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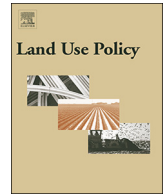
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Managing protected areas in Central Eastern Europe: Between path-dependence and Europeanisation

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ABSTRACT

The nature conservation regimes of post-socialist EU countries are multi-layered, consisting of initial components established before Socialism, reinforced and solidified during Socialist period, and changes brought about by the democratic transition. For nature conservation, the transition to democracy led to new political and legal frameworks, the re-allocation of resources and land tenure changes, which Central Eastern European countries approached differently. Accession to the European Union (EU) became an additional layer in the transition process that brought new policy elements, such as Natura 2000. Accession has also opened up new funding streams for conservation and introduced requirements for participatory decision-making. The controversies surrounding the transposition and practical implementation of Natura 2000 has revealed mismatches between the different policy components of such multi-layered regimes or, in other words, between path dependence and change. This article examines how existing institutional path dependence and occurring policy changes shape the management capacities of selected national parks in Poland and Slovakia. This provides insights into the contextual factors that enhance or constrain the ability of park authorities to deliver the necessary conservation measures and other policy provisions.

1. Introduction

Throughout the world, protected areas (PAs) are seen as major instruments for conserving natural resources. The conservation of valuable habitats and species supports the rich biodiversity essential for the provision of ecosystem services and offers recreational and educational opportunities (Chape et al., 2008; Watson et al., 2014). This, in turn, is expected to contribute to a country's social and economic well-being (Adams and Hutton, 2007; Watson et al., 2014). Nevertheless, protecting certain areas for biodiversity conservation implies various limitations on land and resource uses that, along with numerous benefits, may also cause disadvantages for people directly relying on the use of these resources (Brosius et al., 2005; Adams and Hutton, 2007). Broadly speaking, these limitations have led to various trade-offs between multiple societal and economic interests – trade-offs that are often rooted in a particular historical and political development (Brockington et al., 2006; Otto and Chobotová, 2013; Petrova, 2014; Sandbrook, 2015). Thus, whether protected areas can deliver the expected environmental, social and economic benefits depends on their capacity not only to safeguard biodiversity but also to navigate between the multiple interests of the actors involved, including municipalities,

businesses, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and citizens (Hockings and Phillips, 1999; Leverington et al., 2010).

The capacity of PAs to manage potential trade-offs and deliver conservation measures is shaped by many contextual factors, in which available financial and human resources, existing governance frameworks, and relations with the local community seem to play a decisive role (Hockings and Phillips, 1999). These contextual factors develop gradually over time, following policy-regime changes and the experiences of the actors involved. For example, previous research has documented difficulties in overcoming local communities' distrust and rejection of PA authorities due to a history of unjust treatment, even when new policies aim to collaborate with and gain the community's trust (Fuentes-George, 2016; Kashwan, 2017; Petrova, 2014). Thus, understanding how policy changes become accepted and institutionalised by park authorities and other local actors against a background of existing institutional path dependence can help illuminate opportunities and constraints for nature conservation on the ground.

To provide such insights, this article aims to empirically examine the interaction between lingering Socialist institutional path dependence and policy change arising from the new governance requirements

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introduced by Europeanisation and how this influences nature conservation practices on the ground. The examples of two transboundary national parks in the Carpathian Mountains along the Polish and Slovak border¹ were selected for the analysis. Poland and Slovakia share a similar history in terms of regime changes from Socialism to democratization and Europeanisation. For nature conservation, these wide-reaching changes have led to new political and legal frameworks, the re-allocation of resources, and new land tenure provisions (Börzel and Buzogany, 2009; Kluvánková-Oravská and Chobotová, 2006; Otto and Chobotová, 2013). Nevertheless, these two countries have differed in their implementation of changes to nature conservation. Moreover, the latest edition of Natura 2000, as part of the EU accession requirements, has revealed various conflicts and institutional mismatches in their conservation regimes, raising concerns over the limited effectiveness of the protected areas in the region (De Koning et al., 2014; Kluvánková-Oravská and Chobotová, 2006; Meessen et al., 2015; Stringer and Paaavola, 2013; Švajda, 2008). The four selected parks form two transboundary protected areas with similar ecosystem characteristics. These national parks have been fully or partially designated as Natura 2000 sites and thus are included in the ongoing process of change. At the same time, the local socioeconomic conditions, history and visibility of these national parks vary greatly. This similarity in natural habitats but difference in the chosen reform paths and social conditions enables scrutiny of the various political, social and economic factors that are likely to affect the dynamic of change.

Conceptually, the article aims to introduce the perspective of historical institutionalism (Pierson, 2000; Scott, 2008) to the Europeanisation literature (Börzel and Buzogany, 2009; Radaelli, 2003; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005) by focusing on an analysis of the “institutional fit” between path dependence and policy change in a local context. The concept of path dependence suggests that elements from previous institutional and policy frameworks are unlikely to have been fully erased by policy regime changes; instead, it is probable that they have mixed with new demands creating a multi-layered regime. The normative, top-down character of Europeanisation in the CEE region, documented by previous research, has resulted in a rather rigid framework, where the transposed legal and political requirements have rarely been adjusted to the national contexts and have often brought only symbolic changes (Braun, 2014; Radaelli, 2003; Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier, 2005; Sotirov et al., 2015). However, in the field of nature conservation little is known about the acceptance and institutionalisation of policy changes induced by Europeanisation and their “fit” with existing elements in the local context. Consequently, insights into local processes can help better explain the conditions that enable or hinder policy change and how such conditions influence nature conservation on the ground.

The paper proceeds by first discussing the theoretical considerations for the analysis of the contextual factors affecting the management capacities of PAs authorities over time. These considerations are drawn from the PA management, institutional path dependence and Europeanisation literature. Section 3 then presents the cases, methods and materials used for the analysis. Next, in Section 4, the paper turns to a detailed scrutiny of the cases, using a historical perspective to understand the current context, before offering a discussion of the findings and a presentation of the conclusions in Sections 5 and 6.

2. Theoretical considerations: nature conservation between push and pull

The overall effectiveness of nature conservation regimes largely

¹ The four parks are the Pieniny national parks (NPs) in Poland (*Pieniński Park Narodowy*) and Slovakia (*Pieninský národný park*), and Bieszczady NP, Poland (*Bieszczadzki Park Narodowy*) and Poloniny NP, Slovakia (*Národný Park Poloniny*)

depends on the management capacities of PAs authorities, which are on the frontline of implementing conservation measures, monitoring, tourism management, and environmental education (Chape et al., 2008; Leverington et al., 2010; Robinson et al., 2017). These authorities are increasingly assigned the role of negotiating and finding a compromise among various local economic and social interests, thereby expanding their range of competences (Brockington et al., 2006; Cent et al., 2014; Sandbrook, 2015).

Regular management performance evaluations are an essential feature of a well-functioning protected area, and such evaluations often involve reviewing results against the goals set in management or project plans (Ervin, 2003). However, such technical evaluation provides only limited insights into the effectiveness of protected areas, as the ability to deliver the expected benefits is always context-specific and can seldom be viewed in terms of simple success or failure. For a more comprehensive understanding of the relatively technical term of “management capacities”, Hockings and Phillips (1999) recommended incorporating the following components: i) governance, including political support, legislation and protected area system design; ii) resources, measured by staff, funds and infrastructure; iii) relations with the community, such as awareness, support or conflict (Fig. 1). As presented in Fig. 1, these components are interlinked and define the overall milieu in which PA authorities operate.

In turn, governance, available resources, and relations with communities are directly linked to the process of policy change. In the past three decades, policy changes in CEE countries have been largely shaped by two processes: the transition from Socialism to democracy and Europeanisation. Studies of the post-socialist transition often seek to explain how the elements of the previous political regime and re-occurring patterns in processes, policies and institutions affect changes in the social, political and economic spheres (e.g. Bafail, 2009). In turn, studies on Europeanisation seek to understand how changes related to the transposition of EU norms influence national policies (e.g. Radaelli, 2003). In other words, post-socialist studies examine the locked-in elements of previous policies, often expressed in terms of path dependence, that reduce the number of currently available solutions (A'gh, 2001), whereas the Europeanisation literature aims to understand how domestic policy change and the transfer of power to the EU occur (Bache, 2008; Featherstone, 2003). In a way, these processes present “push and pull” factors for nature conservation on the ground.

2.1. Pull factors

The notion of path dependence, initially developed under historical institutionalism (see e.g. Pierson, 2000; Scott, 2016), intuitively builds on the idea of the continuity of social processes, where a previously introduced course of action influences the following social development (Pierson, 2000). Such influence arises primarily from two sources: the increasing cost of switching from one alternative to another over time and the timing and sequence of certain moments that reinforce divergent paths (Pierson, 2000). Historical institutionalism does not deny change but rather claims that it occurs through small steps that fit into a broader pattern (Dimitrakopoulos, 2010). Even radical regime changes seldom lead to rapid institutional changes but rather to symbolic adaptation or sometimes resistance (Scott, 2008).

In the context of the CEE region, central planning and the top-down, command-and-control governing characteristics of Socialist regimes constitute two major instances of institutional path dependence (Bridger and Pine, 1998; Lerman et al., 2004). The socialist approach presumed that the land and natural resources belonged to the whole nation and that the state was the only appropriate guardian of these resources (Elie and Coumel, 2013; Josephson et al., 2013). The public sphere and civil society engagement were strictly controlled and even suppressed (Agh, 1998; Andonova, 2005). Thus, state domination and collective ownership of land and natural resources can be seen as major “pull” factors for contemporary nature conservation. These factors

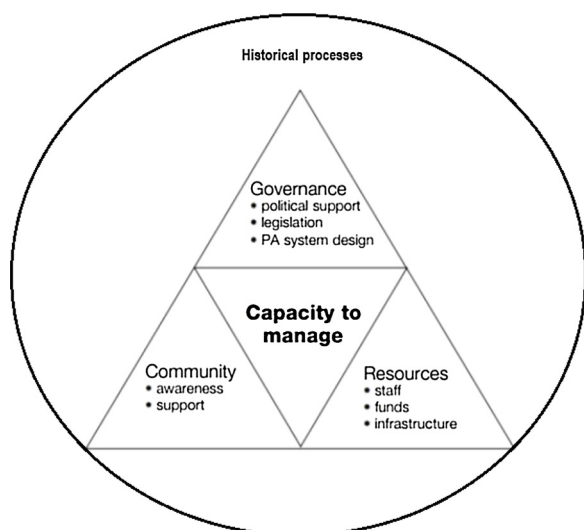


Fig. 1. Protected area management capacity from a historical perspective. Source: Adapted from Hockings and Phillips (1999).

contradict the pressures of Europeanisation for decentralised, participatory decision-making, private land stewardship and entrepreneurial initiatives.

2.2. Push factors

The “push” factors of Europeanisation are linked to the process of accepting and institutionalising the formal and informal norms of the EU (Braun, 2014; Radaelli, 2003). Compliance with *acquis communautaire*, the set of legally binding EU rules, was a key requirement of new member states’ accession to the EU, thereby establishing a top-down mode of Europeanisation (Börzel and Buzogany, 2009; Braun, 2014; Haukenes and Freyberg-Inan, 2013; Sotirov et al., 2015). Natura 2000, the EU-wide network of PAs established as a legal requirement of the Birds and Habitats Directives, represented one of the major changes to nature conservation policy (Börzel and Buzogany, 2009; Tickle and Clarke, 2000). The principles behind Natura 2000 attempt to streamline sustainability in nature conservation through introducing policy measures that should benefit both local socioeconomic development and biodiversity conservation, thus translating into more collaborative conservation approaches (Borrass et al., 2015; Kistenkas, 2013; Stringer and Paavola, 2013). Changes to nature conservation policy have been coupled with the more general requirements of decentralisation and strengthening the role of citizens in local decision-making, potentially creating space for new forms of democratisation (Baker and Jehlička, 1998; Jancar-Webster, 1998).

An analysis of the relevant “push and pull” factors produced by path dependence and Europeanisation at the protected-area level provides both an empirical and conceptual perspective on the frictions between old and new institutions and policies and the consequent implications for the implementation of nature conservation policies, including Natura 2000. In order to understand the current capacities of the selected national parks, the article presents a historical perspective on the development of existing governance frameworks in Poland and Slovakia, the resources available at the PA level, and relations with local communities.

3. Overview of the cases and methods

Border regions are an inherent characteristic of the Carpathian mountain range, since it passes through seven countries (Turnock, 2002). This often means that the land management and conservation of similar habitats and ecosystems differ due to divergent legal

frameworks and political and economic objectives. Thus, an examination of transboundary cases reveals the implications for nature conservation in different national and local contexts. Additionally, such a focus enables the investigation of factors influencing the local socioeconomic development of rural municipalities with similar natural resources. Despite similar histories and speeds of socioeconomic development, Poland and Slovakia vary considerably in their geographic and socioeconomic characteristics. 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. The Carpathians, which are the highest mountain range in Poland, are situated in the southeast of the country. By contrast, Slovakia is a relatively small, landlocked country with a total area of approximately 49 000 km² and a population of 5 million. The Carpathian Mountains cover most of the country’s terrestrial surface area, and both the use of natural resources and nature conservation are of strategic national importance. Despite numerous similarities between the countries, at the transition stage rather different approaches to the reforms were adopted, including decisions on land-use modes, management of natural resources and allocation of resources to PAs.

Four cases (two transboundary park areas) were selected in order to document differences in the effects of national policies and the variety of local practices, thereby increasing the empirical contribution of this research and revealing the different factors that shape the local context. The paper employs a comparative perspective based on a systematic description of the events (cases) and the relationships between different relevant events (Bennett and Elman, 2007). The cases were selected for comparison based on similar experiences of political and socioeconomic changes during Socialism and EU accession, as well as similarities in ecosystem characteristics. The two Pieniny national parks represent the oldest officially designated transboundary park area in Europe, and there exists a long history of internal institutional development and collaboration between park administrations. The unique primeval forest of the Bieszczady/Poloniny parks, the other two selected cases, is also designated as a UNESCO Man and Biosphere reserve, thus attracting significant international attention to the area.

The chosen cases, with their unique contextual factors, therefore provide diverse insights into path dependence and policy change. These cases are also less documented in the literature than the more popular transboundary Tatra national parks. Further identification of the possible causes and consequences of interplay between path dependence and policy change was achieved through the application of elements of process tracing (Mahoney, 2015). Here, the study constructed timelines in which major political regime changes in Poland and Czechoslovakia (of which Slovakia was part until 1993) were linked to the key local events relevant for nature conservation. These timelines, presented in Figs. 2 and 3, helped explain the historical context and are further discussed in Section 4.1. The purpose of this historical analysis was to investigate three components of the theoretical framework (governance, resources, and relations with the community).

These parks, which were established during the Socialist regimes in Poland and Czechoslovakia, currently vary greatly in terms of territory and resources (number of staff, budget) and land tenure (Table 1). As Table 1 demonstrates, the Pieniny parks in both Poland and Slovakia are significantly smaller than the Bieszczady/Poloniny parks in terms of land area, number of staff and available budgets. Land tenure, which defines supervisory rights, differs greatly between the Polish Bieszczady park and the other parks, which may influence relations with local communities. Local inhabitants around the four parks mainly rely on forestry, nature conservation and tourism for employment (Solár et al., 2014; Winnicki and Zemanek, 2009). In other words, the main economic sectors are tightly linked with the areas’ natural resources. Relatively limited local employment opportunities have led to the rapid migration of locals away from the areas, especially the young, resulting in depopulation and land abandonment (except in Polish Pieniny) (Bezák and Mitchley, 2014; Meessen et al., 2015). This has caused

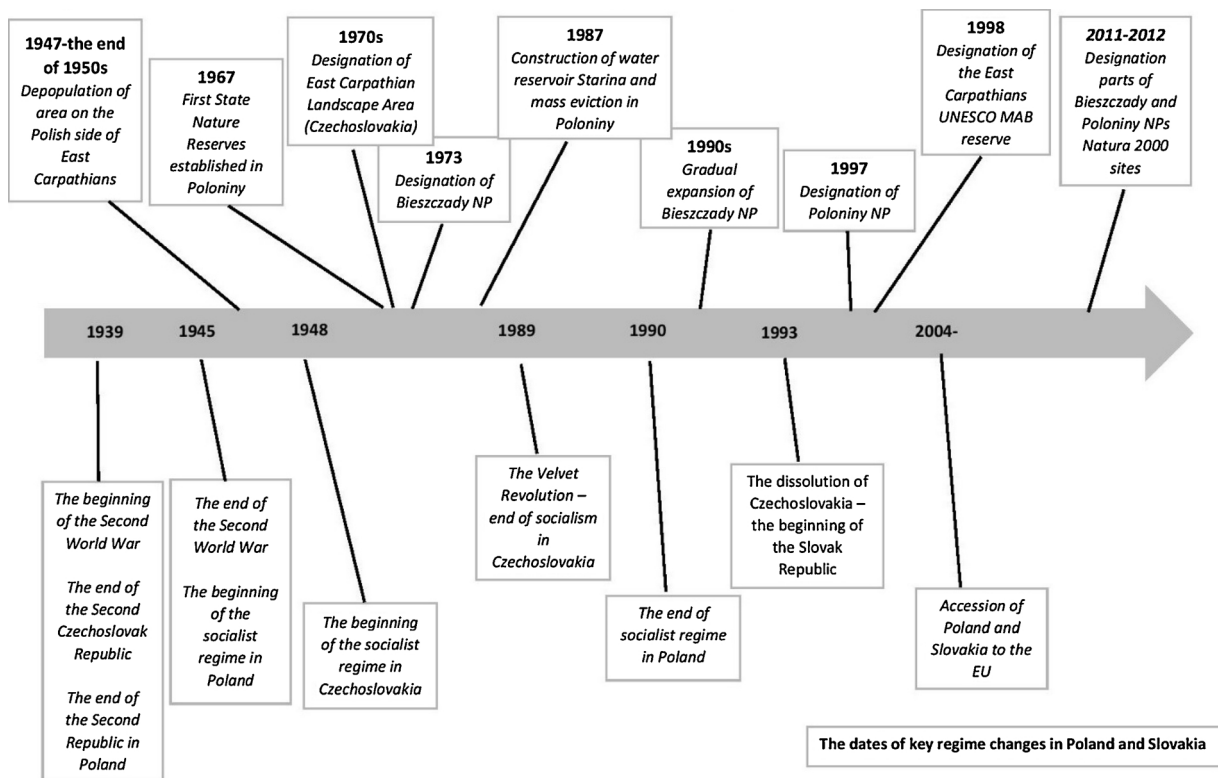


Fig. 2. Timeline: Regime changes and nature conservation in the Bieszczady and Poloniny NPs.

landscape-wide changes, since abandonment results in the expansion of forest habitats through deterioration of the traditionally used grasslands (Butsic et al., 2017; Griffiths et al., 2013; Kuemmerle et al., 2007). Most active nature-conservation measures aim to halt the decline of these habitats, which are valuable for cross-European ecological

connectivity and represent some of the few remaining wilderness spots in Europe (Oszlányi et al., 2004a).

In terms of data collection, interviewing was chosen as the primary method for filling knowledge gaps and documenting local processes in the selected cases (Tansey, 2007). In studies of local cases, factual

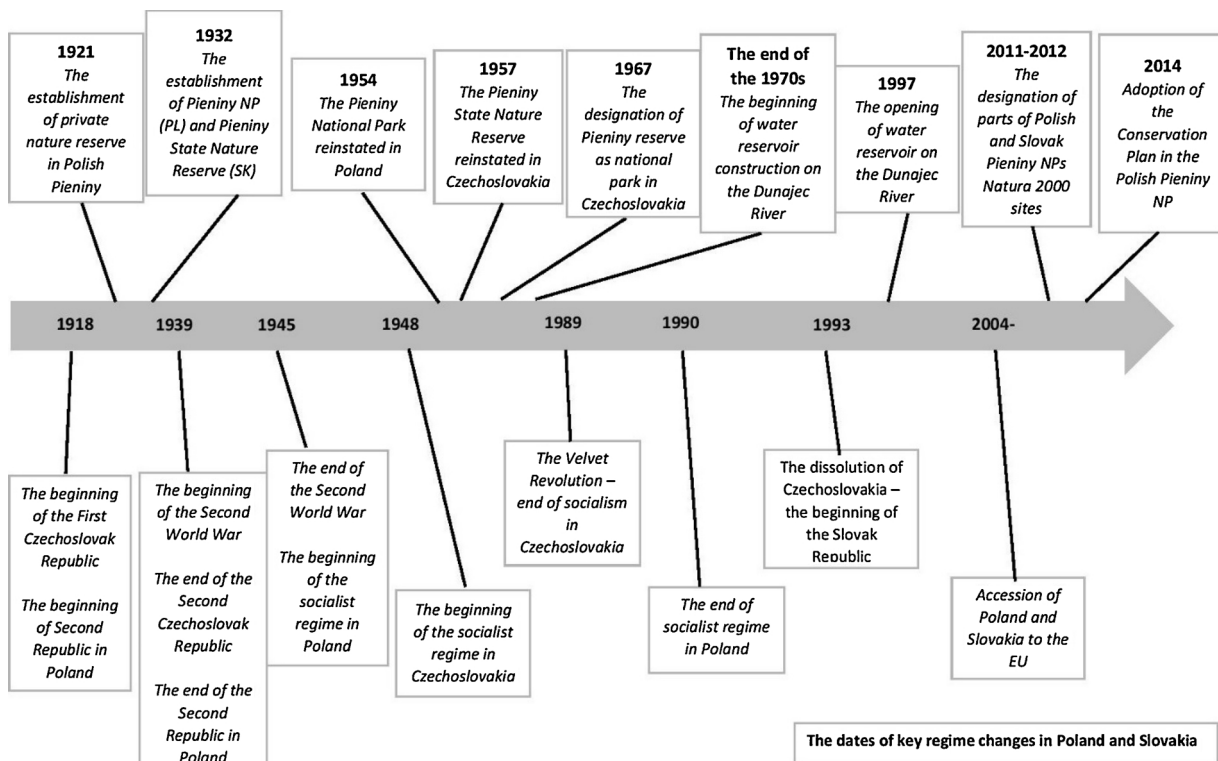


Fig. 3. Timeline: Regime changes and nature conservation in the Pieniny NPs.

Table 1
Cases in a nutshell.

Characteristic	Pieniny NP, Poland	Pieniny NP, Slovakia	Bieszczady NP, Poland	Poloniny NP, Slovakia
Year of designation	1932	1932 (nature reserve) 1967 (NP)	1973	1967 (nature reserve) 1997 (NP)
Total territory (ha)	2 372	3 750	52 065	29 805
Number of staff	50	10	110	12
Approximate budget	approx. 2 M zloty (472 000 EUR)	n/a	approx. 12 M zloty (2.9 M EUR)	n/a
Entrance fees	4-5 zloty (approx. 1 EUR)	No	7 zloty (approx. 1.7 EUR)	No
Percentage of state-owned land inside NP	55	11	96	50

Table 2
List of interviewed actors.

Actor category	Number of interviews	Organization/interview reference
<i>National actors, Poland</i>		
International/regional institutions	4	UNEP-GRID [UNEP-GRID]; Euroregion Karpacki [Euroregion]; Swiss Contribution [Swiss contribution (a); Swiss contribution (b)];
National/regional authorities	5	Ministry of Environment [Ministry of the Environment, PL]; General Directorate for Environmental Protection Environment [GDEP(a); GDEP (b); GDEP (c)]; Regional Directorate for Nature Protection (Malopolsko Voevodship) [RDEP];
NGOs	3	<i>Pracownia na rzecz Wszystkich Istot</i> (the Workshop for all beings) [NGO 1, PL]; <i>Klub Przyrodników</i> (the Polish Environmentalist Club) [NGO 2, PL]; <i>Fundacja Partnerstwo dla Środowiska</i> (Environmental Partnership Foundation) [NGO 3, PL];
<i>National actors, Slovakia</i>		
National authorities	7	The Ministry of Environment [Ministry of Environment, SK]; State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic [SNC (a); SNC (b); SNC (c); SNC (d); SNC (e); SNC (f)]
NGOs	2	<i>Vlk</i> (the Wolf) [NGO 1, SK]; <i>Pro Natura</i> [NGO 2, SK];
Research Institutes/Experts	3	Forest Research Institute of Slovakia [FRI (a); FRI (b)]; University lecturer and nature conservation practitioner [Researcher];
<i>Bieszczady NP, Poland</i>		
Park management	3	Representatives of park museum; Center for Scientific Research and Education; NP headquarters; Centre for Information and Education Desk [BdNP (a); BdNP (b); BdNP (c)]
Local authorities	2	Gmina Lutowska [Lutowska (a)]; Center for Tourist Information in Lutowska [Lutowska (b)];
Involved groups, including NGOs	1	Local entrepreneur and activist [Local Entrepreneur];
<i>Poloniny NP, Slovakia</i>		
Park management	3	Specialists in environmental education; forester; scientific specialist [PNP (a); PNP (b); PNP (c)]
Local authorities	3	Mayors of the municipalities Ulic [Ulic]; Zboj [Zboj]; Vice-Mayor of the municipality Stakcin [Stakcin]
Involved groups, including NGOs	8	Agricultural farm [Agrifop]; Association of local forest owners [Urbariat]; The owner of a guesthouse [Guesthouse]; Director of the Snina secondary school [School Snina]; NGO <i>Cemerica</i> [NGO 3, SK] NGO <i>Karpatske Drevene Cerkvi</i> (The Carpathian wooden churches) [NGO 4, SK]; Local branch of NGO <i>Klub slovenských turistov</i> (Slovak tourist club) [NGO 5, SK]; <i>Vlk</i> (The Wolf) [NGO 6, SK];
<i>Pieniny NP, Poland</i>		
Park management	4	Director, representatives of nature conservation, planning and other departments [PPN (a); PPN (b); PPN (c)];
Local authorities	2	Gmina Kroscienko-nad-Dunajcem [Kroscienko n.Dunajcem]; Gmina Szczawnica [Szczawnica];
Involved groups, including NGOs	3	The Polish Association of Raftsmen on the Dunajec River [Raftsmen Association]; Spa complex in Szczawnica [Spa PL]; Water power plant in Niedzica [Niedzica];
<i>Pieniny NP, Slovakia</i>		
Park management	4	Director, representatives of environmental education, tourism, ranger units [PIENAP (a); PIENAP (b); PIENAP (c)];
Local authorities	3	Mayors of the municipalities Lesnica [Lesnica]; Cerveny Klastor [Cerveny Klastor]; Spisska Stara Ves [Spisska Stara Ves];
Involved groups, including NGOs	8	Tourist facility " <i>Pieninska hata</i> " [Pieninska Hata]; Spa facilities in Cerveny Klastor [Spa SKMuseum Cerveny Kalstor [Museum]; Two local farmers [Agrofirma 1; Agrofirma 2]; Local raftsmen [Local Raftsmen]; Mountain Rescue Team for Tatra-Pieniny area [HZS]; The Association for the development of Pieniny and Zamagurie region [Association Pieniny];

information on specific circumstances and insights into local context and the personal views of local actors are often missing (Brinkmann and Kvale, 2015). Targeted data collection allowed these gaps to be filled. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of the park administrations, municipalities, NGOs, experts and other groups involved in land use and nature conservation locally and nationally (Table 2). Overall, 27 subjects were interviewed in Poland and 41 in Slovakia (for a detailed break-down see Table 2). This number of participants included all relevant identified actors that agreed to take part in the research. The interview questions were

formulated to investigate local context (governance, resources, and relations with the community) and the management capacities of PAs administrations (for detailed interview guidelines see Appendix 1). Where possible these findings were complemented by policy documents, grey literature (e.g. project reports) and peer-reviewed research. Initial interview contacts were acquired through web searches for relevant organizations. This was followed by snowball/chain-referral sampling, where every available contact was asked to indicate other individuals who might be relevant to the study (Tansey, 2007). Most of the interviews were conducted during three field trips in autumn 2013

and spring and autumn 2014 within the framework of the author's "Parks, Policies and People: Nature Conservation Governance in Post-Socialist EU Countries" (Yakusheva, 2017)

The interview data was qualitatively coded to detect a) historical development, b) governance framework, c) available financial and human resources and d) relation with communities. The codes were assigned by the author based on the affiliation of actors with certain organisations or citizen groups in each national park. This allowed a full picture to be acquired and information to be crosschecked between different groups of interviewees from the same area. Such a qualitative approach and the relatively small number of interviews allowed the data to be examined in its entirety to gain comprehensive insights into the studied cases.

4. Results

4.1. History of nature conservation in Poland and Slovakia

Similar to the development in other regions at that time, the idea of establishing national parks (NPs) emerged in the Carpathian countries at the end of the 19th century with the underlying notion to "protect nature from humans" (Adams and Hutton, 2007). During this period, the mountain landscapes of the Carpathians already attracted the attention of early environmentalists, who called for the preservation of a fragile environment under pressure from various human activities, such as mining, grazing and logging (Oszlányi et al., 2004a). However, turbulent historical events with several abrupt political regime changes and wars (see Figs. 2 and 3) postponed the designation of the first parks until the 1930s, when the Polish National Park and the Slovak Nature Reserve were established in Pieniny (Danko, 2008; Gasienica Byrcyn, 1992). Poland became a conservation pioneer in the CEE region, with a relatively progressive nature protection law adopted in 1934. By the beginning of the Second World War, six national parks along with 180 nature reserves and 4 500 natural monuments had been designated in Poland (Otto and Chobotová, 2013). The strong role of nature protection associations, for example, the Polish Tatra Society, helped advance a conservation agenda in this country compared to its neighbours (Hoening, 2014). However, the Second World War, which devastated the CEE region, temporarily disrupted further development of nature conservation.

The new Socialist governments in both Poland and Czechoslovakia nonetheless relaunched nature conservation, and in the 1950s–1970s national parks and nature reserves became widespread (Josephson et al., 2013). For instance, in Slovakia, the first national park was established in 1948 (Tatra NP) by decree of the Czechoslovak government (Otto and Chobotová, 2013). This was followed by the reinstatement of the Slovak nature reserve in the Pieniny in 1957, which was upgraded to a national park in 1967 (Fig. 3). In that year, the first nature reserve was also established in the Slovak Poloniny (Fig. 2). Overall, during socialism, PAs covered around 29% of Slovak territory and enjoyed relatively strong enforcement and research capacities (Paget and Vagacova, 1998; Wilson, 1999). In Poland, the new law for nature protection (1949) assigned the national parks a leading role in protecting the natural environment (Kurek et al., 2001). Pieniny NP was reinstated shortly after this (1954) (Fig. 3), whereas Bieszczady NP was designated only in 1973, after heated debate and strong lobbying from the scientific community (Winnicki and Zemanek, 2009).

In both countries, nature conservation was nevertheless affected by the general shortcomings of the Socialist regimes. Protected areas were mostly established on land unsuitable for large-scale intensive agricultural production, heavy industry, military uses or other strategic economic functions (Meessen et al., 2015; Paget and Vagacova, 1998). Moreover, responsibilities for conservation were fragmented across different ministries, each with its own plans, with minimal coordination occurring between them (Hoening, 2014; Meessen et al., 2015). The main decisions were made by central government, often without

consideration for local specificities or the opinion of local citizens (Andonova, 2005; Josephson et al., 2013). This often hampered adequate protection of these areas, since various, often contradictory, plans existed for the same territories (Prazan et al., 2005; Tickle and Clarke, 2000). In such a system, local nature conservation authorities were tasked with providing professional supervision. The total area under protection, rather than the diversity or status of the protected habitats and species, or the implications for local development, was the key measure of performance (Meessen et al., 2015).

The structure of land-ownership represented a core difference between these two Socialist countries. In Czechoslovakia, all land was collectivised, whereas in Poland it was not (Kluvankova-Oravska and Chobotova, 2010). Thus, in Slovakia, PAs were created on land appropriated by the state without any compensation to local landowners (Otto and Chobotová, 2013; Paget and Vagacova, 1998). By contrast, in the Polish case, owners were either provided compensation for protected plots or allowed to retain them (Kluvankova-Oravska and Chobotova, 2010; Otto and Chobotová, 2013). However, in both countries, the history of relations with local citizens in rural areas was marked by unjust treatment and the neglect of local interests (Niedziałkowski et al., 2014; Oszlányi et al., 2004b; Otto and Chobotová, 2013; Paget and Vagacova, 1998).

To large extent, the difference in land management determined the transition paths that Poland and Slovakia would take, with the latter liberalising land ownership through privatisation and restitution of land rights and Poland maintaining the *status quo*, as the question of land ownership failed to gain prominence there (Otto and Chobotová, 2013; Sikor, 2005, 2002). In Slovakia, the restitution of land ownership was partly seen as compensation for the perceived injustices of land nationalisation during Socialism and partly as an important component in the emerging market economy (Kluvanková-Oravská and Chobotová, 2006). However, the new private land ownership has come with *de facto* limitations on possible land use options due to existing regulations in agriculture, forestry, and nature conservation (Sikor, 2005). Furthermore, in Slovakia several management authorities share responsibilities for the management of land and natural resources, including on the NP's territory (Národná rada, 2002).

The drastic changes caused by the transition resulted in an acute economic downturn, which among other things brought about a significant decrease in funding for the public sector, including nature conservation (Elie and Coumel, 2013; Jancar-Webster, 1998). These economic hardships were particularly felt in the remote rural regions where many protected areas are located (Elie and Coumel, 2013). In order to mitigate these negative effects, Poland early on established the Fund for Environmental Protection and Water Management (the Environmental Fund), formed from "green" taxes and effectively used for funding various fields of environmental policy, including nature conservation (NFEPaWM, 2017). There was, however, no similar mechanism established in Slovakia. Nonetheless, accession to the EU together with major policy reform (Natura 2000) created various funding opportunities for nature conservation in the region (see Fig. 2 and 3). These instruments (e.g. the EU PHARE, LIFE+), which aimed to support conservation, strengthen environmental institutions, build capacity, were accessible not only to state authorities but also to municipalities, NGOs and others (Carmin, 2010; Kolk and van der Weij, 1998). These historic changes, while providing the general context, resulted in different developments in the parks studied in this paper.

4.2. Resources

The different reasons for the establishment of the parks influenced infrastructure development, resources and visibility. The territory of Bieszczady became part of Poland after the Second World War. The area was the scene of fierce resistance against Soviet domination and the Socialist regime by the local population of Ukrainian origin that continued several years after the end of the war (Winnicki and Zemanek,

2009). To halt that resistance, the local population was resettled in other parts of the country. Eventually, the area was declared a no-entry zone and completely depopulated (BdNP (a)). This allowed Bieszczady to regain its “wilderness” characteristics following several years of decreased human pressure (BdNP (a); UNEP-GRID). In addition, a significant proportion of old-growth beech forest was preserved on both sides of the Polish/Slovak border (Solár et al., 2014; Winnicki and Zemanek, 2009). Furthermore, the area of the Bieszczady/Poloniny parks represented the eastern-most region of both Poland and Czechoslovakia, nearing the heavily guarded border with the Soviet Union. The combination of these ecological and socio-political factors created conditions for establishing the Poloniny/Bieszczady national parks to protect these remote areas and their “wild” nature, with limited tourist infrastructure in place. By contrast, the picturesque and mosaic landscapes of the Pieniny were attractive to tourism and later became well linked to urban centres, with several large accommodation and *sanatorium* facilities in place (Danko, 2008). Moreover, the local *Gorały* population managed to preserve their culture and tradition, especially in Poland. Thus, under Socialism, the Pieniny became a major tourist destination for working-class citizens seeking recreation (PPN (a); (c)). The established tourist infrastructure and local traditions continue to support the popularity of this area among tourists to date (Zawilińska and Mika, 2013).

The economic hardship of the transition period dealt a severe blow to these parks and the surrounding municipalities – a fact uniformly acknowledged by most of interviewees in both Poland and Slovakia. However, evaluation of the scope and influence of this economic hardship on nature conservation varied greatly between the two countries. In Poland, park employees specifically mentioned the importance of the Environmental Fund for supplementing parks’ annual budget and providing support for conservation (BdNP (a); UNEP-GRID). For instance, one interviewee remarked:

...if the government had not created the Environmental Fund, there would not be nature conservation in Poland today (UNEP-GRID).

In addition, the Polish parks collect entrance fees and receive income from merchandise, and this relatively stable funding has allowed them to retain their staff and maintain infrastructure (Table 1). Currently, the key area lacking funding is infrastructure development, which would improve the parks’ tourism management capacity, as according to the park authorities the number of visitors is increasing (BdNP (a); PPN (c)). This relatively stable funding situation nevertheless creates certain tensions between the park administration and other local actors (e.g. municipalities), who claim that the situation is unjust because nature conservation is prioritised and municipalities do not acquire benefits from it (Lutowska (a)).

By contrast, Slovak NPs are mainly funded from the state budget and have a rather modest staffing capacity (Table 1). Indeed, several interviewees mentioned that the resource shortage (both financial and human) was acute, preventing engagement with landowners and implementation of some urgent measures (SNC (c); PNP (a); PIENAP (a)). One interviewee described this in the following way:

As it is now, we [the park administration] simply cannot engage with all the landowners and ensure they comply with conservation measures. . . We cannot do everything ourselves, as we have neither management rights nor human or other resources. (PNP (b))

Furthermore, income generation from alternative sources, such as entrance fees, is unfeasible due to the relatively poor tourist infrastructure in most parks (SNC (c)). Besides, Slovak law states that free entrance to the parks is a citizens’ right (SNC (c)).

The representatives from the Polish and Slovak parks somewhat similarly described the opportunities and shortcomings of EU and other international funding (e.g. Swiss and Norwegian cooperation). Both the Polish and Slovak park employees acknowledged the importance of these sources, especially for strategic infrastructure development, implementation of Natura 2000 and international cooperation (BdNP (a),

PNP (a); PIENAP (a); PPN (c)). The representatives from the Slovak parks acknowledged such funding, which often meant that they had to adjust their priorities to fit its requirements (PNP (a); PIENAP (a)). These conservation professionals from both countries mentioned that the complex application and reporting procedures for these funding sources created an additional administrative burden that they needed to bear with already limited human resources (PNP (a); PIENAP (a); PPN (c)). A Bieszczady park representative put it simply:

... it is way too much work for us and not enough people speak English to do it... We now spend more time behind the desk than in the field, and it should not be so (BdNP (a)).

Availability of human and financial resources undoubtedly constitutes an important basis for the management capacities of parks and is tightly linked to governance frameworks.

4.3. Governance

In Poland, in contrast to Slovakia, the current legal framework supports the strong institutional capacity of national parks. In Poland, park administrations have direct authority to perform the required conservation activities and tourism management on state-owned land. Furthermore, the park authorities play a supervisory role in municipal spatial planning within NP borders (Sejm, 2004). The management capacities of the parks, enabled by the legal framework, are thus largely dependent on the land tenure within the park area. In turn, that tenure is linked to the history of the establishment of the parks, as described above. In Bieszczady NP, the state owns 96% of the park territory, meaning the park administration directly manages this land (BdNP (a)). In Pieniny, however, the state owns and manages around half of the park territory – the remainder being privately owned, with the owners responsible for implementing conservation measures (PPN (a)). Unsurprisingly, the representatives from the two parks evaluated the effects of the existing governance framework differently. For instance, two Bieszczady park representatives mentioned that the current governance framework enabled effective conservation:

[P]olicy structures are sufficient for the conservation of nature in Bieszczady. (BdNP (a))

[W]e conduct several wildlife monitoring programmes, and we know species populations are in a good state; the park performs well. (BdNP (c))

By contrast, the representatives of the Polish Pieniny park felt less certain about the strengths of the existing governance framework, especially in relation to conservation on privately owned land:

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

The park administration thus sees the transfer of land to state ownership through purchases as the best way to ensure effective implementation (PPN (b)). Indeed, they enjoy a priority right to purchase this land when plots are for sale, using state subsidies and park revenues (PPN (c)). The Pieniny park representatives were also concerned about the increasing emphasis on the economic development of the area. Thus far, appeals against various controversial development projects have been successful, but the park representatives were uncertain whether such a situation would prevail or whether conservation measures would be relaxed in the future (PPN (b); (c)). These differences in the evaluation of the existing governance framework in Poland were reflected in the answers of other local interviewees. Thus, in Bieszczady NP, local actors acknowledged the strong, even dominant, position of the park administration over not only nature conservation

but also local development. Whereas, in Pieniny, different local groups mentioned the NP administration as a partner with whom they cooperated to a greater or lesser degree, depending on their competencies and interests.

In Slovakia, the park administration *de facto* manages only strictly protected reserves within the park (PNP (a)); (Národná rada, 2002), while other management bodies exist for parks' natural resources, such as forestry, agricultural land, and water (PNP (b)). For example, a Poloniny park representative noted:

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

According to his colleague from Pieniny NP, this negatively affected conservation:

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

A representative of the Poloniny park administration summed up the current role of NP administrations as “campaigning for nature conservation, rather than implementing policies” (PNP (a)). For example, in the Slovak Pieniny NP, the administration directly manages only strictly protected reserves, which account for just 7% of territory (PIENAP (a)). The land in the park is also used for agriculture, and three private farms operate in the area (PIENAP (a); Agrofirma 1). Moreover, in Poloniny NP, even though around half of the territory belongs to the state (Table 1), the park directly manages only a small fraction of the land (approx. 9%) (PNP (a)). The large forested areas of Poloniny NP can be harvested and are managed by the State Forest Enterprise or private owners (PNP (b)). Poloniny NP is also important for the supply of drinking water to the Presov Region in Slovakia. Thus, the State Water Enterprise manages the Starina reservoir, located in the park (PNP (a)). Concerning privately owned land, the representatives of both park administrations mentioned that their ideal strategy would be to buy this land, since private owners were rarely motivated to implement the necessary conservation measures. However, they also stated that the park administrations lacked the financial resources to purchase this land (PIENAP (a); PNP (a)). These complex governance arrangements seem to result in a greater role for individuals and personal connections, and in a dependence on the willingness to cooperate of all the actors involved. Thus, despite great efforts from both park administrations to coordinate their activities with those of the State Forest Enterprise no significant progress has been achieved.

All four parks became part of the Natura 2000 network and thus engaged in the adapting to changes created by Europeanisation. In Poland, management responsibilities over Natura 2000 sites within the borders of national parks were assigned to their administrations (Grodzinska-Jurczak and Cent, 2011). By contrast, in Slovakia, Natura 2000 was translated into levels of protection under national legislation (Sarvašová et al., 2013). Despite these differences, the first thing mentioned by all park representatives while talking about Natura 2000 was the administrative burden it created. The statement of one Polish park representative summarised these views:

[F]or my work, it is like double activities that 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's Annual Action Plan. The areas are almost identical, the activities are mostly the same, but it is still two different documents. (BdNP (a))

The changes introduced by Natura 2000 have most profoundly affected conservation on privately owned land, increasing the management responsibilities of its owners. The representatives from both the

Slovak and Polish Pieniny parks particularly noticed such effects. For instance, a Polish Pieniny representative mentioned that negotiations with landowners had taken “a difficult route” (PPN (b)), and a local entrepreneur linked these complications with the perceived development restrictions imposed by Natura 2000:

Natura 2000 is seen as a bottleneck for local development, especially by the local authorities, since it is impossible to have small factories, ski resorts, etc., here. (Local entrepreneur)

The park representatives agreed that the new Natura 2000 measures for private landowners came with limited additional economic or other implementation incentives (PNP (a); PIENAP (a)). In both countries, Natura 2000 has thus far failed to provide sufficient economic compensation or other ways to motivate private owners towards more sustainable land and resource management.

4.4. Community

Conflicts between local landowners and other citizens and the park administrations over the designation and implementation of Natura 2000 can, to some extent, be seen as a manifestation of long-lasting tensions. Under Socialism, both the Polish and Czechoslovak states interfered in local lives with unilateral decisions over the development of these areas, which seem to create a conflict that is to date not healed. The clash between citizens and state persistently re-appeared in the various stories of local actors. For instance, the depopulation of the Polish Bieszczady area enabled the state to unilaterally decide the fate of this territory. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the area was reopened for settlement, as it was important to harvest timber from the forests, which had overrun former agricultural areas. Forestry and, later, conservation thus became the two major sectors in the Polish Bieszczady Mountains (UNEP-GRID; BdNP (a)). From the accounts of local citizens, this resulted in an institutional domination of conservation institutions that still persists today:

[T]he park is and has always been a country in a 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))

Of the four areas, three had been subject to large-scale Socialist projects that had heavily affected the local population. The Slovak Pieniny area had become the target of collectivisation, and many local citizens had lost land possessed for generations (PIENAP (a)). In the Polish Pieniny, the inhabitants mentioned a dam, which had been constructed against the will of local citizens and had significantly transformed the surroundings and river ecosystem (Raftsmen Association). Moreover, in the Slovak Poloniny region, the Czechoslovak government had decided to construct a water reservoir for which more than 3000 villagers had been evicted from their homes. These events continue to generate bitter feelings among local citizens today:

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

The harsh economic transition of the 1990s, which led to even fewer employment opportunities, forced many to migrate away from the area (with the exception of the Polish Pieniny). The Polish Pieniny NP is the only park where revenue generated from tourism appears to be sufficient to support local economies. However, local citizens in Slovakia and Poland alike see nature conservation as a major obstacle to state or private investment in the respective areas:

[T]he well-being of the 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 nature, and they have money for this, but we do not. (Lutowiska (a))

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 socioeconomic development promised by Natura 2000 in the form of tourism and other local development projects seems to have stagnated. Compensation from Natura 2000, in turn, has proved difficult to access and relatively small in value. According to a Slovak State Nature Conservancy representative:

People feel like the state cheated them again by promising compensation that not everyone can get (SNC (a)).

The inclusion aspect of the Natura 2000 designation process, which involved wide-reaching public consultation with local citizens, also remained limited in its effects. In both countries, the most common criticism was that consultations relied on technical information from experts, while the opinions of local citizens were ignored, and that the state was not prepared to retreat from its original plans. In turn, the representatives of park administrations mentioned that they were under top-down pressure to provide final decisions on time, since their respective governments needed to report to the EU (BdNP (a); PNP (a); PIENAP (a), PPN(c)). However, the consultations raised awareness within the park administrations of the existing local stakes and demonstrated the capacity of private 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)).

At the same time, local citizens from various occupations expressed a keen awareness of the areas' natural habitats, referring to "beautiful and unique local nature", "fantastic landscapes" and "breath-taking views combined with peace and quiet" (Ulic; Local Entrepreneur; Guesthouse). Moreover, even the fiercest critics of the local park administrations acknowledged their role in preserving valuable natural and rural landscapes (Lutowiska (a); NGO6, SK). One local Slovak entrepreneur mentioned that it was good for them to work together with the park administrations:

[I]t 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)

Both Slovak parks and the Polish Pieniny NP specifically mentioned the importance of cooperation with other local organizations and local communities. By contrast, a representative from Bieszczady NP stated:

... we do not have many projects together with other organizations, and I am not so sure we are actually interested (BdNP (c)).

In turn, the representatives of the local municipality mentioned that the park was closed "like an island" and acted as a "state within a state" (Lutowiska (a); (b)). In the Polish Pieniny, the park administration was perceived as more open, with key disagreements concerning the development of tourism (Szczaownica). For the Slovak park administrations, the establishment of local cooperation seemed to be a way to overcome their modest internal capacity and access funding unavailable to state authorities. This also created more positive attitudes towards cooperation from the local community side:

[C]ooperation with the national park administration works well. We act as partners in some projects; we also work with the park partner NGO, Cemerica, and every year do some tourism development projects together... I think there is more potential for cooperation

there. (Ulic)

Overall, the history of injustice and the difficult socioeconomic situation have contributed to local citizens' distrust of the park administrations. In turn, a marked difference exists between the park administrations over the importance of establishing a transparent and mutually beneficial local partnership. In general, local relations seem to be the contextual factors that are changing at the slowest pace compared to resources and governance.

5. Discussion

5.1. Push and pull factors at play

The almost century-long history of PAs in Poland and Slovakia provides an apt illustration of how institutional path dependence and policy changes shape the management capacities of PAs, or, in other words, how pull and push factors interplay. Despite the shortcomings of the Socialist regimes, the designation of the territories examined in this study as protected areas provided tangible restrictions on the economic use of land and enabled the preservation of diverse habitats. The institutional foundations established during Socialism still seem to partially act as a reference point for the park administrations when evaluating their performance, largely limiting their vision of how an effective conservation model operates to institutional domination and full control over protected land. As historical institutionalism would suggest (Pierson, 2000), even such drastic changes as land reform in Slovakia or policy reform of Natura 2000 failed to lead to a break with the past. The diversification of land ownership and management of natural resources in the Slovak NPs in fact weakened the institutional and resource capacities of nature conservation authorities. However, the national park administrations remained the primary public institution tasked with conservation responsibilities. Moreover, other public and private land and resource managers showed little appetite to intervene and fully implement the required conservation measures. The examples of the Slovak NPs illustrate well the contradiction between conservation objectives and the means available to national parks to deliver them – a problem which seems common throughout the Slovak protected-area system (Klůvanková-Oravská and Chobotová, 2006; Meessen et al., 2015; Sarvašová et al., 2013; Švajda, 2008). The lack of coordination between different natural resource management and conservation plans, the absence of supervisory rights and the shortage of human and financial resources represent the key constraints for the country's protected area system. In such a situation, it is perhaps unsurprising that the previous conservation model still acts as a reference point, since the current model provides limited means for cooperation among the various public and private managers of the land and ultimately leads to the diminishing conservation of valuable habitats and species.

In comparison, the Polish nature conservation system has been subject to gradual rather than drastic change. The initial transition challenges were mostly related to a lack of human and financial resources, which, however, was relatively successfully mitigated by the diversification of funding sources. As demonstrated by the cases in this study, the current governance framework, despite providing relatively strong institutional authority to the Polish national parks, seems to reinforce previous conservation visions, to a certain degree, and produces different outcomes at the local level. First, tensions arising from the management of private land inside the national park may signal a lack of mechanisms for promoting systematic stakeholder involvement to help balance various interests. Second, the increasing demands for investment in tourism as means of supporting rural socioeconomic development raise concerns over the robustness of conservation measures in the face of economic interests. Previous research has demonstrated a similar development in the Białowieża NP, where, despite its international protection status (UNESCO World Heritage site and

Natura 2000) and numerous public protests, the government approved controversial plans for timber harvesting (Logmani et al., 2017; Niedziałkowski et al., 2012; Niedziałkowski et al., 2014).

In both countries, the major pull factor in transitioning to a more cooperative conservation model lies in the lack of credible experience with private land stewardship, due to long traditions of collective ownership and state management, which constrain the management options envisaged for the protected land. Currently, in national parks with a significant share of privately owned land, the park administrations see the purchase of such land as their preferred long-term management strategy. Indeed, many new owners in post-socialist countries have limited means and knowledge of land management due to their lack of previous experience or tacit inherited knowledge (Palang et al., 2006). Moreover, the relatively small economic returns from existing compensation schemes and the limitations existing conservation measures impose on other land management options constrain their enthusiasm to learn. Furthermore, neither Polish nor Slovak governments have undertaken systematic attempts to help private landowners improve their skills in land management in protected areas.

From a comparative perspective, the analysis of local processes provided interesting insights into the interplay between path dependence and policy change. The Poloniny/Bieszczady parks entered the path of socio-economic marginalisation due to their remote border location, where the borders were sealed and the Socialist governments controlled the movement of people due to strategic importance of these territories. The Pieniny Mountains, in turn, became a bustling tourist hub due to Socialist-style investment and support of tourism. Arguably, this resulted in numerous large and small-scale tourist businesses and a certain degree of entrepreneurial initiative, from which the area continues to profit.

A neglect of local interests and an atmosphere of injustice and distrust appeared to be common in all four locations, despite the different status of the parks. In those parks where the administration retained most of the features of top-down decision-making and strong management capacities (particularly Bieszczady NP), relations between the administration and local stakeholders appear to be stagnating. In the Slovak parks, lack of capacity and the current funding structure are driving the park administrations to build local partnerships to overcome existing resource constraints. Arguably, such a situation makes park administrations more dependent on the role of individuals (e.g. park directors) and personal connections. At the same time, these partnerships can potentially facilitate the process of trust-building between the park administrations and local citizens and provide grounds for more collaborative conservation approaches (Meessen et al., 2015; Švajda, 2008).

5.2. Mismatch of objectives between Natura 2000 and national parks

Relations with the local community proved difficult to change, especially since the first attempt to account for local interests through public consultations (Natura 2000 designation) became a symbolic rather than genuine effort. Natura 2000 seemingly failed to build significant trust between nature conservation authorities and local citizens in any of the cases and therefore provided only limited “push” effects for a new conservation vision. Numerous studies have analysed different aspects of participation during the introduction of Natura 2000 in Poland and Slovakia (Grodzinska-Jurczak and Cent, 2011; Kluvankova-Oravska and Chobotova, 2010; Niedziałkowski et al., 2012; Sarvašová et al., 2013). The many problems that have been identified include limited experience with such participatory approaches, rushed transposition of the necessary provisions, power disparities among different stakeholders, and the technical shortcomings of the process (Manolache et al., 2018; Niedziałkowski et al., 2016; Rauschmayer et al., 2009; Sotirov et al., 2015; Szabo et al., 2008). This study did not aim to analyse systematically the local experience with public consultation; rather, it strove to understand whether this experience helped

to build local partnerships and contribute to a more open conservation model. However, the problems listed above seem also to apply to the cases examined in this paper. In addition, the findings demonstrated a lack of policy ownership on the ground. Neither park administrations, which saw Natura 2000 as an additional bureaucratic burden, nor local stakeholders, who saw Natura 2000 as a further constraint for local development, wished to accept change. This led to the symbolic acceptance of change but the implementation of little or no concrete measures. Natura 2000 seemingly failed to facilitate a paradigmatic shift or make a significant contribution to the building of trust and transparent relationships between the park and local communities.

The emphasis placed on the socioeconomic potential of Natura 2000, such as increased revenue from tourism, infrastructure development and additional compensation, was ill-suited to existing practices inside the national parks investigated in this study. In these parks, many types of economic activity are forbidden or limited, and some strictly protected areas are closed to any form of potential disturbance, including tourism. Arguably, Natura 2000's idea of balancing nature conservation with concerns over the long-term socio-economic development of rural areas was thus incompatible with the policies of these parks. Thus, from the start, Natura 2000 had limited potential to provide its much vaunted alternatives. Moreover, both researchers and practitioners increasingly recognise that protected areas alone are insufficient to ensure effective long-term biodiversity conservation, due to the increasing complexity of environmental problems and climate change (Watson et al., 2014, Child 2004). Instead, wide-scale landscape changes could be better addressed by alternative conservation strategies that seek ways to work together with private owners to find multi-functional, adaptive uses for protected areas and the surrounding rural landscapes (Estrada-Carmona et al., 2014; Fürst et al., 2013; Kamal and Grodzinska-Jurczak, 2014). Natura 2000 imposes somewhat similar directions for the development of nature conservation policies throughout the EU. However, as the cases in this study demonstrate better adjustment to the local context, flexibility and cooperation among all the involved stakeholders are needed to deliver the desired change. Moreover, the momentum initiated first by transition and then Europeanisation seemingly failed to provide a strong enough push and sufficient resources for national parks to become a leading force in delivering change. Therefore, these changes clashed with the existing “pull” factors present in the form of institutions and experiences. Despite 20 years of travel along the path of change, old patterns seemed to re-emerge in local processes, policies and institutions – patterns that can at least partially explain the current constraints on the implementation of Natura 2000. The present study's scrutiny of the two transboundary park areas, characterised by similar ecosystem features, but demonstrating considerable differences in nature conservation outcomes, reveals the dependence of such outcomes on national and local context. This finding supports the argument suggested by Hockings and Phillips (1999) that the management capacities of PAs – capacities that are essential for delivering both the required conservation measures and other functions of PAs – are largely shaped by a combination of contextual factors.

6. Conclusion

This article contributes to the larger debate on the factors promoting or hindering the ability of protected areas to ensure long-term biodiversity conservation. The findings demonstrate that the local management capacities of PAs authorities in Poland and Slovakia are part of the historical and political development of these countries. Such developments, occurring overtime, both shape and are shaped by the local context, since local history and relations are interwoven into the process. In nature conservation, path dependence is currently most clearly present in relation to land management and ownership, envisioned conservation model and the governing mode, and lack of trust towards authorities. In particular, local communities' mistrust of park

authorities persists despite the changed rhetoric and attempts to include local interests. The economic downturn of the transition, even though felt differently in the attractive for tourism Pieniny compared to the remote Poloniny/Bieszczady area, nonetheless increased resentment in both areas towards limitations on use options of natural resources imposed by nature conservation.

Policy changes associated with Europeanisation introduced a particular conceptual approach to nature conservation policy, based on sustainability principles that balance ecological, economic and social benefits. This approach, however, seemed ill-suited to the diverse local contexts around the studied parks and failed to bring radical change to either the working methods of the park administrations or the mode of decision-making. The experience with public consultation demonstrated that, in order to promote participatory decision-making, systematic long-term actions are necessary. On a positive note, this experience made park administrations reflect on the importance of such mechanisms and on further needs for constant dialogue and the inclusion of local citizens in decision-making. Moreover, the parks' Natura 2000 designation contributed to their international visibility and provided additional funding channels.

Overall, the range of conservation and socio-economic benefits provided by particular protected areas is best understood within a broader context. For example, the cases examined in the present study (particularly those in Poland) demonstrate that the same governance framework can result in different outcomes once it is combined with other local factors. In this light, infrastructure and resources, often seen as key factors in the performance of protected areas around the world (Watson et al., 2014), are often insufficient to explain variations in performance. Lastly, without finding ways to work together with local communities and address their concerns over future socio-economic development, protected areas risk failing to deliver the socio-economic benefits expected of them. The findings of this study not only shed light on the specific cases under investigation but also help explain setbacks in the adoption of nature conservation models by new EU Member States with a history of Socialism. In Central Eastern Europe, robust changes are likely to emerge from systematic efforts, supported by adequate resources, to transform the practices and behaviour that shape local context; symbolic change to meet regulatory demands is simply not enough.

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P. 6 Most of the interviews were conducted during three field trips in autumn 2013 and spring and autumn 2014 within the framework of the author's PhD project "Parks, Policies and People: Nature Conservation Governance in Post-Socialist EU Countries" (Yakusheva, 2017)

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Appendix A

Interview guidelines

All interviews were built upon the semi-structured strategy, where the main topics for each target interview group were predetermined, however, with no particular set of questions. This strategy allowed setting the context of the interviews and provided uniformity and

comparability of the answers, but left the space for an interviewee to narrate and touch upon the most important topics according to her/him. This, in turn, helped to open up additional sides of the research problem, allowing to utilize respondents' knowledge and see them as informants rather than interviewees.

Thus, primary target group for the interviews became *actors directly involved in the park management*. This group was understood broadly as a circle of actors involved in day-to-day management of the park and included park administrations, and other authorities directly dealing with park related activities. Three topics of the special interest were discussed with this group:

- 1 Existing policy frameworks. Namely, conservation projects current and past, relevant national policy provisions, critical assessments from practitioner point of view of existing policy framework, including strengths and weaknesses, influence of Natura 2000;
- 2 Mechanisms of implementation and relations among different policies, including financing;
- 3 Relations with other stakeholders, such as other state institutions, local stakeholders (e.g. environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs), resource users, active citizens), relevant external stakeholders (e.g. international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), development agencies, international networks).

Another group of local interviewees was broadly defined as *involved groups* (local business, resource users, active citizens, local NGOs etc.).

Topics:

Knowledge of park projects, limits/opportunities from the park;

- 1 Involvement in nature conservation policy, e.g. workshops, events, direct involvement in nature conservation projects etc.;
- 2 In case, the topic of the influence of the EU policy on local processes was not touched, the interviewer explicitly brought up relevant questions.

Finally, the representatives of the *municipal and regional authorities* were interviewed. The range of covered topics and interview strategy was similar to the one of the actors directly involved in the park management. Additionally, more policy-oriented topics were covered:

- 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.)

The research also benefited from the interviews with representatives of *national nature conservation authorities, as well as with the relevant EU officials*, with questions focused on various policy related issues relevant for nature conservation policy.

Finally, I conducted interviews with *key experts* on the area of nature conservation policy in the EU and in the Carpathian countries in particular (including international and national ENGOs, staff of international organizations and independent experts). These interviews provided a broader context for the topic.

Topics:

- 1 Potentials and pitfalls of the EU policy for nature conservation and its adoption in Poland and Slovakia;
- 2 Specificity of the Carpathian countries;

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