear in their priorities – supporting the favourable conservation status of the parks’ habitats was the first priority. The parks’ administrations applied a variety of measures ranging from limited interventions (e.g., old growth forests) to active management (e.g., grassland habitats) to achieve this (PNP (b); PPN (a)). In parallel, the search for long-term employment opportunities was a top priority for municipalities and other local actors. However, the relationships and possible correlations between conservation objectives and rural development objectives were less clear. The discontinuation of some long-lasting traditional human activities in all four parks resulted in the need for active measures to support the biodiversity richness of certain habitats, which in turn led to higher conservation costs. These costs, then, created incentives for the park administrations to support rural practices that benefit conservation. However, only a few cases of such support have been observed, such as the support of sheep breeding in Biesczcady.

The four studied parks were initially established by socialist governments with rather different objectives stemming from the major changes in land use in these territories during socialism. The East Carpathian parks were created with the primary purpose of protecting their “wild” nature; the area regained its “wild” characteristics after several years of depopulation but was then re-opened for resource-intensive use (mostly forestry) (UNEP-GRID). The limited potential of other economic use options constituted another reason for protection (BDNP (a)). In contrast, the “mosaic” and “picturesque” landscapes of Pieniny were attractive for tourism and later became well linked to urban centres. Thus, Pieniny became a major tourist destination during socialism to satisfy the demand of working class citizens for recreation (PPN (a)). This usage was also common in other mountain parks, e.g., Tatra NPs, which hosted large numbers of tourists and followed global trends of increased nature-based tourism (Hoenig 2014; Gasienica
Byrcyn, 1992). The differences in local conditions became reflected in the structure of local economies. The more diversified and service-oriented economy of Pieniny, especially on the Polish side, provides more alternatives for local income generation and experiences reduced social tensions compared with the more resource-intensive economy in the East Carpathians.

The economic marginalization of these rural areas caused by urbanization and the perceived need to provide access to nature for city dwellers in the form of national parks was not exclusive to socialism; this trend has been documented globally (Wapner, 2014; Watson et al., 2014; Bishop et al., 1995). The findings of this study confirm previous assumptions that urbanization and economic expansion not only directly affect rural landscapes by claiming physical space and resources but also indirectly affect them by making the future of the countryside dependent on values and plans for rural development that are primarily conducted by urban dwellers (as problematized by e.g., Antrop, 2004). Thus, the initial regime changes resulted in major political and socioeconomic transformations, bringing new challenges for conservation and development. The subsidies for unprofitable economic sectors (e.g., forestry) and social services in the focal rural areas were significantly reduced or even halted altogether (BdNP (a); UNEP-GRID). Park administrations acknowledged the decreased funding and the need to adapt to a new market situation, in which they had to cover a portion of the costs themselves.

Administrations also noted the emerging need to engage in negotiations with land owners and other resource users in line with the new norms on stakeholder inclusion. Various stakeholder groups furthermore found new roles in local policy-making due to the democratization processes. Initially, Poland and Slovakia embarked upon rather different transformation paths. Slovakia was more radical in dismantling the socialist system, which had been more centralized and held tighter control over planning and land use (see, e.g., Williams & Balaz, 2002). The Slovak park administrations confronted a diversification of land management and a lack of land supervision rights that limited their jurisdictions and made consistent implementation of conservation measures difficult. In contrast, the new conservation legislation in Poland supported the strong competencies of park administrations, especially when the state-owned land inside parks (see, e.g., Niedzialkowski et al., 2016). This was clearly demonstrated by the Bieszczady park administration, which managed to retain its position. Despite differences in transformation paths, regime changes brought similar shifts in conservation and rural development objectives to Poland and
Slovakia. The newly introduced elements of governance and market mechanisms created challenges for both the park administrations and other local actors, and they struggled to adapt to these changes.

The normative demands to mainstream sustainability in national policies brought about by Europeanization further shaped conservation and rural development objectives. Natura 2000 called for increased social benefits from conservation and the integration of development and conservation objectives (see, e.g., Borras et al., 2015). However, these new norms did not fit well with the existing measures inside of national parks, which were aimed at reducing anthropogenic pressure. Many types of economic activities are forbidden or limited. Some strictly protected areas are even closed to any form of potential disturbance, including tourism. Thus, park administrations acknowledged that Natura 2000 has not created a paradigmatic shift in their work, despite the influence of Europeanization (PPN (b); PNP (a); PIENAP (a); BdNP (a)). Some municipalities have benefitted from the Natura 2000 funding available for rural development. However, this has yet not created any significant long-term changes in local socioeconomic development. This means that the practical implications of Natura 2000 for conservation and rural development objectives remain unclear. The controversies of Natura 2000 documented by this study are in line with previous research that critiqued the feasibility of the Natura 2000 approach in other EU countries (see, e.g., Evans et al., 2013; Pellegrino et al., 2017).

Unclear national political and management objectives is another reason why the norms of balancing social and ecological objectives are not becoming deeply rooted. The Polish and Slovak governments formally complied with the EU requirements, but efforts to put these sustainability commitments into practice do not appear to be effective. Only limited resources have been allocated for these purposes so far. Additionally, the top-down features of Europeanization have not encouraged the introduction of flexible and diversified models of nature conservation in these countries. The remnants of the socialist fortress conservation model clash with the socioeconomic model promoted by the EU. However, the findings reveal that neither model allows for the flexible formulation of objectives and management practices for “wild” or “tourist gem” national parks. The unclear definitions of what the protection of wild nature, semi-natural rural landscapes, and combinations of natural and cultural heritage mean in these territories create further confusion. The diverse local conditions and development potentials of these municipalities require flexible responses and allocation of resources, as will be further elaborated upon below.
7.1.2 Lack of alternatives for rural development

The current development patterns and employment structures in the studied rural municipalities were to a considerable extent formed during socialism. Informants frequently referred to elements of the socialist welfare state and universal employment by saying “we did not have much, but we all had jobs...” (Zboj). All municipalities in and around the parks had rather typical economic foundations based on the use of local natural resources or tourism (see, e.g., Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997; Joppa, 2012). In the Slovak municipalities, especially near Poloniny NP and around Polish Bieszczady, the forestry sector has been an important employer. Nature conservation and tourism provided additional employment opportunities, the latter being particularly important for the local economy in the Polish Pieniny. However, it was common already during the socialist regime to commute to nearby factories, as the local economy did not provide sufficient employment opportunities. Currently, the primary economic sectors in these rural municipalities include forestry, agriculture (mostly subsistent or small-scale), and tourism. Other activities that might compromise nature conservation objectives such as extractive industries or large-scale infrastructure projects (Chape et al., 2008) have not been on the local political agendas, since no such projects have been suggested recently. The reduced employment opportunities have been linked to a decrease in agricultural and forestry production. The substantial differences in the conservation regimes of national parks in the two countries continue to shape economic structures. In Poland, no economic activities except for low-pressure tourism and some traditional forms of agriculture are allowed (GDEP (a)). In contrast, Slovak parks outside of strictly protected zones today allow forestry, hunting, agriculture and other similar types of activities (SNC (a)).

The contemporary system of compensation to private owners for conservation measures in both countries were characterized as inefficient by several interviewees. The major problems were directly attributed to the complex application procedure, and low levels of, compensation. Indirectly, the prevailing economic crisis and cuts in national budgets also influenced the reduction of financial benefits. One interviewee suggested that such compensations are often seen as subsidies by farmers, since the Ministry of Agriculture rather than the Ministry of Environment pays them (PIENAP (a)). According to a Slovak State Nature Conservancy representative (SNC (a)), “people feel like the state cheated them again by promising compensations that not everyone can get”. Thus, the existing systems of financial
compensations for conservation regimes do not provide sufficient contributions to local resource owners.

The EU and other international policy-makers widely promote controversial alternatives to further develop nature-based tourism in national parks (see, e.g., Holtz & Edwards, 2003). This study confirmed the concerns raised by previous research that the revenues generated by increased visitors often come at the cost of increased anthropogenic pressure on ecosystems (Chape et al., 2008; Holtz & Edwards, 2003). Currently, there are drastic differences in the national tourism development policies between Poland and Slovakia. In Poland, the state supports small-scale local entrepreneurs who provide accommodation services with a tax waiver mechanism. Nothing similar exists in Slovakia. The Polish tax waiver mechanism certainly boosts local entrepreneurship, but at the same time results in a lack of budget revenues, as municipalities do not receive taxes from these local entrepreneurs. Recently, state subsidies for protected land at the municipal level were cut, which further worsened local economic conditions (Lutowiska (a)).

Locally, the development of tourism is tightly linked to inherited legacies and other factors such as entrepreneurship initiatives and attractiveness to external investors. From early on, the Pieniny Parks in both Poland and Slovakia were developed for recreation, not least due to their proximity to urban centres and major transportation links. Tourism in the East Carpathians was less prominent due to its remoteness, border status and lack of transportation infrastructure. Economically, only in Polish Pieniny is tourism a reliable source of income that supports local livelihoods. In contrast, representatives of local municipalities in the scarcely visited Slovak Poloniny NP acknowledged that they do not see how tourism can support local livelihoods. The lack of local entrepreneurship initiatives and external investors were frequently brought up as constraints for the development of tourism (Zboj; PIENAP (a); Lutowiska (a)). Various interviewees, even in the comparably successful case of Pieniny, suggested that the lack of private initiative was a part of the post-socialist legacy that constrained the strategic development of the tourism sector.

People were employed in a state-owned spa complex. Therefore, they worked there, but never truly engaged in tourism development because no matter what you do, you will receive the same salary. This mentality was present for 50 years, and it is not easy to change it now. Many of them still think that nothing depends on them. (Spa PL).
Both rural economies and conservation strategies seem to be in need of flexible approaches. The analysed material suggests that tourism cannot be the only option for development in such different municipalities. The highly competitive and increasingly internationalized tourism sector relies on many factors such as the quality of the tourist experience, the popularity of the proposed activities, accessibility, effective marketing, and even weather conditions (see, e.g., Kruger, 2005; Wells, 1992). This complexity in the tourism sector is well illustrated in the Slovak Pieniny Park. This park has many visitors, but most of them come for day trips from Poland or from the nearby Tatra NP. The tourists rarely stay overnight or use other services because these services are typically cheaper on the Polish side of the border. Thus, these day visitors do not contribute much to the local economy. However, they do bring the negative impacts associated with mass tourism, such as the degradation of ecosystems along the trails, wildlife disturbances and increased pollution (PIENAP (a)). Furthermore, the increasing number of visitors, as demonstrated in Polish Pieniny, leads to expectations of improved and extended infrastructure such as ski slopes, lifts and accommodations. These constructions may in turn threaten conservation efforts (PPN (a)). Currently, conservation and nature-based tourism do not provide stable sources of local income, except in Polish Pieniny, but are already resulting in negative ecological effects. However, local factors are not the only influences on local livelihoods. The broader national policy context, to which I now turn, is also of significant importance.

7.1.3 The interplay of national and supranational priorities and the role of private owners

The prioritization of nature conservation in national policy, the attitudes towards private property, and the introduction of Natura 2000 emerged as major external factors shaping local agendas. Polish and Slovak interviewees expressed similar views on the discrepancies between the officially proclaimed importance of conservation and its actual role compared to other sectors. Conservation efforts often receive limited funding compared with other sectors and are sometimes compromised to allow for economic investment. However, because of the economic slump, the four studied parks have not been much affected by potentially disturbing investments (PPN (a); PIENAP (a)). In contrast, another transboundary park, Tatra, where development projects were implemented despite negative Environmental Impact Assessments, was continuously mentioned as a distressing example. Slovak interviewees mentioned that the use of natural resources
inside the park, in particular forestry, is prioritized in national strategies because of the profits it brings (PIENAP (a)). In Slovakia, this skewed prioritization translates into rather weak competencies within the park administrations.

The prioritization of development over conservation is not uncommon in other Eastern European countries, as well as worldwide, and constitutes one of the major threats to protected areas (see, e.g., Lawrence, 2008; Bishop et al., 1995; Watson et al., 2014). The key political arguments in such discussions link to the direct economic benefits of development, whereas many indirect conservation gains are often ignored (Kettunen & ten Brink, 2013; Hammer et al., 2016). The costs of conservation in national budgets during social and political transformation may be perceived as too high in comparison to other acute socioeconomic problems.

The capacity of private actors to manage conservation strategies was viewed with scepticism by many interviewees. The state was seen by most as a better guardian of land and nature. The representatives of the park administrations continuously argued that private owners were “not interested in managing the land”, “cannot ensure proper management” and alike (PNP (a), PPN (c)). Such attitudes can be attributed to a lack of credible experience with private management due to long-lasting collective ownership and management. This lack of experience constitutes one of the major post-socialist legacies influencing contemporary nature conservation in this region. Many new owners indeed have limited means and knowledge in land management due to a lack of long-lasting connections and traditional knowledge in this field. In both Poland and Slovakia, the transfer of land management rights under park administration jurisdictions seems to be preferred over motivating private actors to improve their skills in sustainable land management. Thus, no efforts are undertaken in this direction, which prevents strengthening of the role of private actors in local governance.

The local discussions related to Natura 2000 further illustrate the effects of Europeanization on balancing conservation and rural development. The lack of integration between conservation objectives in Natura 2000 and national parks, together with the duplication of paperwork, have been recurring issues in all four cases. Among positive changes, the interviewees mentioned increased possibilities for funding and the role of the EU as an external supervisor of law enforcement. The latter was particularly referred to by the representatives of national NGOs, who benefitted from EU financial support and occasionally reached out to the representatives of the EU Commission in cases when national governments failed in compliance.
Arguably, the strategy to establish Natura 2000 in already existing protected areas limited the potential to incorporate development objectives\(^1\). This setup was mostly chosen as a cost-effective response to EU pressure for timely compliance (SNC (b); GDEP (a)). However, no strategies were developed nationally to tackle the integration of economic, social and ecological considerations in rural municipalities. This lack of strategy, in turn, created confusion among local actors, as few social benefits materialized. From the perspective of the park administrations, Natura 2000 was often seen as an administrative burden, “to prepare two management plans that are essentially similar” (BDNP (b)). The municipalities received some financial compensation from Natura 2000, but most of them perceived this form of nature protection to be an additional burden because of the complex and unclear legislation. This failure to transpose goal-oriented EU legislation into tangible national policy strategies was caused by the compliance pressure exerted by the EU and created a perception of formality in the transposed norms that did not lead to much practical change. The EU-promoted “socioeconomic” conservation model, seeking to increase profits from conservation to support rural development, has to date not worked very well in terms of finding a balance between these different objectives. In the following section, I will further elaborate on the influence of regime change and Europeanization on local nature protection and socioeconomic development objectives.

7.2 Between resistance and change: the influence of EU policies on local practices

This section looks at the changes and resistance in local policy-making triggered by Europeanization through the introduction of norms such as transparency, inclusion, accountability and participation. I start by illuminating the emerging participatory practices adopted from EU legislation and their implications for relations between state and non-state actors. I then go deeper into how various factors have shaped local governance in multi-level settings. I particularly look at experiences with formal participatory practices and their potential to redistribute power and contribute

\(^{1}\) This was a rather common strategy in many old and new EU member states, although it was triggered by different causes and led to various results (for discussion see, e.g. Wätzold et al., 2010)
to legitimacy. To investigate the dynamic components of governance change, I examine actors’ adaptation strategies to the ongoing changes and their implications for local governance.

EU norms have influenced nature conservation policies and, to some extent, practices in Poland and Slovakia. Norms related to public participation, transparency, inclusion, and accountability have entered into legislative and policy documents. However, the practical opening-up of policy processes and the understanding of how to ensure meaningful participation of various stakeholders in governance still stumbles. Centrally determined forms of public consultation neither ensured local contextualization nor properly accommodated expressed opinions, which has further undermined trust in state institutions. Thus, robust mechanisms for local decision-making have not yet been established.

7.2.1 Formal or formalistic? Participation in local conservation decision-making

Participation is often described as a way to include public views and stakeholder interests in decision-making processes in order to increase legitimacy and facilitate implementation (see Chapter 2). Theory suggests that for governance to achieve its objectives, it should be based on participatory decision-making, open to and reflecting the concerns of affected actors (be inclusive), visible and clear to all who are interested (be transparent), and controlled by those who are being governed (be accountable) (Suskevics, 2012; Bäckstrand et al., 2012). The norm on public consultations during the designation and adoption of management plans for protected areas is included in Polish and Slovak legislation (SNC (a); GDEP (a)). The designation and the later adoption of management plans for Natura 2000 sites were among the first experiences with these norms in all four parks. Public consultations followed rather similar patterns, despite being embedded in different national contexts.

The process of public consultations implied a certain degree of procedural freedom for the park administration due to a lack of detailed instructions. State authorities perceived the consultations as merely being formal EU requirements, and objectives specific to the local level were not articulated. Policy decisions had already been drafted and in many cases agreed upon at the national level, which meant that only minor adjustments could be made during the local consultations (PPN (a); PIENAP (a)). Stakeholders who participated in consultations expressed negative opinions on how these consultations were organized and how feedback was handled.
The most common critique was that consultations relied on information from technical experts, while the opinions of local citizens were ignored. This left limited space for compromise because state authorities were not prepared to back down from their original plans. Evidently, such an approach did not, and could not, lead to consensus, which is central for the EU normative requirements to work (see, e.g., Haukenes & Freiberg-Inan, 2013).

The park administrations appear to have focused only on results rather than on conducting inclusive and transparent consultations to satisfy various interests. Hence, very few comments were incorporated into the final decisions, which led to a feeling of dissatisfaction among the participants (Lutowiska (a); Urbariat). The basis for the inclusion/exclusion of comments was not clearly explained, and with few exceptions, no formal clarifications were given as to why most comments were dismissed. This lack of concern for the consultation process exemplifies theoretical claims that procedural shortcomings result in non-transparent participatory processes that do not allow involved stakeholders to influence decisions or to hold power-holders accountable (Piattoni, 2009; Reed, 2008).

The park administrations, in turn, were under top-down pressure to provide final outcomes on time, as the national governments needed to report back to the EU. The strict timeframe and primary allocation of resources to the development of policy proposals and the national consultations, contributed to the common perception expressed by several interviewees that the real decisions were being made somewhere else, centrally, for example, in Brussels, Warsaw or Bratislava. Such hierarchical arrangements for public consultations in which the higher government levels pressure lower-level actors call into doubt how far the multi-level governance arrangements have deconstructed hierarchical subordination within the EU (e.g., Marks & Hooghe, 2004).

Problems furthermore arose in relation to how well the formal participatory mechanisms induce horizontal interplay. The public consultations that were arranged had a fairly inclusive character, as they were relatively open. Information about the consultations was disseminated through several channels (newspapers, Internet, direct invitations, etc.). However, a lack of transparency and confusion over the goals of the public consultations did not create feelings of decision ownership. Thus, these examples indicate a shift from non-participation, as is typical of socialism, to symbolic engagement, mean that actors were formally present but not able to secure their interests in the final decision (e.g., Niedzialkowski et al., 2016). Such public consultation experiences did not increase trust in state
authorities, which is essential for legitimate processes according to theory (e.g., Zmerli & Newton, 2008). In contrast, existing distrust in public authorities spilled over to include the EU and associated institutions.

The permanent advisory bodies, which included scientists and municipality representatives in three of the parks, represented another mechanism of actor involvement in conservation governance. The interviewed stakeholders said that the role of the advisory bodies was purely consultative, with a major focus on scientific scrutiny of the park conservation measures (Lutowiska (a); Kroscienko n.Dunajcem; PIENAP (a)). These bodies did not seem to provide conditions for enhancing democratic decision-making. Thus, they too represent symbolic participation.

Nevertheless, the conducted consultations raised awareness within park administrations of the existing local stakes and demonstrated the capacity of non-state actors to articulate their interests. All but one park administration concluded that public consultations could become a useful tool for nature conservation policy and planning (PPN (b); PNP (a); PIENAP (a)). However, their representatives also admitted that it would be easier to continue with "business as usual", as long as there were no legal requirements to conduct consultations. The cost of this lengthy process was high, and most of the comments, in the eye of the park administrations, were not based on sufficient grounds. The representatives of the fourth park directly acknowledged that they would like to spend the resources for consultations “on something more useful” (BdNP (a), (b)). These findings on the role of public consultations in local processes resonate well with voices in research and practice calling for the careful assessment of the possible benefits and shortcomings of participatory decision-making. This time and resource consuming process is often associated with procedural shortcomings and does not lead to the intended result of increasing the democratic nature of local decision-making (see, e.g., Goodwin, 1998; Turnhout et al., 2010).

The formal participatory mechanisms existing in these parks provided a platform for local stakeholders to be heard but failed to provide them with adequate opportunities to influence decisions. Thus, these practices were symbolic and formalistic and did not ensure power redistribution between state and non-state actors. The empirical evidence suggests that the responsible authorities did not aim to reach decisions in line with local interests or with the views expressed in local policy processes, which is central for participation to be effective (e.g., Turnhout et al., 2010). Consequently, none of the actors, not even the state authorities, expressed a sense
of decision ownership, which in turn raises doubts about the overall legitimacy of the adopted policy.

7.2.2 Legacies, informality, and mutual benefits in support of legitimacy

Paradoxically, the observed shortcomings in the participatory processes do not seem to have much influenced overall legitimacy, which can be understood as acceptance of the nature conservation measures. Interviewed local citizens engaged in various occupations expressed a high awareness of the areas’ natural conditions, referring to the “beautiful and unique local nature”, “fantastic landscapes”, “breath-taking views combined with peace and quiet”, and of the need to protect them in their current state (Zboj; Local Entrepreneur; Pension Beskyd). Even the fiercest critics of the local park administration acknowledged their role in preserving valuable natural and rural landscapes (Lutowiska (a)). Overall, these results confirm that legitimacy rests on many factors (see, e.g., Suskevics, 2012), including existing legacies, the potential of informal practices for problem-solving, and the prospects of mutual benefits from conservation.

In terms of legacies, the awareness and appreciation of local landscapes that was promoted during socialism contribute to the contemporary acceptance of conservation measures. The long-term presence of these national parks has become part of local identities and, as suggested by one interviewee, “several generations of local people lived side by side with the park, so its presence is not questioned any longer” (PPN (a)).

In regard to informal practices, the analysed material suggests that informal relations are a widespread way to support cooperation on conservation measures. The interviewed actors acknowledged the importance of informal connections for exchanging information, receiving feedback on each other’s work and solving practical issues (PIENAP (a); PNP (a); BdNP (a); Local entrepreneur; Lutowiska (a)). During socialism, park administrations, municipality offices, and other local actors often relied on each other to be able to report those items required by the central government. It seems that the overall inefficiency of socialist central planning was, at least partially, counteracted by various informal arrangements at the local level that facilitated the resolution of community issues. The reliance on local networks persisted in the initial turbulent years during regime change, and the long-lasting personal relations in these relatively small communities made it easier to reach agreements (Ostrom, 1990). Interviewees acknowledged that this form of cooperation circumvents the often lengthy formal procedures, which
saves resources. Currently, the conflict-solving potential of such informal networks is more doubtful, as the number of involved actors has increased. An example of a conflict between a local NGO that promoted a different approach to conservation and other local actors in the Slovak Poloniny illustrates such shortcomings. It was not possible to resolve the conflict without the help of an external facilitator. Despite these weaknesses, informal practices based on social connections remain a key component of local policy processes.

Finally, mutual benefits were mentioned as a factor supporting the acceptance of conservation measures (Local entrepreneur; PIENAP (a); PNP (a)). Joint applications for both national and international funding, public-private partnerships in establishing tourist services, assistance with field projects and conservation measures can benefit all involved actors. Thus, the willingness to engage in partnerships is not so much based on policy competence as on utilitarian considerations (access to certain funding, reputational gains), where informal connections comprise the primary communication channel. Actors’ ability to act, in turn, is linked to social connections, which form a foundation for interplay among them and, consequently, for local governance. The next section takes a closer look at the arrangements of local governance to gain further insights into the nature of local policy-making.

### 7.2.3 Key characteristics of local governance

The empirical analysis showed significant differences in local governance arrangements in Poland and Slovakia, as well as variation within countries. The major differences between Poland and Slovakia scrutinized in Chapter 4 included competencies of the park administrations (jurisdictions), relations with other economic sectors (Environmental Policy Integration), sources of financing (resources), and degree of centralization (vertical interplay). In Poland, national legislation assigns a relatively strong role to the park administrations, which includes full management authority over state-owned land and supervision of local spatial planning and development projects. The administrations are funded by diverse sources and can act relatively independently of national authorities. In Slovakia, the park administrations share management rights with the state authorities that are responsible for the exploration of natural resources (e.g., timber, water) and with private owners. Each manager is responsible for the implementation of management plans for the respective resource. In principle, the park administration has a supervisory role over park territory. In practice, how-
ever, this supervisory role is not enforced, as other managers are not legally bound to share their plans or submit monitoring data and reports to the park administration. The funding of conservation primarily comes from the state budget and external project funding. This means that many more actors become involved in governance structures in Slovakia than in Poland. Differences in jurisdictions and budgetary financial support results in different capacities of the park administrations to implement conservation policies. The modest capacity of the Slovak park administrations has led to a need for cooperation with various stakeholders, whereas Polish parks can act more autonomously.

Regime transformation resulted in the diversification of membership in local governance. Local governance today includes both state and non-state actors, such as state conservation bodies and other authorities (e.g., park administrations, forestry offices), municipality offices, NGOs, volunteers and experts. The emergence of a market economy led to the appearance of various private actors, for example, businesses and natural resource owners. The improved possibilities of funding from international and national organizations increased NGOs’ institutional and expert capacities to engage in national and local policy processes. This professionalization of NGOs is often seen as one of the key effects of Europeanization acknowledged by previous research (e.g., Börzel & Byzogany, 2009; Carmin, 2010). My results suggest the following division of competencies between national and local NGOs. Local NGOs tend to advance their capacities for implementing field projects and, especially in Slovakia, through their work, extend the limited capacities of park administrations. However, their participation in local policy discussions remains limited in both Poland and Slovakia. National NGOs, in turn, took on expert roles and often worked with national authorities and international partners to produce independent policy reports, guidelines, baseline studies and similar documents, thus contributing to policy discussions.

Diversified governance membership in MLG theory is recognized as a key change in modern policy processes (Marks & Hooghe, 2004). The constellation of actors mainly depends on local conditions, which in turn leads to different governance arrangements. For example, the tourism business sector is especially strong in Polish Pieniny. This is the only park where a formal public-private partnership between the park administration and institutionalized tourism service providers exists. In Slovakia, actors were more diverse than in Poland. This was particularly evident among NGOs with specific niches, for example, organizations for the preservation of wooden architecture, local museums and groups working to develop
tourism. In Poland, local NGOs were fewer and had broader agendas. The discussions on resource distribution with different groups of actors predictably gravitated towards the availability of funding. Polish park administrations seemed to have more secure finances due to diversified sources of income compared to their Slovak counterparts. The revenues of private actors were tightly linked to the structure of the local economy, whereas the NGOs’ access to funding was linked to national policies. In Poland, NGOs profited from national financing from the Fund for Environmental Protection, whereas no such fund exists in Slovakia. The potential to use the national fund to co-fund international projects increases the overall funding capacity of Polish NGOs and other eligible organizations. Various institutional structures that bring stakeholders together is another possible factor contributing to the mobilization of financial resources. In three of the four studied parks (Polish Pieniny being the exception), tourism entrepreneurs did not have an association or any other form of sector organization. This often limits their potential to engage in collective action, as everyone then acts individually (Ostrom, 1990). The shortage of resources in state authorities appeared to be a significant driver of local resource mobilization, as shown in the Slovak cases. Both Slovak parks have cooperated with local NGOs to access financing that is not open to state authorities. They have also mobilized a wide range of local stakeholders to assist with hands-on activities, such as cleaning up and monitoring. This again links to utilitarian rationales for cooperation, where actors aim to promote their interests and gain access to additional resources.

Access to symbolic (reputation) and social resources (access to social networks) was another topic frequently mentioned in interviews. The importance of these resources is supported by previous scholarly findings, especially in governance with highly diversified membership (Rhodes, 1997). In regards to reputation, local actors in different locations stressed the importance of national parks as a brand and of the value of being associated with this brand (Raftsmen Association; Pension Beskyd; Local entrepreneur). Access to social networks was mostly associated with long-lasting personal connections that helped individuals connect to existing informal networks. Perhaps this was the reason why many interviewees stressed the fact that they had been born in the local region (Zboj; Ulic). Moreover, those who were not born in the local region emphasized their long residence and strong bonds to local life (Lutowiska (a); BdNP (c)). Arguably, the prevalence of informal relations as the key mechanism of local governance increases the value of social and
symbolic resources. Informal relations are also a component of actors’ strategies to address Europeanization, which is the topic I now turn to.

7.2.4 Uneven paths to Europeanization: Actors’ responses to change

The Europeanization of nature conservation has had various effects in Poland and Slovakia and has triggered different responses from actors. The formal incorporation of EU norms into national legislation brought several changes into the work of park administrations, even though the enforced conservation measures remain similar to those existing before these countries became members of the EU. The changes were particularly evident in relation to the increased administrative work, since several new provisions required specific monitoring and reporting procedures. The park administrations’ representatives acknowledged the parks’ increased international visibility and access to additional sources of funding. The municipal representatives formed another group that was directly engaged in formal changes but less involved in conservation policies. Among the key changes brought about by the Natura 2000 initiatives, the municipalities especially emphasized improved funding opportunities.

The changes triggered by Europeanization in conservation policies proved to be less significant for most private actors compared with public authorities. Local businesses have been least directly affected by Europeanization among local actors. Small-scale firms have not profited from the policy changes, as they operate locally and do not have the capacity to access funding or the training opportunities offered by partners from outside (Local Raftsman; Pension Beskyd). Medium-scale businesses, mostly present in the Pieniny cases, have more possibilities to profit from policy changes, including access to project funding. However, their representatives also noted that the changes did not affect their everyday practices to any great extent.

In contrast to small businesses, NGOs have been substantially affected by Europeanization and have directly profited from increased funding opportunities. This has contributed to professionalization due to the need to comply with formal EU funding requirements. NGOs also used compliance with EU legislation as a relatively effective formal channel to overrule certain decisions from the government, as it allowed them to report violations or non-compliance directly to the EU Commission (NGO 2, PL; NGO 1, SK). On several occasions, the EU institutions took up such cases and asked national governments for clarification. Indeed, the EU Com-
mission even enforced sanctions, as in the case of wolf hunting in Slovakia. This example shows that local and national civil society organizations can influence policy processes across levels in multi-level governance settings. However, my findings show that such opportunities are mostly taken advantage of by already professionalized NGOs, as high levels of expert knowledge are needed to engage with the EU Commission. Arguably, the promotion of participatory mechanisms that span across levels was not a prominent feature in the top-down Europeanization process. Consequently, only a few local actors were aware of and able to reach out to authorities at higher levels.

Empirical observations show that Europeanization has had uneven effects upon local actors. Europeanization fluctuated, as it triggered different adaptation strategies by different groups of local actors. Local state authorities adopted an absorption strategy, implying non-fundamental changes due to external pressures, where changes were formally incorporated on paper, but everyday practices were not fundamentally influenced. An inertia strategy, meaning a lack of change, was evident for most of the non-state local actors, who either did not experience formal and practical changes or did not consider them to be important. The absorption and inertia strategies correspond with the two adaptation responses defined by Radaelli (2003). However, several local actors adopted an alternative strategy that was not elaborated in Radaelli’s typology. International, national and, to a lesser extent, local NGOs employed strategies based on the recognition of the potential of Europeanization to open up new formal channels of funding and public control while attempting to profit from those. This strategy can be characterized as utilitarian and adds to Radaelli’s typology.

Local changes were also influenced by post-socialist legacies, which further illuminates contemporary challenges and limitations in nature conservation governance in Poland and Slovakia.

7.3 Shifting policies and shifting nature: legacies in nature conservation in a post-socialist context

Already established protected areas became a major post-socialist legacy in nature conservation across the region (Josephson et al., 2013). Nature conservation during socialism followed centrally defined plans based on existing scientific knowledge. These rigid plans often ignored socio-economic concerns and local interests. The state was considered to be the sole
guardian of natural resources and responsible for their conservation. This view on nature conservation did not much differ from that experienced in national parks elsewhere in the world given the fortress conservation approach that historically dominated conservation policies (see, e.g., Brockington et al., 2006; Sanderson 2003). However, more than 50 years of socialist conservation practices formed a solid conservation model that continues to influence conservation policy to this day.

The new, democratic governments in Poland and Slovakia continued to protect existing sites while simultaneously introducing new legislation on natural resource use, land ownership and other related areas that influence conservation outcomes. However, new demands for the integration of nature conservation and local socioeconomic development, privatization and public control led to significant challenges for the protection of existing parks.

These changes at the societal level did not fit well with the inherited institutional legacies, knowledge and experiences of local actors. Thus, tensions between the old and the new conservation models emerged. This section starts with an examination of the transformation of sector-specific legacies and then looks at the more general legacies in policy-making that influenced nature conservation.

7.3.1 Does science-based, centralized conservation still dominate?

The overall instrumental approach to nature conservation during socialism determined the designation of protected areas based on use options, rather than on the protection of landscape and species diversity (Petrova, 2014). The conservation regimes in the studied parks were initiated before or during socialism, with three areas being officially designated national parks during socialism. The only exception was Slovak Poloniny NP, which was upgraded to national park status only in 1997. However, the early designation as a nature reserve (1967) together with the remote location and limited use of this area facilitated preservation.

During socialism, institutional structures and resources were embedded in the centrally planned economy and hierarchical governing system in all four parks. Consequently, the state acted as the prime guardian of nature, and it was assumed that conservation could be fit into existing plans, which often were rigid and slow to change. Scientists and state authorities provided expertise on the development of the plans (PIENAP (a); PNP (a)). The personnel for protected areas were mostly trained in forestry and various biology disciplines, as no special training in conservation or environmental
science existed in these countries (BdNP (a); PIENAP (a)). Thus, foresters and biologists in charge of national parks and national nature conservation promoted certain values and visions for what to protect and how to protect it. These values and visions were accepted without much discussion, because alternative opinions, for example from NGOs, could not be openly suggested. Scientific knowledge was highly respected during socialism and served as the sole basis for conservation decisions throughout the socialist bloc (Josephson et al., 2013). Scientific knowledge still remains a primary foundation for deciding upon conservation measures in Poland and Slovakia, despite calls to integrate other interests. The lack of experience in this sphere explains, at least partly, the current frustration of park staff with ongoing changes towards a more open and inclusive conservation approach, as they do not recognize the added value of such a shift.

The socioeconomic oriented model promoted by the EU does not fit well with the knowledge of the park staff, since many of them were trained during socialism. The administrations openly question the credibility of this model and its ability in terms of leading to appropriate results. Arguably, the prevalence of these views within local staff helps to keep remnants of the socialist fortress conservation approach alive. This result is congruent with the conceptual propositions of post-socialist studies on the continuity of actors’ behaviour, processes and solutions (Bafoil, 2009). The succession of the administrative apparatus in the park administrations and national authorities contributes to maintaining legacies of the previous regime. However, the practical implications of this congruence are not straightforward. On the one hand, park administrations are reluctant to engage in the new policy approach. On the other hand, adherence to a fortress conservation approach might help to prevent possible negative effects from further economic exploitation in and around the parks.

A lack of trust in private land ownership and the private stewardship of natural resources is tightly linked to persisting legacies of the socialist approach to conservation. In transformation societies, where traditional knowledge and appreciation for local natural resource management are crumbling, the question of balance between the highly divergent interests of various actors has become important (see, e.g., Adams, 2004; Baker & Jehlicka, 1998). The contemporary Slovak conservation model with diversified management and ownership, where some resource users are mostly interested in maximizing their short-term economic gains, does not seem to be a promising alternative.
Finally, the issue of trust, or rather distrust, in state authorities was frequently mentioned by interviewees, confirming general theoretical claims about low vertical trust in post-socialist societies (Sztompka, 1999). The unjust treatment and neglect of local interests, representing the major causes behind diminishing trust, were mentioned as common features of nature conservation and local policies. The interviewees from the Polish Bieszczady referred to the memories of forced relocation. In Polish Pieniny, the inhabitants remembered the construction of the dam against the will of local citizens. Slovak narratives were related to the eviction of villagers due to the construction of a water reservoir and the collectivization of land. There were no effective mechanisms for public control or other ways for local citizens to be included in decision-making processes. Local issues were handled by either enforcing state decisions or alternatively through informal channels. State authorities, including park administrations, were not trusted, and mostly “bad” outcomes were expected from them: “the state always did what they wanted”, mentioned one local citizen (Zboj). Arguably, this persistent legacy of distrust and lack of experience in conflict-solving through formal institutions still influences conservation governance in these parks. In the following section, I further scrutinize the implications of these legacies for local policy-making.

7.3.2 Post-socialist legacies in local policy-making

The diversity of local conditions and experiences with socialism and regime change makes it difficult to provide general conclusions about the post-socialist legacy. What seems to be clear is that there is continuity rather than abrupt changes in policy practices, which makes post-socialist legacies relevant for understanding contemporary governance. Despite the many problems associated with socialism, some interviewees remembered the socialist regime as good times. In contrast with the turbulent years of transformation, socialism provided employment, social benefits, and a sense of equality and stability. Ultimately, the state played a major role in society, and both the “bad” and the “good” came from the state. This contradictory pattern of oppression and dominance combined with a sense of socioeconomic security and welfare is rather common in post-socialist societies (see, e.g., Bridger & Pine, 1998). To some extent, reliance on the state explains the reluctance of individuals and institutions to engage in participatory decision-making and to take initiative, as these are rather new approaches and few positive experiences are perceived to have emerged from them so far.
The analysis undertaken shows that the speed and extent of the changes in the four parks have varied. This supports the idea by Bridger and Pine (1998) about the diversity of change patterns and the importance of analysing local conditions to understand how policy changes play out practically. Local natural conditions and existing patterns of socioeconomic development are tightly interlinked, which narrows down the scope and potential for policy change (Bafoil, 2009). The transformation to a liberal democracy did not solve all of the problems related to conservation and rural development, as transition enthusiasts had hoped (see Coumel & Elie, 2013 for discussion). Almost three decades of transformation brought massive changes. Some of these changes addressed various shortcomings of the previous regimes, making these societies more democratic and basing them on private property, liberal economies and improved local self-government. Other changes resulted in various economic and social problems, and the remote rural municipalities became unable to address these problems once comprehensive state support ceased. The reduced financing and capacities of some park administrations constrain the implementation of existing conservation measures. The benefits of the EU approach remain unclear and uncertain. Thus, various legacies influence local governance and are shaped by the complex interplay between old and new norms, measures, and relations, which together form the unique setting of local governance.

7.4 Discussion: from government to governance and multi-level governance?

The analysis of the four parks illuminates the transformation process of nature conservation policies from socialism to liberal democracy and later towards the consensus-based governance promoted by the EU. The many designated protected areas are one of the major positive environmental legacies of the socialist regime. The early designation of the studied parks as protected areas prevented their exploitation and enabled the preservation of important landscapes, for example primeval beech forests, which are currently highly valued at the European level (Oszlanyi et al., 2004). At the same time, the rigid governing mode of the protected areas embedded in the socialist top-down, centralized system did not account for broader participation in local political decision-making and conservation practices.
Transformation to a democratic regime requires more inclusive, transparent, and accountable policy-making and implementation (Peters & Pierre, 2004). Various non-state actors, such as NGOs, private owners, resource users, and businesses have become involved in local policy processes. Consequently, park administrations had to negotiate with these actors, albeit in different ways and to various extents. The analysis has shown that most of these negotiations were conducted through informal channels. Utilitarian considerations seem to be one of the key drivers motivating closer cooperation between actors and stakeholders. This is neatly illustrated in the two Slovak cases, where the park administrations did not have the staff or the financial capacity to cover core conservation activities and therefore initiated partnerships with local stakeholders. The expectation of mutual economic benefits provided further incentives for cooperation in all four parks. Personal connections and informal negotiations have been shown to be the key channels for forming such cooperation and problem-solving.

The analysis of local processes revealed several insights into ongoing changes in multi-level governance. Only a few mechanisms to reach out across levels are available to state and non-state actors. Most of the decision-making and cooperation seems to have taken place within, rather than between, governance levels. At the EU level, only international and transnational organizations, large companies, international NGOs and representatives of the relevant national institutions are substantially involved in policy processes. At the national level, national authorities mostly interact with actors and stakeholders operating at the same level. Various local actors are involved in nature conservation on the ground. However, interplay across levels is weaker, sporadic and not institutionalized. Some formal consultative mechanisms that allow cross-level interplay such as Discussion and Dialogue groups led by the EU Commission have been established (as discussed in Chapter 4), but these institutions do not allow the simultaneous engagement of actors from different levels and, thus, restrict the possibilities for vertical interplay.

International and national NGOs constitute an exception because they make use of existing opportunities. National and international environmental NGOs sometimes transgress levels and EU mechanisms of public control, which occasionally allows them to side-step national jurisdictions and directly address EU institutions. NGOs engage in various local horizontal partnerships with state conservation authorities, businesses, and other NGOs. In comparison, state authorities are constrained by hierarchical structures. Thus, the four cases analysed here show the limited opportunities for cross-level
interactions, which are used only by some actors. In turn, those who are directly influenced by the policy decision lack access to transparent information exchange and the ability to get included in the decision-making, which undermines the accountability of policy processes (problematized at the national level by Kluvankova-Oravska et al., 2009).

Another constraint of cross-level engagement can be traced to temporal discrepancies in policy processes. Policy negotiations and decision-making are initiated at the EU level, then at the national level, and only after this are transferred to the local level. Deadlines for reporting back on implementation to the supranational level often expire before negotiations have been conducted at the local level. For example, in the designation of Natura 2000 sites, the top-down character of agenda setting did not allow for contextualization and critical discussion on local opportunities and constraints. The fixed agenda of public consultations in all four cases led to the depoliticization of local influence because there were no real opportunities to provide critique and because local actors were supposed to agree and implement already prepared plans. The limited local renegotiation opportunities brought only minor adjustments to policy objectives and very weak incorporation of local interests. This further points to the relevance of the critique of multi-level governance as lacking democracy and accountability (e.g., Peters & Pierre, 2004). Participatory practices were symbolic and formalistic in character and suffered from low levels of transparency and accountability, preventing the establishment of the theoretically assumed broader agreements and increase of public trust in decisions (see, e.g., Reed, 2008). The implementation of vaguely defined goals in the EU Directives sometimes waters down their core principles, as was the case in the public consultations on Natura 2000.

The uneven distribution of resources among actors at different levels has reduced the potential for cross-level interplay. The distribution of resources was predictably skewed towards actors at higher levels. Local actors had very limited resources, which reduced their dispositional power. Most local actors, both state and some non-state (NGOs), rely on external funding (e.g., Carmin, 2010; Börzel & Byzogany, 2009). The core activities of state authorities are often covered in the state budget, whereas external funding is needed for additional projects. NGOs often have a limited budget and rely on external sources to cover all of their activities. NGOs sometimes use grant money to fill gaps not covered by state or municipal institutions. This is particularly evident in Slovakia, where park administrations do not have the staff capacity to engage in additional projects. In turn, donor organiza-
tions often set their own policy priorities, and project applications have to match these priorities to obtain funding, limiting NGOs autonomy since they become dependent on the donors’ agenda.

The reliance on external funding results in the reduced capacity of especially smaller NGOs to engage in local and national political discussions. Very few NGOs, mostly only those operating nationwide, can afford to become engaged in policy and strategic discussions. National NGOs that are successful in acquiring funding accumulate significant experience in navigating rather complex project requirements. Many of them adopt the particular language of such project applications to prove their expert knowledge and project management skills, which is in line with the phenomenon of professionalization observed in environmental NGOs and volunteers by other studies (Jancar-Webster, 1998; Carmin 2010; Börzel & Byzogany, 2009). At the same time, it would be a simplification to say that only “professional” NGOs are present in policy processes. The diversity of local NGOs also includes ‘nature enthusiasts’, who are keen to explore local surroundings and complete various hands-on tasks such as the local “Friends of PIENAP” in Slovak Pieniny, or ‘campaigners’, who mostly used confrontational strategies such as the Slovak NGO “Wolf” (typology suggested by Jancar-Webster, 1998).

The EU and other international donors successfully employed mechanisms for steering through funding that lead to the adaptation of local interests to funding requirements. This type of steering is not unique to my study, and previous research documented the unification of, for example, NGOs’ policy agendas and institution-building in the CEE region (Carmin, 2010). Steering through funding has shaped local processes and has to some extent strengthened the role of tourism development in local economic agendas. EU funding opportunities can provide significant additions to the budgets of conservation authorities, municipalities, and other eligible actors. This is especially true in countries like Slovakia, where governmental funding is scarce and external funding for conservation objectives is important. The mechanism for steering through funding moreover influences transboundary cooperation between the Polish and Slovak parks. National legislations often restrict such cooperation, as public funds are only allowed to be spent domestically. Thus, transboundary projects almost exclusively rely on external funding and on local enthusiasts that are willing to make contributions.

The EU political strategy has a rather high degree of embedded hierarchy when local levels are included in the analysis. The top-down Euro-
eanization process in the CEE region sent somewhat conflicting messages on what EU governance ought to look like and how the new member states were supposed to uniformly comply with proposed governance norms and practices. National authorities had to report on the implementation of the required changes in governance to the EU and could be sanctioned for non-compliance if they did not fulfil the requirements. Only minor policy adjustments were possible, and the political deliberation of concrete policy changes on nature conservation was not given much space. Arguably, this is at odds with core principles in the EU’s official strategies, including the decentralization of governance, inclusiveness, transparency, and accountability. Thus, the inherited legacy of the centralized and rigid governing of nature conservation to a considerable extent has withstood the influence of Europeanization, at least at the local and practical level. Thus, this study highlights the role of legacies, where old habits and ways of doing things die hard. In other words, a considerable gap exists between the normative demands for policy change and actual developments in nature conservation practices. Although a change in direction towards the inclusion of a broader set of actors and stakeholders in policy-making on conservation has been embarked upon in Poland and Slovakia, only a few multi-level governance components have been found to play significant roles in the daily practices of the parks.
PART 6
Conclusion
CHAPTER 8
Parks, policies and people.
Who works for whom?

In this chapter, I elaborate on the key findings of this thesis and link them to broader scholarly discussions on the common trends in nature conservation and rural development in CEE countries, Europe, and globally. More precisely, I focus on those findings relevant to aspects of the local governance of nature conservation, such as participatory decision-making in relation to conservation and socioeconomic development in the context of Europeanization and post-socialist transformation. This study shows that nature conservation regimes can provide tangible restrictions on the possible economic uses of conserved areas. However, rural development alternatives depend on a broader set of local, national and global factors such as the local economy, local employment opportunities, the prioritization of nature conservation in national policies, investor interest and increasing urbanization.

The shift to liberal democracy, a market economy and later Europeanization provided opportunities for the improvement of both nature conservation and rural development through greater stakeholder involvement in decision-making and implementation. Mutually beneficial partnerships were formed to access newly opened funding sources. At the same time, participatory decision-making posed significant procedural and conceptual challenges around how to achieve transparent, inclusive and accountable policy processes that provide equal opportunities for different actors to influence decision-making. The lack of previous experience with participatory decision-making, strong reliance on scientific knowledge and skepticism about the capacity of private actors to deliver conservation, combined with a lack of private initiative to engage in rural development, lingering from the socialist regime present obstacles to the development of local governance. The opportunities for local actors to address decision-makers at higher administrative and political levels to make their voices
heard remain scarce, whereas it is clear that decisions taken at higher levels indirectly shape local processes. Thus, modern multi-level governance characterizes local policy spaces.

Nature conservation regimes in Poland and Slovakia throughout history appear to be embedded in rather rigid approaches that ignore local specificities. Under socialism, conservation followed centrally imposed plans, and local opinions were ignored in conservation and local development planning. The contemporary socioeconomic approach to conservation, promoted through Natura 2000, provides limited possibilities for the local contextualization of conservation objectives and flexible solutions aimed to bring conservation and rural development closer together.

8.1 Main conclusions

8.1.1 Key insights into the potential to integrate nature conservation and rural development

It has been shown that the local potential for integrating nature conservation and rural development agendas depends on several factors. On the one hand, national parks have greatly contributed to the conservation of biodiversity at the national and EU levels. They help to protect iconic landscapes, species, and cultural heritage, as well as to preserve key natural resources, particularly forests and water. The preserved picturesque landscapes attract tourists, who provide income to local inhabitants. On the other hand, conservation measures enforced by both national authorities and the EU create restrictions to the economic activities that shape local economies and social conditions in these rural areas. Thus, despite a high degree of acceptance of national parks by local citizens, conservation regimes and rural development objectives remain largely disconnected, and conservation is increasingly seen as an obstacle to development. However, factors other than those attributed to conservation measures have also been important in the gradual marginalization of the studied areas. These other factors include the particular use of the areas during socialism, urbanization and the decrease in rural populations, lack of employment options and investor interest, insufficient infrastructure and the drastic economic restructuring related to regime change.

The urbanization process in this region was stimulated by socialist governments, as their ideological underpinnings and socioeconomic models were linked to working class interests and large-scale industrial production.
During the 50 years of socialism in Poland and Slovakia, the role of the countryside was to provide food and raw material supplies through large-scale farming and forestry. The territories unsuitable for such production, such as the mountain areas in focus in this study, were of little interest to the socialist governments. This resulted in a lack of investment in local social and economic infrastructure. These areas, which were often remotely located, became likely candidates for designation as national parks to preserve their “wild” nature or to provide access to nature for the working class. Areas with mass tourism potential, such as Pieniny, were developed for recreation. The changes stemming from regime transformation hit rural areas harder, as subsidies ceased for primary economic sectors, such as forestry and agriculture, and because these areas had limited potential in the new market economy. This further enhanced the depopulation of rural areas due to limited employment options and the subsequent lack of private or state interest in investing in local development. The new democratic governments, faced with an acute socioeconomic situation, also quickly lost interest in conservation matters, prioritizing economic growth. Thus, the contemporary situation in rural areas is the result of a complex socioeconomic and political development trajectory coupled with local conditions rather than solely being the result of enforced conservation measures.

The existing tensions between conservation and development objectives developed gradually over time and can be attributed to the actual practices of conservation. The inclusion of local interests was not considered within the rigid socialist conservation model. Local citizens were displaced and deprived of their property, their right to use resources and their right to participate in decisions on the local environment, which led to hostility and distrust of state authorities and park administrations. The decreased human pressure resulted in different outcomes, with re-wilding in some areas, while others, such as grasslands, steadily lost their quality and ability to support species diversity. The present conservation model, promoted by the EU, prioritizes a balance between conservation and socioeconomic development. Conservation is often seen as a sector that needs to generate sufficient revenues for the implementation of conservation measures and to support local socioeconomic development. Under such conditions, tourism is seen as one of the key means to support local livelihoods.

However, it has been shown in this thesis that despite the proclaimed inclusivity and flexibility in the EU approach, it is not yet well adapted to actual local needs. The tourism sector has weak potential in some areas due to remote locations and a lack of infrastructure. This makes it an unreliable
source of income for park administrations and local municipalities. Those existing compensation schemes for conservation available to private owners, and until recently to municipalities, have not yet become a viable alternative. The compensation proved to be too small and hard to get, and it was soon eliminated because of the economic crisis. Thus, the discontent of local citizens with current practices has resulted in continued distrust in state institutions. It can be concluded that conservation and rural development call for different and multifaceted approaches, where a plethora of local conditions must be met for robust and sustainable development to materialize in combination with adequate nature protection. Thus, in the analysed local practices, the potential for integrating nature conservation and development objectives remain limited, and strategic discussion on how to achieve this integration is currently lacking.

The findings on the local relationships between conservation regimes and local development are particularly important when linked back to the fact that protected areas in general, and national parks in particular, are global policy tools for conservation. The expanding official recognition of protected areas in Central Eastern Europe and other regions of the world currently considers not only nature conservation but also how conservation may contribute to local livelihoods and economic self-sufficiency through incomes from tourism and recreation (see, e.g., Watson et al. 2014; Child, 2004). At the same time, this study shows that national parks face substantial challenges from both an ecological and a socioeconomic perspective. These problems are surprisingly similar for different regions and contexts. Thus, they seem to indicate some common trends, such as a further need to re-think approaches to conservation. Park administrations face substantial difficulties in incorporating socioeconomic approaches, and the integration of conservation and development in many places leads to weakened conservation measures in the name of development, which then often brings limited contributions to local livelihoods.

More specifically, from an ecological point of view, the question arises whether national parks can fulfil their core function of protecting large-scale natural and near-natural ecosystems considering the limited area they cover. The increasing overexploitation of natural resources, fragmentation of habitats, urbanization, climate change and other anthropogenic pressures result in large-scale changes at landscape levels, often leading to the irreversible loss of natural and heritage values. In the 20th century, the expansion of protected areas somewhat slowed habitat and biodiversity loss (see, e.g., Watson et al. 2014). The further ability of protected areas to con-
serve identified values in the face of ever-increasing uncertainties remains an open question. Moreover, the multiple functions served by protected areas lead to inevitable trade-offs between different objectives and values. Should the protection of species and remaining “wilderness” be prioritized above parks functions? Or should parks be even more accessible to make them an integral part of local and national socioeconomic development? This thesis has shown that there is still no definitive answer to these fundamental questions either nationally or at the EU level. Meantime, ineffective law enforcement, weak institutional and financial support, rigid conservation plans and the over-bureaucratization of management processes continue to haunt nature protection ambitions in the CEE region as well as in many other regions all over the world (see, e.g., Child, 2004; Petrova, 2014; Adams & Hutton, 2007).

From a societal point of view, the national parks have often been criticized for not being effective in balancing conservation and socioeconomic development agendas or in providing equal ecological and social benefits to all, especially to local citizens. These tensions between protected areas and local communities seem to signal a common trend in post-socialist, post-colonial and developed democratic societies alike (for examples, see Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997; Paavola, 2004; Borrini-Feyerabend & Tarnowski, 2005; Joppa, 2012). Historically, this might be linked with the conceptual loading of the national park model, which was initially associated with the exclusion of anthropogenic influence in order to protect wild nature. National parks were established in socialist states, as well as in other countries, as public amenities officially set aside on behalf of societies by their governments. Therefore, conservation measures were embedded in legal and policy frameworks, and enforcement has been managed by society. Thus, conservation through protected areas has mostly relied on top-down enforcement mechanisms, where state authorities are in charge and ultimately responsible for the outcomes. This model for national parks has undergone substantial changes, which are differently shaped in different political and socioeconomic contexts. In particular, in post-socialist societies, public amenities such as national parks have been hit hard by the changing political and socioeconomic situation. This study has confirmed previous research findings showing that the remotely located municipalities in and around national parks have especially suffered in the transformation from socialist to liberal regimes (Petrova, 2014; Muller, 2014). Furthermore, this thesis confirms a broader observation that those who live in direct proximity to national parks often bear higher costs than others, as conservation measures limit
their access to resources, including land, and a range of other economic activities (see, e.g., Watson et al. 2014; Child, 2004).

In attempts to counteract these hardships and to ensure the representation of local interests in conservation decision-making, various governance and socioeconomic measures have been emerging, starting with broad stakeholder engagement and ranging to various pay-off and compensation schemes. The success or failure of these measures seems to be closely linked to supranational and national policies as well as to local contexts. In the following section, key findings on how political and contextual factors shape local participatory and governance practices are discussed.

8.1.2 Lingering post-socialist legacies and Europeanization in local contexts

Local interactions between nature conservation and socioeconomic objectives are tightly linked to national and supranational policies, which define competences, available resources and overall governance structures. The analysis suggests that both Europeanization and post-socialist legacies have contributed to the shaping of governance structures during transformation. The Polish and Slovak socialist regimes that were in power until the end of the 1980s included top-down, command-and-control governing, rigid conservation planning, the dominance of natural science technical and expert knowledge, the exclusion of local interests from decision-making and restricted public spheres. However, the socialist regime in Poland was more liberal and allowed the private ownership of land within protected areas, which was not allowed in Slovakia. This difference influenced the initially chosen reform paths in profound ways. The new Polish government kept the status quo for land ownership and management rights, whereas the Slovak government diversified land management and ownership, which drastically increased the proportion of private land. These reforms did not consider coordination between different state management bodies or the redistribution of resources and competences between state managers and private owners. This resulted in ambiguous responsibilities for conservation authorities, which only had a limited capacity to enforce adopted conservation measures. Weak enforcement was coupled with a general scepticism about the ability of private actors to undertake conservation measures, which in the studied cases was traced to socialist legacies of collective ownership and the state control of natural resources, as well as to more recent examples of unsustainable uses to increase short-term economic gains.
In terms of local policy-making, post-socialist legacies still form a core of local practices and management options, with informal relations and low trust in state authorities being particularly evident. At the same time, democratization in the 1990s and the later Europeanization of the political, social and economic spheres brought various new groups of actors such as NGOs, private owners and businesses into local policy processes. The park administrations began to collaborate with these actors and created mutually beneficial partnerships that allowed them to profit from external funding and to exchange locally available resources. Currently, cooperation tends to develop through informal channels, making symbolic (e.g., reputation) and social (e.g., access to social networks) resources particularly important for local governance. Actors from the national and international levels occasionally engage in local processes. This engagement is either due to formal competencies, as in the case of EIAs undertaken by regional conservation authorities, or due to pragmatic interests such as business investments or pilot projects for NGOs.

The processes of Europeanization influenced policies and formal approaches to conservation by introducing norms such as inclusion, transparency, accountability and participatory decision-making. However, these influences did not fundamentally change established practices. Europeanization, however, had an uneven influence on different types of actors, ranging from direct effects on state authorities as they engaged in formal implementation to indirect influence through changed policy and legal frameworks for various non-state actors. The increased funding of nature conservation by the EU was often mentioned as an important change in all four parks and by NGOs, as it steered local processes towards contemporary western governance models. The universally recognized rights of local citizens to be part of environmental decision-making processes is among the key components of such governance models.

Thus, the Europeanization norms, practically promoted in conservation through the introduction of Natura 2000, included establishing participatory mechanisms to engage local actors in conservation decision-making and management, to balance various interests, to increase legitimacy and to incorporate different knowledge claims. However, this study has confirmed previous observations that participation often brings additional practical problems, even though it might seem attractive in principle (see, e.g., Young et al., 2007; Agrawal & Gibson, 1999; Rabe, 2017). Such problems include a lack of clear definitions of why actors should engage and how to ensure meaningful engagement in relation to power and resource disparities. The EU
A model of public consultations did not lead to meaningful results in the four studied parks but rather ended up in formalistic processes with few beneficial outputs. Thus, a legal framework and external demand for participation do not appear to be sufficient for ensuring quality participation processes.

Another important aspect of participation processes that emerged in this study is related to how actors are selected and how to ensure equal inclusion to achieve the desired results. It is usually fairly easy to identify state and non-state actors (e.g., relevant state authorities, NGOs), whereas how to establish who “local people” are is often problematic. Previous research tends to suggest identifying local residents who have strong bonds to the area, who rely on the use of local natural resources in their everyday lives, and who furthermore have a traditional knowledge about these resources (e.g., Agrawal & Gibson, 1999). In the post-socialist societies in focus here, where enforced mobility from rural to urban areas and weakened links to “traditional” rural ways of life have been part of the state policies, it has been especially cumbersome to select appropriate stakeholders for participation processes. Thus, further conceptualization of how to define “local people” in societies in transformation would most likely improve the adequacy of representation. In connection to this, peoples’ incentives to, and motivations for, engaging in local, political processes needs to be further explored.

Finally, formalistic practices of participation seem to bring even greater distrust and fatigue among the involved actors, in contrast to the desired balancing of interests, power and legitimacy. These types of challenges related to incorporating participatory practices as part of governance arrangements are congruent with previous findings in CEE countries (Petrova, et al. 2009; Anthony & Moldovan, 2008; Stringer & Paavola, 2013), Europe (Sladonja et al., 2012; Paavola, 2004), and globally (Watson et al., 2014; Marshall, 2008; Ghimire & Pimbert, 1997). The contemporary EU model of public consultations in CEE does not seem to be serving as an effective path towards meaningful inclusion. Therefore, the identification of alternative practices could make an empirical contribution to future policy development and provide a basis for advancing the conceptual understanding of participation in transformation societies. The next section offers further reflections on governance changes in local nature conservation based on the findings of this study.
8.1.3 The role of local processes in MLG and further governance implications

The shift from government to governance meant that various state and non-state actors in nature conservation at both local and national levels were brought into policy-making. However, their ability to influence policy-making processes remains limited, which is likely to reduce the redistribution of political power among actors and between policy levels. Contemporary power structures in the studied parks have been shown to be skewed towards higher levels, with the national government retaining control over strategic decisions. However, local implementation benefits from the active engagement of environmental NGOs, especially in Slovakia. The increased expertise of NGOs coupled with the limited capacity of state authorities to implement projects creates conditions for their active engagement in everyday practices. It should be noted though that only a few NGOs are able to utilize the limited channels they have to reach across levels to promote their interests by directly addressing actors at higher levels. Thus, even though most NGOs engage in practical aspects of nature conservation, only some have begun to explore political channels within EU governance.

Apart from the role of NGOs, only a few components of multi-level governance were shown to be directly relevant at the local level. Essentially, the ability of local actors to reach across levels in multi-level governance remains limited. The hierarchical structure along the supranational-national-local axis still dominates policy-making in the two Pieniny and the two East Carpathians parks. Thus, existing practices do not lead to the deconstruction of hierarchies and the free flow of communication and resources. At the same time, MLG increases distances between those who adopt decisions, those who implement them, and those directly affected, without offering new accountability mechanisms. This result supports findings from authors such as Fairbrass and Jordan (2001) and Knill and Liefferink (2007) on democratic deficits and the lack of accountability in EU multi-level governance. This lack of accountability seems to frustrate many citizens. This study has found signs of this frustration in municipalities in and around national parks, as people are confused about the role of the EU and its nature conservation policies (Natura 2000), as well as the constraints and benefits arising from them.

Even though few MLG components related to opportunities of cross-level negotiations have been directly identified in the studied cases, multi-level governance shifts indirectly influenced local processes. The empirical
evidence from this study confirmed previous findings (e.g., Knill & Liefferink, 2007) that policy-making processes have dispersed across levels. Decisions about environmental policies adopted at one level influence policies and to some extent practices at other levels. In practice, this means that supranational policies that have been nationally and regionally domesticated formally determine local policy framework. Furthermore, the results show increased horizontal interplay that can also be attributed to the governance shift. The move towards multi-level environmental governance, particularly evident in EU policies, constitutes one of the attempts to ensure sound implementation of environmental policies.

Normative demands for decentralization, transparency, accountability and inclusiveness represent attempts to improve governance quality. The most important rationales behind these attempts are to bring decisions closer to those influenced and to mobilize alternative resources for implementation, for example, through public-private partnerships. The development of such a nature conservation governance model in the EU, introduced through Natura 2000, provides various opportunities for improved governance in CEE, especially as related to funding. However, the introduction of these norms into existing national and local contexts is challenging. In fact, many perceive these attempts as an “additional burden” offering little added value. The insights from this study on the importance of informal practices as primary channels of local cooperation towards problem-solving can offer a partial explanation for the local resistance against policy changes promoted by the EU. The formal channels for problem-solving, especially those addressing problems across levels, remain limited. Multi-level governance based on participatory decision-making is therefore problematic not only within CEE, but in the whole of the EU. This has been acknowledged in other studies (see, e.g., Piattoni, 2009; Paavola et al., 2009). To date, the proposed governance model has not managed to successfully address alleged democratic deficits or to provide mechanisms to effectively incorporate local concerns into multi-level governance in nature conservation and rural development alike. It is hard to say for certain, but without further strengthening local governance, contemporary EU policy efforts are likely to fall short in delivering both conservation and rural development objectives.

The limitations to addressing biodiversity loss in protected areas alone are increasingly recognized in science and practice. In the search for alternative strategies, several options have been elaborated by researchers and applied in practice. For example, various schemes of integrated landscape management
in the form of complex, multi-functional uses of the rural landscape for food
production, livelihood improvement, and biodiversity conservation are gaining
increased attention (see, e.g., Milder et al., 2014; Estrada-Carmona et al., 2014).
To improve the participatory component of nature conservation governance,
several community-based natural resource management and other co-
management schemes aimed to increase local influence have been introduced
(see, e.g., Armitage et al., 2007; Brosius et al., 2005). Perhaps in times when
multiple contradictions surround traditional concepts of protected areas, it is
indeed necessary to re-think existing models and incorporate more alternatives
in nature conservation policies. Theoretical and empirical insights into
balancing conservation and development objectives, the role of participation
and other factors such as legacies, the political prioritization of conservation
and the availability of resources can help to better understand existing
governance structures and pathways to improve them.

8.2 Reflections on further avenues for research

The potential avenues for further research on the topics of this thesis are
manifold. The list below is by no means exhaustive but rather touches upon
a few aspects that I have not been able to address in detail in this thesis,
despite being of substantial interest.

It has been widely recognized that the increasing complexity of modern
policy-making requires the further advancement of scientific and other
types of knowledge to provide better support for informed decisions (e.g.
Raymond et al., 2010). Knowledge on nature conservation is often formed
by in-depth case study analysis and reviews existing local knowledge and
various aspects of conservation practices. This is especially true for the
social implications of nature conservation such as accounting for local
interests among resource users to ensure long-term conservation as well as
to enrich local livelihoods. However, this is a relatively new topic in Eastern
Europe. Despite several thorough publications (e.g., Petrova, 2014;
Schwartz, 2006; Lawrence, 2008; Svajda, 2008; Rodela & Udovc, 2008), little
is known about what motivates people at local levels to engage in conserv-
ervation under the conditions of distrust in central governments, the absence
of long-term traditions of private initiatives, and the marginalization of
rural areas. In the light of the difficulties encountered by state enforced
mechanisms, such as legally protected areas, in creating and distributing
conservation benefits, it would be interesting to further explore alternatives
to existing natural resource management models and their potential to ensure long-term biodiversity conservation as well as social and economic sustainability. Further insights from such cases may illuminate paths towards improved multi-level governance in the form that the EU promotes in CEE countries, which in turn could be beneficial for the EU in terms of increased integration and coherence. The post-socialist countries represent a high proportion of the EU’s Member States and can hardly be called “new” after more than 10 years of membership. Perhaps incorporating insights from existing CEE governance models can advance EU policy strategies and enrich practices. This is likely to be especially valuable against the background of ongoing discussions on the future of the EU and the search for alternative ways to improve integration.

The further incorporation of empirical insights from local studies can help to address aspects that have been less elaborated in MLG theory to date. For example, the emergence of a greater number of non-state actors, as well as the decentralization of power and increased competencies at regional and local levels, are expected to lead to increased horizontal and vertical interplay. However, little is known about how to accurately identify and address power discrepancies among different groups of actors. Improved knowledge in these areas could help to refine theory, improve its potential to explain opportunities and constraints in multi-level governance and promote both sound policy development and implementation across levels. Furthermore, it could shed light on problems related to legitimacy, accountability, transparency and inclusion in MLG settings. This can ultimately help conceptualize the changing and complex socioeconomic and political relations in the EU. Furthermore, it could address the question of whether the EU really has a common, consistent governance strategy or instead a mix of various national governance models.

8.3 Bringing policy perspective
It was not a key objective of this thesis to develop a set of comprehensive policy recommendations, since this would have required a different research focus and strategy. However, the multifaceted results of the analysis and implications thereof, as well as numerous requests from my interviewees, encouraged me to reflect upon possible policy implications of this study. I will only touch upon a few topics related to the potential bridging of conservation and development objectives and, linked to this, the
capacity of park administrations to adopt more flexible approaches to conservation in Poland and Slovakia. It should be noted that the situations in Poland and Slovakia differ in many ways. The suggestions below only include aspects that could be of relevance in both countries.

The development of an integrated national strategy for nature conservation and rural development that addresses the problems of the remote mountain regions is likely to be beneficial in relation to using a holistic approach to develop flexible solutions. Although both countries have comprehensive legal and policy frameworks for nature conservation and various aspects of economic development, these frameworks address rural development and conservation separately. Moreover, the competencies in these areas are located in multiple national, regional, and local authorities. For example, rural development is under the competencies of municipalities, while conservation is under park administrations. Integration between the two is limited, despite significant overlap especially in regard to tourism development. Improved integration can potentially help the distribution of available resources and implementation strategies. The focal parks showed that the objectives in conservation and socioeconomic development vary greatly between and within countries. Thus, flexibility in objectives and applied measures is needed to ensure a better fit to local conditions. The integration of conservation and development may further encourage formal cooperation among various local actors, which could lead to a gradual bridging of the two agendas. For this purpose, additional consultative practices might be required.

Therefore, improved formal competencies of the existing permanent consultative bodies in the three parks and the establishment of such bodies in other parks can be a way forward. Currently, the competencies of the consultative bodies in the studied parks tend to be limited to scientific evaluations of conservation plans. Moreover, their conclusions only serve as recommendations. Extending membership in these bodies to various interested stakeholders together with improving competencies to evaluate plans from a socioeconomic perspective and using financial aspects can provide a transparent platform and contribute to establishing trust in park administrations. This can further serve to enhance the negotiation skills of local actors and make trade-offs more visible. In Slovakia, such bodies can be assigned further competencies for coordinating the plans of various resource users, including forestry, with conservation objectives. This is urgently needed, as contemporary arrangements, where park administrations lack a supervisory role, put long-term conservation in peril.
Additional financial and staff capacity of the park administrations and municipalities is required to support the implementation of conservation and wider stakeholder engagement. Increased state funding may, especially in Slovakia, significantly improve the implementation of conservation measures. However, in today’s challenging economic situation, local actors need to accept responsibility for distributing the available resources fairly and for mobilizing additional funds. For example, parts of the revenues from entrance fees, forestry, use of water and other natural resources might be re-invested in conservation and rural development.

Transboundary cooperation is valued by actors from both sides of the border between Poland and Slovakia. The further strengthening of transboundary cooperation is therefore likely to increase the potential for development, for example through the joint development of high-quality tourist packages, the increased chances of obtaining funding in project applications (as the transboundary component is among the evaluation criteria in many donor programmes) and co-designed scientific research efforts on various ecological and social aspects. Lifting national restrictions on the use of available funding for such cooperation would be a step forward in developing closer transboundary partnerships.

Finally, the role of Natura 2000 in national conservation policies needs to be reconsidered. There is a need for the improved coordination of existing policy components, reduced duplication of the workflow and better coordination of resources and available data. Potentially, this can improve the harmonization of existing policy frameworks and lead to more effective implementation.

8.4 Final remarks

Returning to the initial concerns expressed by local residents near Bieszczady NP as to whether they will be able to make a living, have an income and a good life, this study has shown that these worries continue to be part of people’s everyday considerations. This work has zoomed in on key local challenges and opportunities in nature conservation and practices in the context of societies in transformation. The full-scale restructuring of societies after the collapse of the socialist regimes inevitably affected nature conservation. Arguably, the nature conservation sector has played an important role in the processes of democratization and public participation locally. More actors, including NGOs, businesses, and private owners
became engaged in governance through various policy mechanisms, thereby strengthening the political role of national parks. The mobilization of their resources and expertise is one of the key strategic opportunities for nature conservation in Poland and Slovakia. For these parks, the regime change and subsequent accession to the EU created ample opportunities for the international exchange of experiences, access to scientific data and the sharing of knowledge on policy practices. Furthermore, the competencies of the national parks expanded to include environmental education, recreation and contributions to generating local incomes. The increased cooperation, driven by the possibility of mutual benefits, became characteristic of the transformation towards a democratic, liberal society.

The challenges facing the Pieniny, Bieszczady and Poloniny National Parks have been shown to be part of local, national, European and even global trends. Specific challenges are related to the transformation of existing practices and lingering post-socialist legacies that sometimes clash with new public and societal demands. The distrust and perceived injustices expressed by locals in relation to state authorities and to some extent also in relation to park administrations hamper the development of inclusive, transparent, and accountable policy practices at the local level. The experiences from the participatory practices introduced to satisfy EU demands have become associated with procedural and conceptual limitations and have not always contributed to the desired policy developments. Further changes in local governance and in the balance between conservation and socioeconomic development, as well as participatory decision-making, constitute, perhaps, the most significant challenges to sustainable nature conservation.
Sammanfattning (svenska)

Förvaltningen av nationalparkerna vid gränsen mellan Polen och Slovakien i Karpaterna är framför allt inriktad mot att uppnå balans mellan bevarande av biologisk mångfald och social välfärd. Polen och Slovakien har under de senaste 25 åren genomgått en snabb förändring från socialistiska regimer till liberala demokratier, vilket har inneburit genomgripande politiska, sociala och ekonomiska förändringar. Medlemskapet i EU innebar ytterligare förändringar, som till exempel integrering av naturvårdsarbete och socioekonomisk utveckling, liksom främjande av inkluderande, transparent och deltagarinfattande beslutsfattande. Därmed bygger den moderna beslutsprocessen inte längre på den tidigare hierarkiska strukturen, utan har nu fått en aningen diffus karaktär, innefattande en mängd olika aktörer som interagerar i såväl horisontella som vertikala beslutsprocesser.

I denna avhandling utforskas nyckelutmaningar och möjligheter för beslutsfattande och implementering av naturvårdsarbete på lokal nivå, relaterade till de post-socialistiska arven och medlemskapet i EU. Multi-level governance (politiskt beslutsfattande på flera nivåer), Europeanization (europeisering) och post-socialistiska studier används som teoretiska verktyg för analysen av fyra gränsöverskridande nationalparker: Pieninsky, som innefattar både polska och slovakiska områden, Bieszczady (Polen) och Poloniny (Slovakien).

Studien visar att det tidiga inrättandet av naturskydd i nationalparkerna hindrade exploatering och möjliggjorde bevarandet av värdefulla naturområden, vilka idag är högt värderade utifrån ett europeiskt perspektiv. Reglerna för detta naturskydd har dock skapat begränsningar för hur områdena kan användas för till exempel agrara verksamheter och turism.

De mer övergripande landsbygdsutvecklingsmöjligheterna beror av lokala, nationella och globala faktorer som exempelvis den lokala ekonomins struktur, tillgång på arbetstillfällen, hur naturskydd prioriteras i nationellt beslutsfattande, intresse för investeringar i området och urba-
niseringsprocesser. Medlemskapet i EU har medfört ökade möjligheter för finansiering av naturskydd och landsbygdsutveckling. Samtidigt har medlemskapet för dessa länder lett till ökade förväntningar på politiskt deltagande och nya utmaningar vad gäller transparens i beslutsfattande och inkluderande beslutsprocesser. Vidare har informella beslutsvägar i lokalt beslutsfattande och lågt förtroende för statliga myndigheter lett till ytterligare utmaningar i deltagandeprocesser. Möjligheter för lokala aktörer att kommunicera och påverka beslut på högre nivåer har förblivit begränsade och är ännu inte tydligt institutionaliserade, samtidigt som det moderna, interaktiva beslutsfattandet på flera nivåer indirekt formar lokala processer genom att definiera legala och politiska ramverk inom vilka förvaltningsbeslut fattas.

Nyckelord: Nationalparker, Karpaterna, Polen, Slovakien, Europeanization, Östeuropa, multi-level governance, post-socialism.
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Appendix

Lists of Interviews

European Union
Desk Officer Nature Unit, Directorate-General Environment of the European Commission [DG Environment], Brussels, Belgium, November, 2013

International offices of Non-Governmental Organizations
Representative of the WWF European Office [WWF (a)], skype interview, August, 2014
Representative of the WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme [WWF (b)], Vienna, Austria, October, 2013

Other
Former employee of the Carpathian Convention [Carpathian Convention], Brussels, Belgium, November, 2013

POLAND
Governmental institutions
Advisor to the Minister, Department of Forestry and Nature Conservation of the Ministry of the Environment of the Republic of Poland [Ministry of the Environment, PL], Warsaw, Poland, May 2014
Head of Nature Conservation Unit of the General Directorate for the Nature Protection of the Republic of Poland [GDEP (a)], Warsaw, Poland, May 2014
Chief Expert of Nature Conservation Unit of the General Directorate for the Nature Protection of the Republic of Poland [GDEP (b)], Warsaw, Poland, May 2014
Expert of Species Protection Unit of the General Directorate for the Nature Protection of the Republic of Poland [GDEP (c)], Warsaw, Poland, May 2014
Specialist of the Regional Directorate for Environmental Protection of Malopolska Vojvodship [RDEP], Krakow, Poland, September 2014
Non-governmental organizations and associations

Director of Association of Carpathian Euroregion Poland [Euroregion], Rzeszow, Poland, May, 2014

President of the Polish Environmental Partnership Foundation [Polish Foundation], Krakow, September, 2014

Representative of NGO Pracownia na rzecz wszystkich istot (Workshop for all beings) [NGO 1, PL], Luhačovice, Czech Republic, October, 2013

Representative of NGO Klub Przyrodników (Polish Environmentalist Club) [NGO 2, PL], Rabe, Poland, May, 2014

Others

Representative of UNEP-GRID Warsaw Center [UNEP-GRID], Warsaw, Poland, May, 2014

Head of Swiss Contribution office in Poland [Swiss contribution (a)], skype interview, October, 2014

National Programme Officer of Swiss Contribution office in Poland [Swiss contribution (b)], skype interview, October, 2014

Local stakeholders: Bieszczady National park

Head of Dissemination and Communication Unit Scientific and Educational Centre of Bieszczady National Park [BdNP (a)], Ustrzyki Dolne, Poland, May 2014

Specialist of Information and Education Centre of the Bieszczady National Park in Lutowiska [BdNP (b)], Lutowiska, Poland, May 2014

Specialist of Nature Conservation Department of the Bieszczady National Park [BdNP (c)], Uztrzyki Gorne, Poland, May 2014

Mayor of Municipality Lutowiska [Lutowiska (a)], Lutowiska, Poland, May 2014

Employee of the Municipal and Tourist Information Centre in Lutowiska [Lutowiska (b)], Lutowiska, Poland, May 2014

Local Entrepreneur [Local Entrepreneur], Ustrzyki Dolne, Poland, May 2014

Local stakeholders: Pieniny National Park

Director of the Pieniny National Park [PPN (a)], Kroscienko n.Dunajcem, Poland, September 2014

Deputy Director of the Pieniny National Park and Head of the Department for Nature Conservation, group interview, [PPN (b)], Kroscienko n.Dunajcem, Poland, September 2014

Specialist of the Department for Nature Conservation [PPN (c)], Kroscienko n.Dunajcem, Poland, September 2014
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Vice-mayor of Municipality Kroscienko n.Dunajecem [Kroscienko n.Dunajecem], Kroscienko n.Dunajecem, Poland, September 2014

Specialist of the Department of Property Management, Spatial Planning, Agriculture and Environment of Municipality Szczawnica [Szczawnica], Szczawnica, Poland, September 2014

Chairman of the Polish Association of Raftmen on the Dunajec River [Raftsmen Association], Sromowce Wyżne, Poland, September 2014

Head of PR and Marketing Department Spa Szczawnica [Spa PL], Szczawnica, Poland, September 2014

Representative of the Czorsztyn-Niedzica and Sromowce Wyzne Water Reservoir [Niedzica], Sromowce Wyżne, Poland, September 2014

SLOVAKIA

Governmental institutions

Director of the State Nature Conservancy of the Republic of Slovakia [SNC (a)], Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, October 2013

The Head of the International Cooperation and Environmental Education Department of the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic [SNC (b)], Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, October 2013

The Head of the International Cooperation Unit and Coordinator of International Conventions of the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic [SNC (c)], Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, October 2013

The Head of the Monitoring, Reporting and Environmental Impact Assessment Department of the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic [SNC (d)], Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, October 2013

The Head of the Reporting Unit of the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic [SNC (e)], Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia, October 2013

Botanist of the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic [SNC (f)], Banská Bystrica, Slovakia, October 2013


Director of the Forest Research Institute of the Slovak Republic [FRI (a)], Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia, October 2013

Head of Forest Protection Service of Forest research Institute of the Slovak Republic [FRI (b)], Banská Štiavnica, Slovakia, October 2013

Non-governmental organizations and Associations:

Representative of NGO Vlk (Wolf) [NGO 1, SK], Banska Bystrica, Slovakia, October 2013 and May 2014
Representative of NGO *Pro Natura* (For nature) [NGO 2, SK], Banska Bystrica, Slovakia, May 2014

Other
Associate Professor of the Faculty of Natural Science [Researcher], Matej Bel University, Spisska Stara Ves, Slovakia, September 2014

Local stakeholders: Poloniny National park
Botanist of the Poloniny National Park [PNP (a)], Stakcin, Slovakia, May 2014
Forester of the Poloniny National Park [PNP (b)], Stakcin, Slovakia, May 2014
Specialist on Environmental Education of the Poloniny National Park [PNP (c)], Stakcin, Slovakia, May 2014
Chairman of *Urbariat* (Association of Forest Owners) [Urbariat], Stakcin, Slovakia, May 2014
Director of school in Snina [School Snina], Snina, Slovakia, May 2014
Representative of Agricultural Farm Agrifop [Agrifop], Stakcin, Slovakia, May 2014
Representative of NGO *Cemerica* [NGO 3, SK], Stakcin, Slovakia, May 2014
Representative of NGO *Karpatske Drevene Cerkvi* (The Carpathian wooden churches) [NGO 4, SK], Snina, Slovakia, May 2014
Representative of NGO *Klub slovenských turistov* (Slovak tourist club) [NGO 5, SK], Stakcin, Slovakia, May 2014
Representative of local branch of NGO *Vlk* (Wolf) [NGO 6, SK], Stakcin, Slovakia, May 2014
Owner of the pension *Beskyd Nyski* [Pension Beskyd], Nova Sedlica, Slovakia, May 2014
Mayor of municipality Ulic [Ulic], Ulic, Slovakia, May 2014
Mayor of municipality Zboj [Zboj], Stakcin, Slovakia, May 2014
Vice-Mayor of municipality Stakcin [Stakcin], Stakcin, Slovakia, May 2014

Local stakeholders: Pieniny National park
Park Director of the Pieniny National Park [PIENAP (a)], Spisska Stara Ves, Slovakia, September 2014
Specialist of the Nature Conservation Department of the Pieniny National Park [PIENAP (b)], Spisska Stara Ves, Slovakia, September 2014
Specialist in Tourism and Visitation of the Pieniny National Park [PIENAP (c)], Spisska Stara Ves, Slovakia, September 2014
Mayor of Town Spisska Stara Ves [Spisska Stara Ves], Spisska Stara Ves, Slovakia, September 2014
Mayor of Municipality Lesnica [Lesnica], Lesnica, Slovakia, September 2014
APPENDIX

Mayor of Municipality Cerveny Klastor [Cerveny Klastor], Cerveny Klastor, Slovakia, September 2014
Manager of the Tourist Facility Pieninska hata [Pieninska Hata], Spisska Stara Ves, Slovakia, September 2014
Representative of the Slovak Association of Mountain Rescue [HZS], Spisska Stara Ves, Slovakia, September 2014
Representative of the spa complex Kupeli Cerveny Klastor [Spa SK], Cerveny Klastor, Slovakia, September 2014
Director of the museum Cerveny Klastor [Museum], Cerveny Klastor, Slovakia, September 2014
Director of the Association for Development of the Pieniny and Zamagurie Region [Association Pieniny], Cerveny Klastor, Slovakia, September 2014
Local Raftsmen [Local Raftsmen], Cerveny Klastor, Slovakia, September 2014
Director of Agrofirm [Agrofirma 1], Spisska Stara Ves, Slovakia, September 2014
Farmer [Agrofirma 2], Spisska Stara Ves, Slovakia, September 2014

Meetings attended

The scientific workshop “Transportation Infrastructure and Wildlife Corridors – learning from experience” of the Infra-Eco Network Europe (IENE), Luhacovice, Czech Republic, 16–18 October, 2013
The excursion in the Poloniny National Park devoted to the European Day of Parks, the Poloniny National Park, Slovakia, 28 May, 2014
4. Andrej Kotljarchuk, In the Shadows of Poland and Russia: The Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Sweden in the European Crisis of the mid-17th Century, 2005
5. Håkan Blomqvist, Nation, ras och civilisation i svensk arbetarrörelse före nazismen, 2006
6. Karin S Lindelöf, Om vi nu ska bli som Europa: Könsskapande och normalitet bland unga kvinnor i transitionens Polen, 2006
8. Arne Ek, Att konstruera en uppslutning kring den enda vägen: Om folkrörelser modernisering i skuggan av det Östeuropeiska systemskiftet, 2006
17. Renata Ingbrant, *From Her Point of View: Woman’s Anti-World in the Poetry of Anna Świrszczyńska*, 2007
34. Tommy Larsson Segerlind, *Team Entrepreneurship: A process analysis of the venture team and the venture team roles in relation to the innovation process*, 2009
37. Karin Ellencrona, *Functional characterization of interactions between the flavivirus NS5 protein and PDZ proteins of the mammalian host*, 2009
43. René León Rosales, *Vid framtidens hitersta gräns: Om pojkar och elevpositioner i en multietnisk skola*, 2010
44. Simon Larsson, *Intelligensaristokrater och arkivmartyrer: Normerna för vetenskaplig skicklighet i svensk historieforskning 1900–1945*, 2010
47. Michael Wigerius, *Roles of mammalian Scribble in polarity signaling, virus offense and cell-fate determination*, 2010
49. Magnus Linnaresson, *Postgång på växlande villkor: Det svenska postväsendets organisation under stormaktstiden*, 2010
52. Carl Cederberg, *Resaying the Human: Levinas Beyond Humanism and Antihumanism*, 2010
70. Maria Wolrath Söderberg, *Topos som meningsskapare: retorikens topiska perspektiv på tänkande och lärande genom argumentation*, 2012
76. Tanya Jukkala, *Suicide in Russia: A macro-sociological study*, 2013
77. Maria Nyman, *Resandets gränser: svenska resenärers skildringar av Ryssland under 1700-talet*, 2013
82. Anna Kharkina, *From Kinship to Global Brand: the Discourse on Culture in Nordic Cooperation after World War II*, 2013
84. Oskar Henriksson, *Genetic connectivity of fish in the Western Indian Ocean*, 2013


105. Katharina Wesolowski, *Maybe baby? Reproductive behaviour, fertility intentions, and family policies in post-communist countries, with a special focus on Ukraine*, 2015


124. Ramona Rat, Un-common Sociality: Thinking sociality with Levinas, 2016
125. Petter Thureborn, Microbial ecosystem functions along the steep oxygen gradient of the Landsort Deep, Baltic Sea, 2016
127. Naveed Asghar, Ticks and Tick-borne Encephalitis Virus – From nature to infection, 2016
128. Linn Rabe, Participation and legitimacy: Actor involvement for nature conservation, 2017
129. Maryam Adjam, Minnesspår: hagkomstens rum och rörelse i skuggan av en flykt, 2017
131. Ekaterina Tarasova, Anti-nuclear Movements in Discursive and Political Contexts: Between expert voices and local protests, 2017
132. Sanja Obrenović Johansson, Från kombifeminism till rörelse – Kvinnlig serbisk organisering i förändring, 2017
133. Michał Salamonik, In Their Majesties’ Service The Career of Francesco De Gratta (1613–1676) as a Royal Servant and Trader in Gdańsk, 2017
Our main goal is to preserve species and habitats in the good conditions and maintain favourable conservation status.

(Park administration)

“We [the municipality] do not receive taxes or subsidies, so I always wonder how we are supposed to make ends meet and deliver education, healthcare and reliable public transportation.

(Municipality office)

Nature conservation and rural development are seen increasingly as interlinked agendas. In practice, however, the local potential for their integration remains limited, and often no strategic vision exists for how to achieve it. Local actors are reluctant to engage in developing more inclusive, transparent, accountable, and participatory policy making, as they have often experienced few positive outcomes from these strategies.

This thesis explores key challenges and opportunities for nature conservation policy and practices at the local level in a context of post-socialist legacies and Europeanization to further understand the ongoing governance changes in Central Eastern Europe.

Natalya Yakusheva carries out research in the field of environmental science with a special focus on environmental governance. This is her PhD thesis.