



EXPLORING THE DETERMINANTS OF LOCAL PEOPLE'S ATTITUDE TOWARDS NATIONAL PARKS IN POLAND

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Abstract

The article examines the attitudes of local communities towards national parks in Poland. Specifically, it aims to recognize the main factors determining the residents' individual attitudes towards the Babia Góra National Park (Polish Carpathian Mts). The analysis is based on the results of questionnaire surveys carried out among the residents of the municipalities within which the park is located. Research results show that individual attitudes of residents towards national parks are determined by: a) the perception of the park's managing entity, b) the level of access to natural resources covered by legal protection, and c) a subjectively assessed balance of gains and losses related to the park's impact on the lives of individuals and the local economy. The analysis concluded, inter alia, that not all factors determining the residents' attitudes and opinions create the potential for social conflict. Moreover, the entities managing national parks should be more involved in creating development opportunities for local communities. This issue should also be more widely reflected in nature conservation policy in Poland.

Key words

National park, social attitudes, local development, the Babia Góra region, Poland

RESEARCH PROBLEM

In the management of environmentally valuable areas, social participation plays an increasingly important role. In the case of protected areas, a co-management model based on the permanent cooperation between park management and local communities, which should lead to a synthesis of nature conservation goals with socio-economic ones, is recommended. The model assumes that the development of cooperation will lead to mutual trust and a search for new solutions conducive to preventing or mitigating social conflicts around the issue of nature conservation. The interactive model of national park management should lead to increased

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public support for activities undertaken by these and other land-based forms of nature conservation (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2004, 2013; Dudley 2013; Mika et al. 2015; Królikowska 2007; Phillips 2003).

In Central European countries, regulations enabling social participation in decision making processes concerning protected areas accompany broader systemic changes. Entities managing these areas recognize the necessity of taking into account social interest in the activities they undertake and are implementing participatory methods on an increasing scale; they open up to discussion and strive to reach compromises (Ginalski 2008; Švajda 2010). Unfortunately, building positive relations with residents often results in considerable difficulties stemming from social conflicts around national parks that have accumulated in previous decades, conflicts of interest and a lack of mutual trust (Domański and Partyka 1992; Gliński 2001; Hibszer 2013; Królikowska 2007; Mika and Zawilińska 2015).

Currently, scholars extensively discuss the social aspects related to the administration of protected areas. Many authors emphasize that the attitude of local communities towards national parks is crucial for the proper functioning of these areas and the successful implementation of their conservation objectives (Borrini-Feyerabend et al. 2004; Törn et al. 2007; Wells et al. 1992). However, the attitudes of the inhabitants towards parks are conditioned by the local context: the historical, geographical, cultural and political conditions in which these forms of protection function (i.e. Alexander 2000; Baral and Heinen 2007; Silori 2007; Vodouhe et al. 2010; Walpole and Goodwin 2001). In each case, the context sets out an exceptional and unique mosaic of conditions in which today's park management entities are obliged to build socially expected relations with the local population, the authorities, and the business sphere. Additionally, in Poland, the attitude of local communities towards national parks is largely conditioned by the way these areas were established in the 20th century through top-down administrative decisions that failed to take residents' voices into account. Older generations still recall the difficult relationship between residents and park authorities and a subjective sense of wrongdoing associated with the government's decision to place private lands under legal protection (Grabowski and Marmuszewski 1985; Osiniak et al. 1993; Górecki et al. 1998; Terlecka and Górecki 1998).

PURPOSE AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of the study is to identify the main factors shaping the attitudes of local communities towards the Babia Góra National Park located in the Polish Carpathians. The analysis was based on the results of questionnaire surveys carried out in 2015 on a sample of $n = 152$ residents of municipalities within the park borders – Jabłonka, Lipnica Wielka and Zawoja. The selection of the sample was based



on a quota; the aim was to obtain a composition of respondents similar to that of residents in terms of age and gender. The questionnaire contained a set of 22 questions (variables) in the form of statements to which the respondents had to respond using the Likert scale – a five- and four-level scale (the so-called forced selection scale). For the selected group of variables, exploratory factor analysis was carried out using promax rotation in order to identify the main components indicating the determinants of social attitudes towards the park. In addition, the respondents evaluated selected phenomena (12 variables) which have a direct or indirect connection with the presence and operation of the Babia Góra National Park in the local system. This assessment consisted in the subjective qualification of these phenomena as “advantageous” or “unfavourable” from the point of view of the social situation and local development. The data sets presenting the analysed problems (variables) are reproduced in tables: 2, 3 and 4.

Previous studies on the attitude of the local population towards the Babia Góra National Park (Mika et al. 2015) indicate that people who live further away from its borders, people in “younger” age groups, individuals with a higher level of education, and those who do not own private land within the conservancy borders are more favourable towards the park. People who maintain a generally more positive attitude towards the park more often than others believe that the Babia Góra National Park has a positive impact on the economic situation of the region. They perceive an economic benefit in tourist spending and the park as an institution – an employer and a contractor (Mika and Zawilińska 2016; Mika et al. 2016). The community also recognizes and appreciates the influence of the park on the publicization of the town.

Despite a relatively good understanding of the declared attitude of the local population towards this park, the scholarly literature lacks a study that presents the factors determining the real attitude of the inhabitants to the Babia Góra National Park in an analytical, multithreaded, and critical manner.

RESULTS

Characteristics of survey respondents

The study involved people over the age of 15. The identity of the respondents in terms of their place of residence, age and education level are presented in table 1. The respondents were mostly women (58.5%). Most often they had secondary (30.3%) or vocational (28.9%) education. Among respondents with higher education (21.8% of respondents), the largest group (45%) were people aged 26-35. Interviewees and their immediate family members usually (90%) were not professionally associated with Babia Góra National Park. On the other hand, work related to tourist service was performed by 9.2% of respondents.



Table 1 Demographic characteristics of respondents and their place of residence

Gender		Education	
Male	41,5 %	Higher education	21,8 %
Female	58,5 %	Secondary school	30,3 %
		Vocational degree	28,9 %
		Primary school	19,0 %
Age		Municipality	
15–25	19,1 %	Jabłonka	17,6 %
26–35	16,9 %	Lipnica Wielka	38,0 %
36–45	19,0 %	Zawoja	44,4 %
46–60	23,2 %		
>60	21,8 %		

Source: own research.

The social attitude towards nature conservation

The analysis sought to gauge the attitudes of locals towards the Babia Góra National Park by identifying the respondents' broader attitude to nature protection. According to the distribution of answers in table 2, the vast majority of respondents declared a positive attitude to the idea of nature conservation and the role played by national parks in this endeavour. They nearly fully supported (95%) the necessity of environmental education for the younger generation. However, the assertion that "even more protected areas should be created in Poland" raised some concern. 58.9% of respondents supported such a proposal. Almost 70% of investigated said

Table 2 Selected opinions of respondents on the subject of nature conservation

Variable	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither, nor	Disagree	Strongly disagree
	[%]				
<i>We must protect nature for future generations</i>	58,5	40,1	0	0	1,4
<i>National parks play an important role in nature conservation in Poland</i>	48,6	44,4	3,5	2,1	1,4
<i>Even more protected areas should be created in Poland</i>	24,1	34,8	18,4	17,0	5,7
<i>The younger generation should know more about the need to protect nature</i>	53,8	41,2	2,3	2,7	0
<i>I think I know enough about the way national parks in Poland function</i>	16,3	53,2	9,9	17,1	3,5
<i>I would like to know more about how national parks can support the local economy and residents</i>	22,5	54,2	9,9	12,0	1,4

Source: own research.



they knew enough about the way national parks operate in Poland and just over three quarters of them would like to know more about how national parks can support the local economy and residents (table 2).

The attitude of the inhabitants towards Babia Góra National Park

In light of the survey results, an image of strong functional dependencies between the Babia Góra National Park and communities in the municipalities related administratively with this park emerged. In the study, as many as 84.5% of respondents agreed with the statement that the Babia Góra National Park affects the lives of the residents of their village and 59.8% admitted that the presence of this park affects their lives – directly or indirectly. Although most respondents (87.3%) declared that they were satisfied with the existence of a national park in their village, only 34.8% would accept extending its borders.

Searching for factors determining the population's relationship with the national park in the local system, the researchers conducted an exploratory factor analysis of variables presented in the form of statements that describe the actual or potential relations of the park with its spatial and social surroundings. The list of variables and average values of grades calculated from the four-level Likert scale and their standard deviations appear in table 3. Values of Kaisera-Mayer-Olkin (0.721) and Bartlett's sphericity tests ($\chi^2 = 489.1$, $p < 0.000$) justify a factor analysis. Using the principal component analysis with promax rotation, five factors were delineated with eigenvalue above 1 (table 3). These factors explain 61.9% of the total variance of variables.

Determinants that differentiate the attitudes of residents towards the Babia Góra National Park can be summarized in the following categories: "the involvement of the park management board in local affairs" (Factor 1), "the subjective experience of the park's impact on the life of an individual and the social group" (Factor 2), "the relationship between the quality of life and the values of nature" (Factor 3), "access to natural resources" (Factor 4) and "the perceived balance of gains and losses" (Factor 5).

Factor 1 is most strongly correlated with the variables regarding the assessment of the Babia Góra National Park management board as a decision-making entity in local economic matters. The attitude of the inhabitants to the national park is therefore strongly conditioned by the way in which the performance of its managing entity is perceived and assessed. The respondents' opinions indicated that the authorities of their municipalities should be firm towards the Babia Góra management in matters that are a concern to residents. Therefore, residents recognize the role of park management as an important local development actor. The vast majority (80.3%) of respondents supported such a thesis. Interestingly, almost half of the respondents – 45.6% agreed with an even more radical statement that



Table 3 Identified factors, factorial loadings and average values of variables

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3	Factor 4	Factor 5	Arithmetic mean	SD
Factor 1. Involvement of the park management board in local affairs							
<i>Residents should have access to detailed information about the finances of the Babia Góra National Park</i>	,852					2,90	0,84
<i>Residents should be better informed about the activities of the Babia Góra National Park</i>	,758					3,29	0,58
<i>The park management should be even more involved in the affairs of the residents of our village</i>	,683					3,01	0,71
<i>Municipal authorities and residents should have a greater impact on decision made regarding the operation of the Babia Góra National Park</i>	,666					3,23	0,68
Factor 2. Subjective experience of the park's impact on the life of an individual and social group							
<i>The Babia Góra National Park influences the lives of the inhabitants of our village</i>		,915				3,14	0,80
<i>The presence of the Babia Góra National Park affects my life</i>		,821				2,76	0,84
Factor 3. Relationship between the quality of life and the values of nature							
<i>Tourism develops in our village only because of the Babia Góra National Park existence</i>			,802			2,35	0,96
<i>The proximity to nature in Babia Góra National Park is of great importance for the health and well-being of the inhabitants of the town</i>			,709			3,32	0,63
Factor 4. Access to natural resources							
<i>Residents should be allowed to use the natural resources of the park to a greater extent</i>				,861		3,25	0,92
<i>The national park limits the development of our village</i>				,614		2,23	0,84
Factor 5. Perceived balance of gains and losses							
<i>The noise and car traffic associated with tourism are burdensome to me</i>					,778	2,18	0,81
<i>The presence of the national park causes more losses than creates benefits for the residents</i>					,688	2,06	0,78

The table includes variables with factor loads above 0.5; Kaiser-Mayer-Olkin test: 0.721, Bartlett's sphericity test: chi-squared = 489.1, $p < 0.000$, Total Explained Variance = 61.9%.
The arithmetic mean of the 1-4; rating scale:

1 – I strongly disagree, 2 – I rather disagree, 3 – I agree rather, 4 – I strongly agree.

Source: own research.



“the management of the Babia Góra National Park does not take into account the interests of residents at all”, which may indicate a hidden and inexpressible antipathy towards the administrative body among a segment of the local community.

Factor 2 points to the existence of a connection between the attitude of residents to the national park and the individual persons’ beliefs about the actual or potential impact of this national park on their lives and the life of the community to which they belong more broadly.

Factors 3 and 4 relate to social attitudes and the perception of the park through the prism of its protected natural resources. Factor 3 emphasizes the importance of nature preservation as a value defined from the point of view of the quality of the environment of everyday life and the value that, through the development of tourism, creates one of the local foundations of economic growth. In turn, factor 4 indicates the importance of conflict in the local economy, resulting from the legal restrictions on the residents’ access to resources lying within the park boundaries and the limits placed on economic activity due to nature conservation. As many as 79.6% of the respondents admitted that residents should be allowed to use the natural resources of the park to a greater extent; i.e., for logging, forest undergrowth, the use of meadows, etc. In contrast, 31.6% of respondents agreed with the statement: “the national park limits the development of our village.”

Factor 5 seems to be not completely unambiguous. Variables that are highly correlated with it indicate the importance of subjective beliefs and views of respondents regarding the gains or losses (difficulties) that the presence of the national park brings to the local system. The problem of balancing gains and losses is multi-threaded and concerns a wider spectrum of variables than those that express the highest correlation with factor 5. Therefore, this problem requires further analysis and development.

The issue of the subjective perception of gains and losses has been further elaborated in the next research question. Respondents were asked to rate selected issues related to the presence of the national park in their town. The list of the studied variables and their qualifications is presented in table 4. These issues were assessed by respondents in two ways – either as favourable phenomena (positive assessment) or unfavourable or difficult (negative assessment), depending on the respondents’ subjective experiences and views.

The assessment diversity of all the analysed variables clearly indicates the lack of consensus among the local population in matters related to the Babia Góra National Park. Most of the respondents considered the “gains” to be: the proximity of nature, the development of tourism, the opportunity to work in the park and the development of ecological (organic) farming production. Interestingly, respondents positively assessed the peripheral location of their villages in relation to large cities.



Table 4 The respondents' evaluation of selected phenomena related to the presence of the Babia Góra National Park in the local system

Variable	Rating [%]	
	Negative	Positive
The proximity to nature	3	97
Tourism development	3	97
Limitations in obtaining a building permit	83	17
The price increase for building plots (real estate)	54	46
The opportunity to work in the park	6	94
The peripheral location of the village in relation to large cities	18	82
Limitations in economic investments due to nature conservation	75	25
Buying construction plots for recreational purposes by people from cities	27	73
The development of organic (ecological) agricultural production	7	93
Restrictions on changing the qualification of agricultural land for construction plots	80	20
Restrictions on the disposal and access to private land within the boundaries of the national park	81	19
A strong commitment of ecological organizations in matters of rural development	50	50

Source: own research.

All manner of restrictions imposed by the park's presence on the free use of resources were recognized as "disadvantages" (losses, impediments). Legal regulations include, among others, such issues as: changing the qualifications of agricultural land to building plots, obtaining a building permit, disposing of and access to private lands within the national park as well as economic investments. While such negative evaluations could have been expected, it seems surprising that as many as 20-25% of respondents considered these regulations to be "benefits".

Among the analysed variables, the evaluation of three issues clearly divides the studied community. These are: the purchase of building plots (for recreational purposes) by non-village people, the increase in the prices of individual building plots (real estate) and significant interest of environmental organizations in the matters of rural development. Since the 1980s, the areas surrounding the Babia Góra National Park attracted the development of second homes whose owners are mostly residents of the agglomerations lying on the foreland of the Carpathians (agglomeration of Krakow, the Katowice conurbation). Clearly, residents evaluate the buying-up of property and price increases that follow rather ambiguously.

Using the non-parametric *U* Mann-Whitney test, attempts were made to verify whether the assessments of variables in Table 3 and in table 4 differ depending



on the age of the respondents. Two generational groups were compared in the ranges up to and over the age of 35. It became apparent that for the examined issues, there were no significant statistical differences between these age groups. Additionally, the respondents' opinions did not differ depending on gender.

Interestingly, in the case of problematic issues contained in table 4, the level of education did not figure as a variable differentiating classification nor assessment. Thus, since the variables: age, gender and education do not affect the perception of the Babia Góra National Park, one can assume that the highly subjective beliefs of individuals or the particular interests of certain residents' groups account for the presented assessments of the balance of gains and losses stemming from the presence of the park and its impact on the trajectory of local processes.

CONCLUSIONS

Separate factors determining the attitude of the local population towards the Babia Góra National Park indicate three dimensions in which the attitudes of individuals are shaped. The first dimension concerns the perception and attitude of residents towards the park's managing entity, the second refers to the issue of the community's access to resources subject to legal protection the third relates to a subjectively assessed set of benefits and losses (loss, impediments) in connection with the presence of the park and the role it plays in the local economy. These dimensions indicate that the opinions and attitudes of residents are determined by the phenomena, conditions and situations that are related to the park area as well as those that relate to the park's direct and indirect impact on the course of the social and economic processes in its spatial environment. Although the determinants of the attitudes and opinions indicate a specific historic developmental and geographical context of the Babia Góra region, the content of these factors proves universal and can be generalized to other national parks in Poland.

Not every determinant of social attitudes and opinions has the potential for functional and social conflict. Undoubtedly, the conflict of interest between the park's managing entity and some residents as well as local authorities can cause disputes. The basis of this tension is not only the legal restriction of access to the park's resources but also different attitudes towards what constitutes good management (Domański and Partyka 1992). The fact that currently there are no major social conflicts in the Babia Góra region is due to the fact that the direct causative impact of the Babia Góra National Park on the local community is limited, among other things, due to the small size of the park, a small amount of private land within it and limited size of the park's buffer zone. It seems that the indirect impact of this park on its residents' quality of the life due to, among other things, the economic benefits of tourism development and perceived benefits from the proximity of nature and the peripheral location of the region, is more important for the assessment of the gain-loss balance in social perception.



Previous studies indirectly indicate the emergence of a generational change in the social attitudes towards the Babia Góra National Park (Mika et al. 2015; Zawilińska 2016, 2017). Serafin and Zawilińska (2017) and Hibszer (2013) reported similar observations for other national parks. These scholars identify environmental education and cooperation between parks and schools as a potential factor of change. In the context of the factors determining the attitude of the inhabitants to the national park, the following question arises: will the declared attitude of the representatives of the young generation be more favourable to the idea and functioning of the national park if the same people face a conflict of interest with the park? Young people are more accustomed to the existence of legal barriers and limitations in connection with the protection of nature and their attitude is not burdened with the past. However, little is known about how and in what way the attitudes of young people towards national parks or, more broadly, nature conservation is shaped in the process of transferring values between generations, i.e. in families. The relation between the national park and the local community is based, on the one hand, on references to values and their juxtaposition, weighing and contrasting each other and, on the other hand, on balancing benefits and losses, mainly economic ones. One can risk advancing the thesis that only the first of these aspects of the relationship and learned conviction about the superior value of nature conservation affect the described attitudes of the young generation. However, is such a basis for shaping opinions enough when people want to, to a greater extent use natural resources in conditions of legal restrictions? It seems that in the future the real attitude of this social group towards protected areas in this national park will depend on whether its representatives will be able to find and take advantage of developmental alternatives that the national park will offer them in its role as an driver of local development.

The involvement of entities managing national parks in creating developmental opportunities for local communities should be reflected in the policy of nature conservation, which, moreover, is in line with the new paradigm, proposed by the IUCN, defining the way these forms of nature conservancies function. Earlier detailed research in the Babia Góra region clearly showed that there are such spheres of the local economy in which the increase in institutional activity and capital or advisory involvement of national parks would bring additional economic benefits to the inhabitants (Mika et al. 2015). However, achieving such a goal on a larger scale in Polish conditions will not be easy. This requires not only a change in thinking about the function of national parks at the central level but also an institutional reorganization of park managers by extending their objectives of action and equipping human resources with competences in the social sphere, management and politics. It is not certain whether strengthening the role of national parks as actors of local development would improve their relations with local authorities.



There is no doubt, however, that striving to develop mechanisms that will lead to building a relatively lasting support among the local population for the presence and operation of national parks in Poland is an inalienable duty of both the institutions of power and nature conservation institutions.

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