Global Conservation Ideas & Local Reactions:

The Case of a New Proposed National Park in the Făgăraș Mountains, Romania

by © Marie Louise Aastrup

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Abstract

Environmental protection is never a controversy-free endeavor. Conflicts arise over land ownership, use, and access. With the fall of Communism (1947-1989) Romania experienced drastic changes in property rights, land tenures, environmental policy, and management. In the intervening decades, Romania transitioned to a market economy and accessioned to the EU in 2007. Since then a private foundation, *Foundation Conservation Carpathia* (FCC), has put forward a proposal to establish the *Făgăraș Mountains National Park* in Central Romania. Although the national park is yet to be established, FCC has, since 2009, been purchasing land for private protection with the intention of returning these landholdings to the state once a national park has been established.

This raises questions around how people come to think of conservation in certain ways, how different actors understand and frame new conservation initiatives, how lived experiences and histories are shaping conservation perceptions, and what conservation perceptions can reveal about social equity concerns and how can these inform conservation planning. To answer these questions, I employed mixed methods consisting of qualitative data collection (interviews, participant observation, document analysis) and quantitative data collection (a questionnaire). I conducted 56 semi-structured interviews with environmental non-governmental organizations, government officials, local decision-makers, and local community members with various levels of

involvement in the proposed national park. I distributed the questionnaire (n = 644) among local community members in 10 different municipalities. Throughout this dissertation, I show the fruitfulness of using mixed methods to investigate local conservation perceptions.

In this dissertation, I argue that a critical social science perspective can improve conservation planning and deepen our understanding on the human-environment interactions as they pertain to conservation. Local perceptions of the park proposal are not only complex, they are also contradictory, shaped by local experiences and histories, public concerns and anticipations for the future. Chapter Two examines how different actors employ conservation narratives to push different political agendas. Political ecologists have paid extensive attention to protected areas, especially in relation to power, rights, and marginalized peoples. This dissertation draws on political ecology to examine conservation narratives in the context of post-Communism and neoliberalization in Romania. Three chief narratives can be observed pertaining to tourism, restrictions, and deforestation. These narratives are embedded in the history and socio-economic context of the area, but also reveal the agendas of different actors regarding landscape values. Assessing these narratives, this research reveals how actors position themselves and the points of contention among the different actors in the brewing conflict that the national park represents.

In the third chapter, I investigate how social memory forms and informs local perceptions of conservation. I investigate the role of historical context, local

experiences, and social memories in shaping local perceptions of the proposed park. I argue that conservation initiatives should be attentive to, and respectful of, the historical and cultural contexts in which they occur as these will be key in understanding local experiences, livelihoods, and concerns related to the park and eventually successful conservation. In particular, exploring and documenting local experiences and social memories of past and present events deepen our understanding of local realities.

Finally, I illustrate how perceptions research can guide equitable conservation planning (Chapter Four). The ways in which protected areas impact local communities are complex and contextual. In this chapter I investigate local perceptions of the proposed national park to understand the implications of local perceptions for equitable management by comparing two geographical areas in the Făgăraș Mountains: one area, comprised of communities adjacent to an already existing privately protected area (n = 217) in the Făgăraș Mountains, and the other area integrating communities in the Făgăraș Mountains (n = 427) but not adjacent to the privately protected area. I show that contextual factors inform people's perception of the park proposal and that locals in the privately protected areas are slightly more positive that a national park will bring benefits than are locals further away from the privately protected area. Locals in both areas perceived a number of restrictions, especially regarding livelihoods. Understanding local perceptions of proposed protected areas can inform equitable management, as perceptions can reveal spatial differences in

anticipated distribution of benefits, contextual factors that affect trust in management, and barriers for procedural equity.

Keywords

Conflict, Conservation, Equity, National parks, Perceptions, Political ecology, Power, Privately protected area, Protected areas, Romania, Social memory, Trust

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Dedication

To Marinus,
Whose good mood was always contagious

Table of Contents

List of Figures

List of Tables

Appendices

Acronyms

ANOVA – Analysis of Variance

CBD – Convention on Biological Diversity

CAP - *Cooperativa Agricolă de Producţie* (collective farms)

IAS - *Intreprindere Agricola de Stat* (state farms)

ENGO – Environmental Non-Governmental Organization

HD – Human Dimensions of Conservation

IUCN – International Union for the Conservation of Nature

FCC - Foundation Conservation Carpathia

FM – Făgăraș Mountains

FMNP – Făgăraș Mountains National Park

NGO – Non-Governmental Organization

NP – National Park

PA – Protected Area

PPA – Privately Protected Area

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Protected areas encompass a wide range of conservation areas in terms of designation status, landscape type, location, size, and management approaches and objectives. To provide some common language for what is meant by a protected area, the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) provided its first definition and a set of protected area categorizations following a General Assembly in 1994. IUCN has since revised this definition to:

> A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed, through legal or other effective means, to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values (Dudley, 2008, p. 8).

Since the establishment of the first national park in Yellowstone in 1872, a myriad of protected areas, terrestrial as well as marine, have been created under public or private ownership and management. These include a multitude of global, regional, and national protected area schemes such as the IUCN categories spanning from strict wilderness areas to sustainable use protected areas, the UNESCO Man and Biosphere Programme, or regional agreements such as the European Union (EU) wide Natura 2000 program to mention a few.

Following the Second World War, the number of protected areas proliferated (Adams & Hutton, 2007; King, 2010). This “conservation boom” (Neumann, 2015; Zimmerer, 2000) has, in turn, spurred an array of social science research on

protected areas, including: their social impacts (e.g. Büscher & Wolmer, 2007; Neumann, 2001; Oldekop et al., 2015; Pullin et al., 2013; West, Igoe, & Brockington, 2006); the equity implications (e.g. Adams & Moon, 2013; Jones, 2009; Martin et al., 2016; Richmond & Kotowicz, 2015); colonial conservation (e.g. Neumann, 2003); visitor carrying capacity (e.g. Manning, 1999; Needham, Haider, & Rollins, 2016); and the cultural construction of "wilderness" (e.g. Cronon, 1996). For example, Karl Jacoby's *Crime against Nature* (2001) elucidates how Yellowstone National Park intended to produce "nature as prehuman wilderness" (Jacoby, 2001, p. 87) through the removal of Native American presence within the park boundaries, ultimately creating a nature based on "a prior, stateorganized [sic] process of rearranging the countryside, in which native peoples and nature were slotted into distinct categories and separated from one another" (ibid. 87). The idea of "wilderness" as spaces without humans is not unique to Yellowstone but has dominated conservation efforts in North America (e.g. Jacoby, 2001; Spence, 1996) and beyond (Gissibl, Höhler, & Kupper, 2012). Conservation areas today are occasionally still labelled as "wilderness", although local resource uses and users, indigenous peoples, local and traditional ecological knowledge among others, have become more central to conservation planning.

In recent decades, an increasing number of private actors (individual landowners, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), for profit organisations, research institutions) have entered the conservation arena, raising new

challenges in protected area establishment and management (Stolton et al., 2014). Depending on perspectives, these challenges involve the neoliberalisation of conservation (Adams, 2017; Holmes & Cavanagh, 2016; Louder & Bosak, 2019); land ownership and "green grabbing"[1] (Fairhead et al., 2012); mainstreaming privately protected area definitions, securing funding for activities beyond land acquisition, and assessing conservation effectiveness (Stolton et al., 2014).

Beyond parks and protected areas' role in mitigating biodiversity loss, the global conservation agenda has become increasingly concerned with socially inclusive conservation. This is perhaps best exemplified with the opening of the Convention for Biological Diversity (CBD) for signatures during the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in Rio in 1992. The United Nations named the 2010s the *United Nations Decade on Biodiversity* and launched a Strategic Plan for Biodiversity 2011-2020, which included the Aichi Targets. Of particular interest to protected areas is Aichi Target 11, which reads:

> By 2020, at least 17 per cent of terrestrial and inland water, and 10 per cent of coastal and marine areas, especially areas of particular importance for biodiversity and ecosystem services, are conserved through *effectively and equitably managed*, ecologically representative and well connected systems of protected areas and other effective area-based conservation measures, and integrated into the wider landscapes and seascapes. (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010).

[1] Green grabbing builds on the notion of "land grabbing" and has been defined as "the appropriation of land and resources for environmental ends" (Fairhead et al., 2012, p. 238) – i.e. acquiring land for e.g. biodiversity conservation.

One body of literature of particular interest to this research deals with local perceptions and social impacts of protected areas (e.g. Bennett, 2016; Holmes, 2007, 2015a; Neumann, 2001; Oldekop et al., 2015; West et al., 2006). Few studies have focused on the human and social perspectives when it comes to establishing new protected areas (e.g. Bennett, Lemelin, & Ellis, 2010). Most of such work has been carried out retrospectively (i.e. after the protected area has already been established) limiting the opportunity for the protected area planners to take local concerns into account when establishing new protected areas.

Unlike most research on (local) perceptions of protected areas to date, this research investigates a prospective national park in the Făgăraș Mountains in Central Romania (Figure 1). The proposal to create the *Făgăraș Mountains National Park* (FMNP) was put forward by a private foundation, *Foundation Conservation Carpathia* (FCC), who has already acquired land which is currently managed as a privately protected area. FCC intends to return their landholdings to the Romanian state with FCC as custodians, once the national park has been established and appropriate protection measures are in place. This project raises questions around the social dimensions of neoliberalisation of conservation in Eastern Europe and (privately) protected areas, especially how local perspectives are understood, considered, and accounted for in protected area planning (i.e. equity concerns). This study contributes to the sparse literature on prospective conservation initiatives. While the research on privately protected areas is plentiful (e.g. Fortwangler, 2007; Holmes, 2015; Serenari et al.,

2017; Wright et al., 2018), little social science research has been carried out in an Eastern European context on conservation in general, and local perceptions in particular (e.g. Ciocănea et al., 2016; Dorondel, 2016; Schwartz, 2006; Strzelecka, Rechciński, & Grodzińska-Jurczak, 2017). This context is particularly interesting as Romania has a tumultuous recent history with Communism (1947-1989) and nationalization of land after the Second World War, privatisation of land and public assets throughout the nineties, and, at least in some cases, EU accession (2007) in the new millennial which meant adopting new forms of nature protection.

In this research, I ask the overarching research question: How do people articulate their own conceptions of conservation? To answer this, I framed my project around three additional questions: How do different actors understand and frame new conservation initiatives? What is the role of lived experiences and histories in shaping conservation perceptions? What do conservation perceptions reveal about social equity concerns and how can these inform conservation planning? Local perceptions of the park proposal are not only complex, they are also contradictory, shaped by local experiences and histories, public concerns, and anticipations for the future.

Throughout this dissertation, I will argue that a critical social science perspective (see the Conceptualisation and Methodology sections) can improve conservation planning and deepen our understanding on the human-environment

interactions as they pertain to conservation. Specifically, this research has three primary objectives:

1. Examining how different actors employ conservation narratives to push different political agendas
2. Understanding how social memory forms and informs locals' perception of conservation
3. Understanding how perceptions research can guide equitable conservation planning.

Each manuscript in this dissertation will explore one or more of these objectives and contribute to the theoretical and methodological understanding of conservation perceptions as well as provide insights for the future planning of the FMNP.

1.2 Study Area

The Făgăraș Mountains, located in central Romania, are part of the Carpathian mountain range ranging from southern Poland in the north to Serbia in the south. Approximately half of the Carpathian Mountain range falls inside Romania's borders. The Făgăraș Mountains cover about 200.000 ha and stretch approximately 80 km along its east-west facing ridge, separating the regions of Transylvania and Wallachia (Figure 1). In a biodiversity assessment of the Făgăraș Mountains, Linnell and colleagues (2016) found that the Făgăraș

Mountains is home to 57 mammal species including wolves (*Canis lupus*), bears (*Ursus arctos*), and lynx (*Lynx lynx*), 130 bird species including golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) and white storks (*Ciconia ciconia*), and 895 plant species such as edelwise (*Leontopodium alpinum*) among others. Of these, there are a number of endemic plant species of regional importance to the Carpathian Mountains (e.g. *Gypsophila petraea* and *Thymus pulcherrimus)* and 107 species of flora and fauna that are listed as species of interest under the EU Bird Directive (79/409/ECC) or Habitats Directive (92/43/ECC) (e.g. otters (*Lutra lutra*), red-bellied toads (*Bombina bombina*), and capercaillies (*Tetrao urogallus*)). The Făgăraș Mountains have extensive old-growth, virgin, and quasi-virgin[2] forest with mixed deciduous forests at the lower altitudes and coniferous species (primarily fir (*Abies alba*) and spruce (*Picea abies*)) at higher altitudes, followed by an alpine region (above 2.200 m) with grasslands. Romania's highest peak, the Moldoveanu Peak (2.500 m in altitude), is also found in the Făgăraș Mountains. When Romania became a member of the EU in 2007, the state designated two Natura 2000 sites in the Făgăraș Mountains, a Site of Community Importance (SCI) in the north under the Habitats Directive and a Special Protection Area (SPA) in the south under the bird directive. The borders of the proposed national park are yet to be defined, but the intention is for the park to encompass the two Natura 2000 sites (and thus change the managerial

[2] "Quasi-virgin forest" is a commonly used term in Romanian forestry, where distinctions are made between virgin and quasi-virgin forest depending on the number of old growth trees and level of anthropogenic impact.

objectives of these areas), as well as any land currently privately protected by FCC. FCC's landholdings primarily fall inside the Făgăraș Mountains, but their privately protected land also includes landholdings which are not in the Făgăraș Mountains.

Due to the large numbers of bears in the Carpathian Mountains, negative human – bear encounters are not uncommon. In recent years, conflicts between humans and bears have increased. While human – carnivore conflicts are outside the scope of this dissertation, increasing encounters are part of the reason why some people are reluctant vis-à-vis conservation and forest protection.

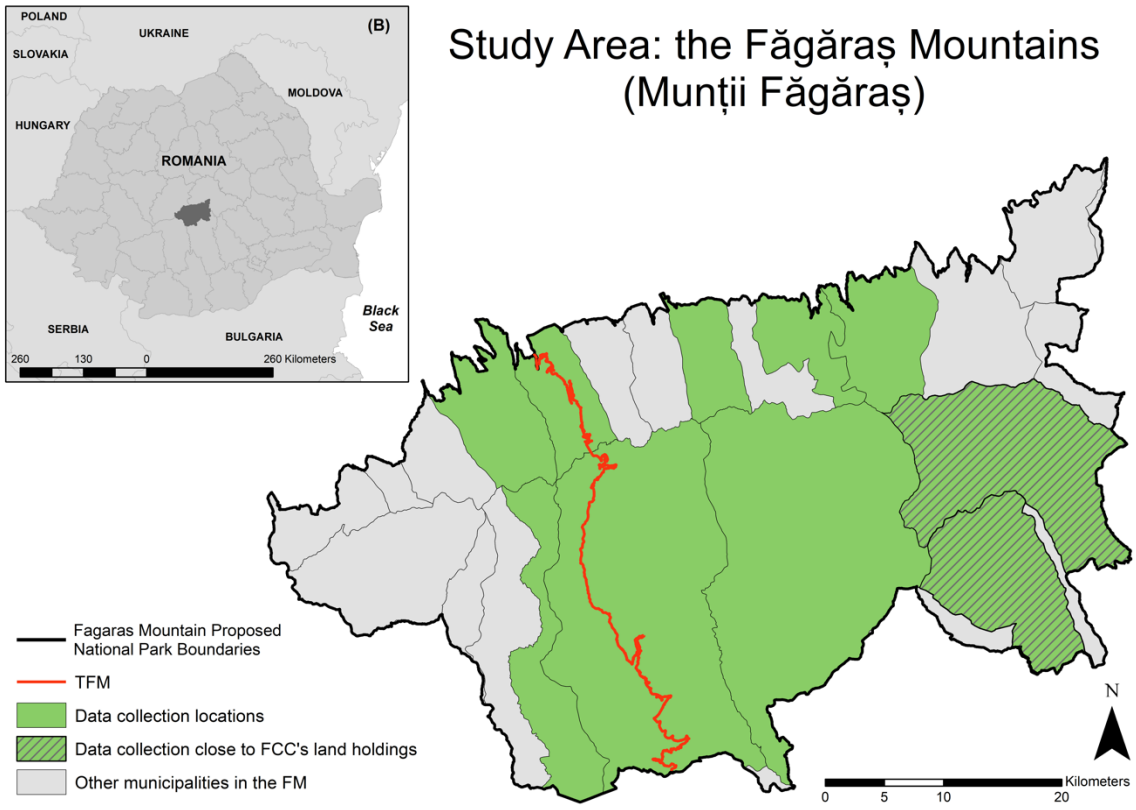

Figure 1 Study area: the Făgăraș Mountains. Areas in green indicate the municipalities where I collected data. The dashed areas indicate the municipalities where I collected data close to Foundation Conservation Carpathia's landholdings. TFM denotes *the Transfăgărășan*, the only road crossing the mountains (operating only seasonally). Source: Shapefiles are a courtesy of Foundation Conservation Carpathia.

Official data suggest that approximately 70,000 inhabitants live in the municipalities around the Făgăraș Mountains, although interviews with mayors indicate that this likely overestimates the *de facto* population. This is due to people having second homes around the Făgăraș Mountains, while working in other parts of Romania or abroad for the majority of the year. The Făgăraș Mountains region falls under the jurisdiction of 25 municipalities, and is

surrounded by small communities, ranging from approximately 1,200 to 6,000 inhabitants in the municipalities with population densities between 3 people/km^2 to 35 people/km^2. The highest population densities are in the southeastern corner of the Făgăraș Mountains, where FCC currently owns land, with the lowest densities in the remainder of the southern cluster. There are more villages in the north cluster, and they are generally better connected than those in the south. The northern communities are situated along a national road connecting two fortified cities and touristic urban centers, Sibiu in the east and Brasov in the west. With the exception of a few communities located in the southeastern corner of the Făgăraș Mountains, the southern communities generally have a poorer road system. There are no human settlements in the central mountains.

Romania has a long history of pastoralism and transhumance[3] (Huband, Mccracken, & Mertens, 2010), which is still practiced in the Făgăraș Mountains (Linnell et al., 2016). The topography in the south creates gentler slopes and hills, and agricultural fields are smaller and less common than in the north. Rather than extensive agricultural fields, locals have orchards and livestock. Overall, local livelihood activities in the mountains are primarily limited to sheep herding, picking forest products either for private consumption or reselling, and provision of firewood through landowner associations or the local municipality. The *Tara Făgărașului*, the flat lands at the foot of the northern ridge in the Făgăraș

[3] Seasonal movement of livestock (i.e. a type of pastoralism).

depression (Figure 2), are agricultural fields with orchards and potato crops, among others.

Figure 2 Pictures of the Făgăraș Mountains. Upper left corner: view of the northern Făgăraș Mountains looking south. Upper right corner: view of the southern Făgăraș Mountains looking north. Lower left corner: view of the central Făgăraș Mountains from the Transfăgărașan road. Lower right corner: deforestation in the S/E Făgăraș Mountains. Photo credits: Marie Louise Aastrup.

1.3 Research Context

Over the past 150 years, Romania has experienced a series of major changes in land and environmental management, spanning from the unification of the country following the First World War[4] to EU accession in 2007. The Kingdom

[4]Prior to the unification, Transylvania was part of the former Austrian-Hungarian Empire, and the Principalities of Wallachia and Moldova were under the influence of the Ottoman Empire (Hitchins, 2014).

of Romania[5] (prior to Transylvanian inclusion) abolished serfdom in 1864 and entitled serfs to land, however the previous Roma slaves (*tigani robi*, sometimes referred to as "gypsies" today including Roma and Rudari people) remained landless (Dorondel, 2016). At the beginning of the Second World War Romania claimed neutrality, but quickly shifted its position, forming part of the Axis until 1944. During this time, Romania provided oil and other natural resources to Germany (Hitchins, 2014). The military actions of the Second World War were not without environmental consequences for Romania, including changes in vegetation, soil compression, and intense natural resource extraction (Nita et al., 2018).

Following the war, Romania increased its pressure on natural resource extraction especially of petroleum, minerals, and timber resources, to meet Soviet war reparation payments (Hitchins, 2014; Măntescu & Vasile, 2009). The intense extraction policies lasted until the end of Soviet occupation (1944-1958). Nita and colleagues (2018) estimate that the Soviet-Romanian companies *SovRoms* (dissolved in 1954-1956) provided 1 million m^3/annually of timber to the Soviet Union. While solid data are lacking, there is anecdotal evidence that vast amounts of old growth forest were cut down during this period.

[5] The union of the Principalities (Moldova and Wallachia) took place in 1859.

Communism brought a new set of changes to environmental policy. A central tenet of Communist policy[6] was the nationalisation of forests, and collectivisation and nationalisation of land. At the beginning of the transition, 85% of Romania's farmland was collectivized in collective farms, *Cooperativa Agricolă de Producţie* (CAP) and nationalized in the subsidized state farms, *Intreprindere Agricola de Stat* (IAS) (Chivu, Ciutacu, & Georgescu, 2017; OECD, 2000). CAP was made up of smaller landholdings and were primarily concerned with the production of agricultural products. IAS were comprised of larger landholdings and its scope extended that of CAP as IAS were also more technologically advanced. In Romania, approximately 60% of IAS were on land made productive through drainage and irrigation (Dorondel, 2016; Swinnen, 1999).

After the Romanian Revolution (December 1989) the state initiated several privatisation processes that took place throughout the 1990s and early 2000s (Table 1). Nature conservation efforts in Romania increased simultaneously with state land reforms, privatisation, and beginning EU accession. In the 20 years following the revolution, Romania's protected area network grew from 4.1% to 19.29% (Iojă et al., 2010). This increase in protected areas was primarily due to the designation of Natura 2000 areas as part of the adoption of EU law. While this increase is impressive, the degree of protection is uncertain. The processes

[6] Environmental policy during the Communist Regime was characterized by largely two trajectories: silvicultural engineering and developing heavy industry. Silvicultural engineering, the foundation of forest management in Romania today, was based on regeneration of productive forests (this is covered in greater detail in Chapter Three). The state saw heavy industry as the economic panacea to the fiscal situation in the late 1970s and 1980s aimed at cutting dependency on the Soviet Union and increase Romania's international ties (Hitchins, 2014).

of privatisation and their associated effects on forestry activities are covered in greater detail in Chapter Three. In general, the privatisation of forest land created opportunities for extensive (il)legal logging[7] activities in the first 20 years of democracy. These logging activities are not confined to the Făgăraș Mountains.

Table 1 Key events in Romanian land use

Year	Event	Significance for land use
1991	Land Law (18/1991)	The first Land Law initiated the process of privatization, following a principle of historical justice by restoring agricultural and forest lands to their previous (pre-1947) owners. This law led to the privatization of approximately 5% of Romania's forest area, about 350000 ha of forest lands.
2000	Land Law (1/2000)	The second Land Law restored agricultural and forest lands to municipalities, churches, associations (*obște and composesorate*), and private individuals.
2005	Land Law (247/2005)	The third Land Law privatized what had been exempted by previous laws.
2007	Romania becomes an EU member state	Adoption of EU environmental law including designating Natura 2000 areas under the Habitat and Bird Directives (Directive 92/43/ECC and Directive 79/409/ECC)

7 I denote (il)legal logging using parenthesis to bring attention to, and differentiate between, woodcutting activities carried out by marginalized people (Rudari) and larger-scale illegal woodcutting activities. In post-Communist legislation, Rudari were not considered legitimate forest owners, resulting in Rudari logging activities (despite centrality to culture), being deemed (and prosecuted) as illegal (Dorondel, 2016).

2009	FCC is established	FCC is established with the vision of creating a world class wilderness in Central Romania
2016	Technocratic government signs FMNP memorandum of understanding with FCC	FMNP Memorandum of Understanding signed by vice prime minister (*viceprim-Ministru*) Vasile Dîncu, ministry of Regional Development and Public Administration (*Ministrul Dezvoltării Regionale și Administrației Publice*)

Across Romania, illegal logging continues to be an issue, with recent news stories both in Romanian news and beyond in 2019 of how the “wood mafia” has violently killed foresters (e.g. Dreesen, 2019; Vasiac, 2019). In recent years, six foresters have been killed by the “wood mafia” and Reuters reported that an additional 650 foresters have suffered physical assaults (been beaten, attacked with axes, or shot) as a result of uncovering illegal logging activities (Ilie, 2019). This has led to public protests and an anti-illegal logging campaign with a call for state action. The issue was also a topic of a recently formed discussion platform between ENGOs and forest industries, both expressing concern in a united voice about illegal logging. While there have not been any such violent encounters in the Făgăraș Mountains, this context is crucial for understanding local perspectives of conservation and forestry activities (see Chapter Two and Chapter Three).

The intensive logging activities that took place across Romania following the Revolution (Dorondel, 2016), led a central European couple, born in Germany and Austria respectively, who live in Romania and have been involved in conservation work for more than 30 years, to establish a private conservation foundation, Foundation Conservation Carpathia (FCC). FCC was established in 2009 by the two directors alongside 10 philanthropists and conservationists, with the ultimate goal of creating a national park by purchasing landholdings and obtaining hunting rights and wildlife management obligations for conservation purposes. FCC’s conservation approach is modeled after Tompkins’ conservation

work in South America (for information on the Tompkins initiatives see e.g. Holmes, 2015; Louder & Bosak, 2019), and is supported by private and public funds, primarily research institutions and Western philanthropists. Besides directors of other conservation organisations, FCC's board of directors also include two individuals listed on Forbes' *List of Real-Time Billionaires* (Forbes Media, 2020).

Key to FCC's conservation approach is its focus on local communities (see below) and its intent to return the landholdings to the public domain once the national park has been established. As the FCC mission statement reads:

OUR VISION:

> We aim to create a world-class wilderness reserve in the Southern Romanian Carpathians, large enough to support significant numbers of large carnivores and to allow evolutionary processes to happen. The project consists of the wider Făgăraș Mountains Natura 2000 site, Piatra Craiului National Park and Leaota Mountain and forms a total of over 250.000 ha. FCC is involved in creating a new, non-destructive economy around the Făgăraș Mountains, for the benefit of biodiversity and local communities. Once the project is completed, this new National Park should be a world-class wilderness, an icon for conservation in Europe and an emblematic National Park on our continent.

OUR MISSION:

> The foundation shall contribute to the conservation and restoration of the natural Carpathian ecosystem, for the benefit of biodiversity and local communities, by acquiring, protecting and administrating forests and natural grasslands. (Carpathia, 2020).

It is this goal of creating a wilderness with a "non-destructive economy" that benefits biodiversity and locals alike that forms the context for this research. The

foundation had previously worked with a research team who investigated local livelihood strategies and livelihood needs, and FCC was now looking to understand local perceptions toward its conservation agenda. After several discussions throughout 2016 on the fruitfulness of adopting a human dimensions approach between my co-supervisor Dr. Alistair Bath and the directors of FCC, FCC decided to instigate a larger research project. This research comprised several components, including a study on hunters' perceptions of large carnivore management, one on tourists' motivations for visiting the Făgăraș Mountain, one on local perceptions of bison and beaver introductions in the privately protected area, and finally a general study on local perceptions of the park proposal. While our collaborators aired some concerns as to the applicability of survey methods in the Romanian context, they were still interested in gaining information that was generalizable and representative of the region. My research is intended to serve as a baseline study for investigating temporal changes in local perceptions as the park proposal moves forward.

Developing a research design that targets local perceptions and captures local concerns about a somewhat intangible, vaguely defined conservation proposal was not without its challenges. Little research exists on investigating perceptions of *proposed* protected areas, which is why I decided to carry out an initial set of semi-structured interviews in the region during my first field season in 2017. This first field season led me to re-consider the framing of my research, as my findings suggested that the FMNP idea was fairly far removed from the

everyday lives of those who will be living in close proximity to the park. First, very few of the interviewees (local community members) were aware of either the proposed national park, the meaning of a national park, or the Făgăraș Mountains' current designation as a Natura 2000 site. Interviewees also only vaguely understood the borders of the current Natura 2000 site, as well as the proposed national park borders. They were largely unaware of the existence of FCC or its activities, which are confined primarily to the south/east corner of the Făgăraș Mountains. It became clear that inquiring directly about the foundation and its activities, or assuming that local people could easily understand the fairly intangible proposal that the FMNP idea currently is, would not be straightforward. Rather, these interviewees expressed a range of other concerns related to conservation, resources and land ownership in the Făgăraș Mountains, including firewood availability and illegal logging. It was this wider set of conservation-related perceptions and concerns, in relation to the FMNP proposal, that this project set out to investigate.

1.4 Conceptualization

In the light of the applied aspect of this research (i.e. informing conservation planning), the research objectives suggested an interdisciplinary approach within a conservation social science framework (Bennett et al., 2017a). Conservation social science highlights the various perspectives on conservation with regard to

social phenomena, social processes, and individual attributes across various scales (Bennett et al., 2017a). To investigate conservation perceptions in the Făgăraș Mountains, this research primarily engages with the conservation social science fields of *political ecology* and *human dimensions of conservation*. These two distinct approaches to investigating the social and human aspects of conservation are relevant as: a) political ecology directs attention to interactions among actors within a broad framework of political economy, the politics driving conservation, and issues of access (and restrictions following park designation); and b) human dimensions produces research with high managerial relevance regarding individual conservation behaviours and quantitatively assesses how widespread perceptions and associated behaviours may be understood through a cognitive framework. Drawing on two distinct philosophical and methodological approaches can increase the success of conservation interventions, as both approaches bring unique, but possibly complementary perspectives on the conservation challenges (Moon & Blackman, 2014). A human dimensions approach may be effective in designing conservation communication material addressing specific behaviours, whereas a political ecology approach may be effective in understanding the underlying structural and discursive processes that surround conservation initiatives and possibly spur resistance to them.

The interdisciplinary field of political ecology was born out of the Anglo-American human ecology and cultural ecology traditions within geography and anthropology in the 1950s and 1960s, largely as a response to the dominant

positivistic research on human-environment interactions of the time (Brondízio & Moran, 2013; Harden, 2012). Political ecology critiqued cultural ecology for ignoring the influences of the broader political economy on human-environment interactions, its preoccupation with *local* scale phenomena, and an inattention to social justice issues that characterised Gilbert White's Chicago School of natural hazards research (Castree, Kitchin, & Rogers, 2013; Hewitt, 1983; Macdonald et al., 2011; Neumann, 2005; Turner, 2002; Turner & Robbins, 2008; Wescoat Jr., 2015). Where cultural ecologists used (local) culture as the explaining factor for understanding adaptations to local environments (e.g. Rappaport, 1968), political ecology situated environmental changes in the broader political economy and engaged social theory such as Marxism and later the works of Michel Foucault (Blaikie & Brookfield, 1987; Neumann, 2005). Research in political ecology of conservation explores the contested politics of biodiversity conservation, including parks and protected areas and game and wildlife management. As a field of research, it has contributed a critical perspective to conservation research, attending to the politics driving conservation, the uneven distribution of impacts and benefits, power relations, and the material and discursive processes underlining conservation initiatives (Fairhead, Leach, & Scoones, 2012). Political ecology critiques of nature conservation focus on social justice, access, control, property rights, displacements, and socio-cultural identity, among other issues (Adams & Hutton, 2007; Neumann, 2015; Ribot & Peluso, 2003; Vaccaro, Beltran, & Paquet, 2013). My understanding of conservation is shaped by this line

of thinking, as conservation is about drawing and redefining borders, rights, and access, and is thus always a political pursuit (Adams, 2017; Neumann, 2015; Vaccaro et al., 2013).

Human dimensions is also interdisciplinary in nature and has focused on understanding and improving conservation management by investigating individual attributes (Dimitrakopoulos et al., 2010; Frank, Monaco, & Bath, 2015; Sponarski et al., 2014 Vaske, Shelby, & Manfredo, 2006) and improving message targeting and behaviour change strategies (Miller, 2017; Powell & Ham, 2008). The field of human dimensions stems from the North American wildlife management tradition (Decker, Brown, & Siemer, 2001) and is primarily concerned with understanding stakeholders' cognitions[8], behaviours, and acceptability, primarily through quantitative analysis of questionnaire data (Kellert, 1985; Marin et al., 2011; Sponarski, Vaske, & Bath, 2015; Vaske & Donnelly, 1999).

Over time, the field of human dimensions has taken on an increasingly more theoretical dimension, while still adhering to its tenet of informing management and understanding concrete managerial issues (Brown & Decker, 2001; Vaske, 2008; Vaske & Donnelly, 1999). Although primarily located at Anglo-American universities within conservation or natural resource departments (Brown & Decker, 2001), human dimensions research has become increasingly globally

[8] Cognitions refer to the process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought and experience (Vaske & Donnelly, 1999).

oriented (Arlinghaus, 2006; Gosling et al., 2019; Hill, 2004; Kassilly, 2003; Manfredo & Dayer, 2004; Toutain, Visscher, & Dulieu, 2004) and methodologically diverse (Brackhane et al., 2019; Dinat et al., 2019; Vernon, Bischoff-Mattson, & Clark, 2016). This global orientation brings with it a new set of epistemological and methodological challenges (Gore & Kahler, 2015), as the Anglo-American theoretical perspective and methods may not be appropriate or applicable across cultural contexts. However, the theories and methods used in human dimensions are being tested and modified to understand their utility and limitations across cultures (e.g. Goldman, de Pinho, & Perry, 2010; Kaczensky, 2007; Tanakanjana & Saranet, 2007; Zainal Abidin & Jacobs, 2016). With regard to conservation, this type of research has proven effective in targeting and changing specific conservation related behaviours, for example by minimising wildlife risk perceptions through experiential learning (Sponarski, et al., 2016) or visitor management in protected areas (Brown, Ham, & Hughes, 2010).

Combining these two conceptual approaches thus provides insights into how conservation conflicts arise and how conservation perceptions are shaped by both contextual factors (e.g. politics, history, political economy) and cognitive factors (e.g. beliefs and attitudes). Where human dimensions research is concerned with identifying the individual attributes at the foundation of conservation problems (e.g. Bishop, Vaske, & Bath, 2020; Gosling et al., 2019; Vaske, Donnelly, Williams, & Jonker, 2001), political ecologists understand socio-

ecological systems (and changes) as contextual and power-laden (Robbins, 2012b).

Combining these perspectives allowed me to engage with different methodological approaches to conduct conservation social science in novel ways. Combining methods from political ecology and human dimensions provides both generalizable[9] data representative of larger populations and deep description on local perceptions, while situating these data in the broader historical and political context. I draw from human dimensions in my approach to understanding local perceptions of conservation by employing aspects of the human dimensions' cognitive approach (e.g. Vaske and Donnelly, 1999). I understand perceptions as "(...) the way an individual observes, understands, interprets, and evaluates a referent object, action, experience, individual, policy, or outcome" (Bennett, 2016, p. 4). Much human dimensions research focuses on using questionnaires to quantitatively document stakeholders' cognitions (values, attitudes, norms, and beliefs), and the relationship between cognitions and behaviours (e.g. Bishop et al., 2020; Needham, 2010). Perceptions are related to cognitions in that perceptions are mediated and influenced by value orientations, attitudes, beliefs, and norms, etc. (Bennett, 2016). Unlike most human dimensions research to date, I also draw on ethnographic, place-based research methods used by political ecologists (Bridge, Mccarthy, & Perreault, 2015; Tuck &

[9] The breadth of inference that can be drawn between the sample population and other populations (Vaske, 2008).

McKenzie, 2015) to contextualize conservation perceptions. History, customs, language, belief systems, traditions, etc., all contribute to how people interpret their reality (Munhall, 2008). As I will show, perceptions are a product of experiences and thus highly contextualised.

Drawing on two distinct fields has allowed me to capture the complex relationships, scales, and perspectives that are present in conservation research (Bennett et al., 2017a; Bennett et al., 2017b). I showcase how interdisciplinary work across social science perspectives on conservation can be carried out. Transgressing disciplinary boundaries enriches our understanding of conservation issues and can ultimately lead to more just and successful conservation. Practically, this study also represents a response to a call for greater integration of social research in conservation work (Bennett et al., 2017b), as it was born out of an interest in a human dimensions approach.

From an ontological point of view, it can be argued that human dimensions is a realist field, compared to the constructivist perspective that guides political ecology inquiry. Despite ontological differences, these perspectives can be complementary (Moon & Blackman, 2014). Moon and Blackman (2014) illustrate how realist research can aid the development and implementation of conservation interventions while relativist research can aid in explaining why and how such interventions may fail. However, different ontological, epistemological, and methodological starting points can serve as barriers for interdisciplinary conservation research (Parathian, McLennan, Hill, Frazão-Moreira, & Hockings,

2018), and are at the heart of the tensions between political ecology and human dimensions inquiry. Not unlike the early political ecology critiques of Gilbert White's Chicago School (Neumann, 2005; Turner & Robbins, 2008; Wescoat Jr., 2015; Zimmerer, 2010), the – perhaps primary – point of tension between the two framing literatures is a question of political vs. apolitical ecology (Robbins, 2011). Human dimensions research was born in North American wildlife management (Decker, Brown, & Siemer, 2001) and its technocratic roots are still present in the way human dimensions researchers conceptualize and investigate human-enviornment interactions today. Political ecologists are occupied with the *political* nature of human-environment interactions – that is, the political economic forces and power-relations underpining these interactions (Robbins, 2011). Human dimensions researchers are interested (primarily) in the social psychological factors that shape human behaviours toward certain aspects of the environment (Vaske, 2008) typically without reference to broader social or economic contexts or relations. So the first point of tension is one that is common for political ecology and its conservation social science neighobours: are human-environment interactions framed and understood as political or apoltical?

The question of *political* versus *apolitical* ties into the second point of tension around epistemological and normative claims of objectivity. Human dimensions research's claim to objectivity is tightly linked to the modes of inquiry (i.e. questionnaires) and inference made based on the (typically numeric) data (e.g. Vaske, 2008). The assumption among human dimensions researchers is,

perhaps, that by using (certain) theoretical frameworks to develop questionnaires and randomly sample a given population, then the findings will be objective because they are *generalizable* (among other standards for good quantitative social research – see subsequent sections on methodology). By contrast, a political ecologist may remind us that the researcher makes decisions about which theories should inform their instruments and what kind of representations of the world such a survey can offer (and, perhaps, how these representations are enacted by the survey itself (Law, 2009)). Political ecologists may take the critique further and highlight how (applied) human dimensions work is implicitly political in nature, as it serves (at least sometimes and among other things) to improve research-based managerial decisions (e.g. Bath, 2013). Political ecologists, in the words of Paul Robbins (2011), take an "explicitly normative approach rather than one that claims the objectivity of disinterest" (ibid. 13) and explicitly acknowledge the normative foundations and assumptions under which the research is conducted. Debates around the political nature of conservation and its normative foundation is, to my knowledge, largely absent from human dimensions research. Yet, human dimensions researchers might reject political ecologists' notions of explicitly political and normative research, arguing that research should seek to minimize subjectivity.

A third point of tension relates to the modes of inquiry. Human dimensions have primarily employed questionnaires to make sense of world (Vaske, 2008; Vaske, Shelby, & Manfredo, 2006). Political ecological inquiry is methodologically

plural (Bridge, Mccarthy, & Perreault, 2015), and engages with (particularly field-based) methods such as participant observation, interviews, archival research and historical documentary analysis, Geographical Information Systems (GIS), among others (Bridge et al., 2015; Robbins, 2012a). Claims to political ecology's use of quantitative questionnaires remains largely lip service, however, with only few examples of political ecologists employing quantitative questionnaires (Drimili, 2018). This lack of engagement may be due to political ecology's commitment to critical scholarship and critique of conventional science (Bridge et al., 2015) combined with the positivistic epistemological foundation—which critical scholarship rejects —often associated with quantitative research.

The tensions outlined above point towards to these as divergent literatures that serve two rather distinct overall purposes. One serves to understand the social considerations of conservation management and feed into conservation decision-making, the other to critique the political conditions, processes, and actors that engage in conservation. This dissertation does not seek to solve the ontological, epistemological, and methodological tensions between the two fields, but rather offer a constructive dialogue between two divergent conservation social science perspectives, to better understand the complex dynamics of conservation planning and protected area establishment

Ultimately, my research shows that there is not a "one-size-fits-all" approach to conservation research, as such work is fundamentally contextual, and that researchers investigating conservation issues should exhibit greater willingness

to engage with a variety of conservation social science disciplines. Integrating political ecology into human dimensions has allowed me to understand a) how conflict forms and who can motivate it (covered in Chapter Two), b) how locals understand conservation initiatives as a product of past experiences, current issues, and envisioned futures (covered in Chapter Three), and c) how perceptions can guide equitable conservation planning (covered in Chapter Four). In doing so, my approach demonstrates how a) human dimensions research could benefit from greater engagement with place-based research and ethnographies, and b) how political ecology could engage with questionnaire methods and orient itself more towards applied conservation management.

1.5 Methodologies & Research Design

Research design is fundamentally about the type of research that is appropriate for answering the research questions (Gorard, 2015). My research is driven by an applied problem as presented in the case study at hand, situated within current trajectories of conservation practices and the social sciences investigating them more broadly. As such, my research seeks to deepen our understanding of local conservation perceptions, while attending to how conservation is conducted within its broader context. To do so warrants mixing perspectives and methods to obtain rich description and representative data.

However, drawing on different data types such as qualitative (i.e. text or image) or quantitative (i.e. numeric) data creates a richer, more nuanced understanding of the issue at hand. To do so, I designed a mixed methods case study which involved both exploratory sequential[10] and convergent[11] designs (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). From that follows a three-tier design (Figure 2) based on: 1) initial exploratory qualitative data collection (fall 2017) → 2) simultaneous quantitative & qualitative data collection (fall 2018) → 3) qualitative, follow-up interviews and community outreach (spring 2019). This research design ensured that the questionnaire was locally relevant, and that the research datasets included generalizable questionnaire data, deep description from the interviews, qualitative data from the questionnaire comments, and extensive field notes from the participant observation. I also carried out ground-truthing and verification of my research findings in the final field season in 2019.

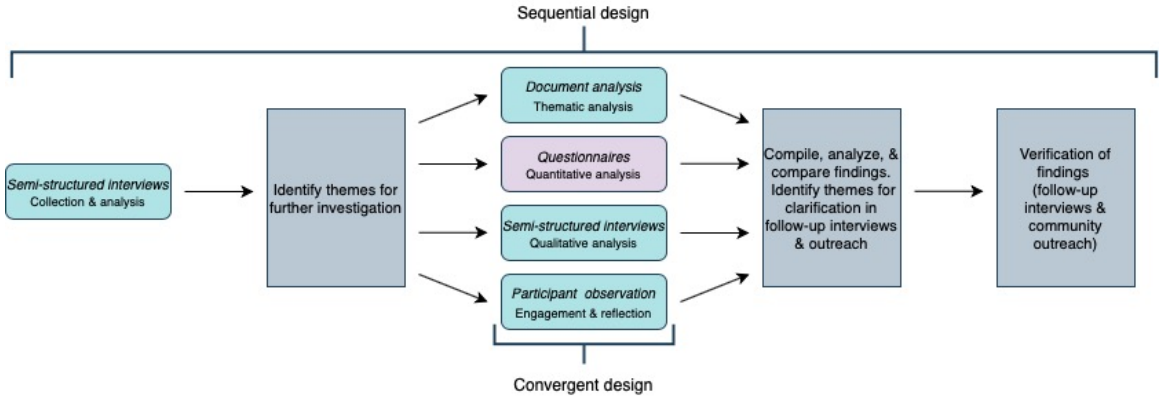

Figure 3 Research Design

[10] Qualitative data collection followed by quantitative data collected (latter being informed by the results of the former) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

[11] Simultaneous collection of quantitative and qualitative data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017)

I implemented the questionnaire in five communities in the northern cluster of the Făgăraș Mountains, and five in the southern cluster. Two of the five communities in the south were located adjacent to the privately protected area. I chose a proportionate random sample frame (Vaske, 2008) to allow for comparisons between the northern and southern cluster and between the communities adjacent to the privately protected area and those located elsewhere in the Făgăraș Mountains. The initial sample frame was based on generating a random number table to identify potentially participating households, but due to the occasional cadastral parcels without houses and the high number of abandoned and uninhabited houses in the study area, this sample frame did not work. While applying a random or even systematic sample frame reduces selection bias, these sample frames do not account for (drastic) seasonal changes in the population. We (my local research assistant and I) observed big seasonal changes in numbers of inhabited households, observations which were confirmed both by mayors and residents, but also by changes in response rates throughout the data collection season (August – November). For example, response rates in the two communities sampled in August were 92% and 88%, compared to the community where I collected data in November which yielded a response rate of only 16%. Additionally, 73% of the respondents indicated that they received the questionnaire at their primary household and 14.6% at their second house. Another challenge that I faced when implementing the

questionnaire related to lack of familiarity with the questionnaire format, low literacy levels and/or, among the elderly population, vision issues. When possible, I offered to complete the questionnaire with the potential respondent, often unsuccessfully. Here, the possibility to carry out either formal or informal (i.e. conversational field notes) interviews was a particularly good strategy. For the interviews with local community members, I sought a broad representation of people with different occupational and social background. How the research was implemented in the field is covered in greater detail in the empirical chapters. Rather than merging the different datasets (questionnaire responses, questionnaire comments, interview responses, document analysis, and field notes), I analysed each dataset separately and identified commonalities and discrepancies across the data sets by triangulating my findings. I chose this strategy as integrating the perspectives of the participants (from the qualitative interviews) with the researcher determined perspectives represented in the quantitative questionnaires can compensate for the weaknesses and draw on the strengths associated with either method (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

A common challenge in mixed methods studies lies in the language around research quality and how it is assessed (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Gorard, 2015; O'Cathain, 2015). While the criteria for assessing data quality for both qualitative and quantitative data should not be neglected in mixed methods research, mixed methods offer additional insights that monomethod studies do not. Data quality is assessed using different sets of criteria for quantitative and

qualitative data respectively, and the criteria used for assessing quantitative data do not (necessarily) translate to qualitative research data (Moon et al., 2016; O'Cathain, 2015) and vice versa. This has led to debates around assessing mixed methods data (see O'Cathain, 2015 for an overview). Perhaps a (somewhat crude) methodological distinction between social sciences employing quantitative research instruments and those who employ qualitative research instruments lies in how they treat knowledge production (Sui & DeLyser, 2012) and notions of subjectivity and objectivity. Quantitative methodology at large seeks to exclude the subjectivity of the researcher, where qualitative methodology accounts for subjectivities both relating to the researcher and the participants (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003), with the purpose of increasing the quality of the research. I employed several strategies to assess the validity of the data: besides spending prolonged time in the field, I used triangulation, member-checking, thick description, reflexivity, and reported contradictory data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). I triangulated the findings by comparing and contrasting the qualitative and quantitative data, both against each other and against existing literature. Triangulating various qualitative data sources (e.g. deep ethnography, document analysis) with quantitative data sources (e.g. questionnaire data, official statistics) create a richer understanding of the research problem at hand and a more robust foundation for analysis (Creswell and Clark 2018). I also carried out member-checking and ground-truthed my findings during my third field season. I have, throughout this

dissertation, provided thick description of the qualitative data and highlighted commonalities and contradictions in the quantitative and qualitative data, which are important components of quality assessment in mixed methods (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018; O'Cathain, 2015).

Employing a mixed methods approach responds to a call for geographic research that moves beyond the quantitative – qualitative divide (DeLyser & Sui, 2013, 2014; Sui & DeLyser, 2012) and for enhancing inter- and trans-disciplinary work more generally (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013; Sui & DeLyser, 2012; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2015). The lack of engagement with mixed methods may be due to researchers' varying philosophical standpoints and personal preferences for certain methods (Gorard, 2015; Plano Clark & Badiee, 2015). While my own epistemological starting point adheres more to constructionism, I recognise the fruitfulness of the post-positivistic approaches to behaviour change research. Ultimately, one can argue that pragmatism is foundational of mixed methods research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), and as such lets the research questions guide the (pluralistic) approaches to investigate a research problem. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), pragmatism recognises the historical, social, and political contexts within which research occurs.

So why mix methods? First, mixed methods are appropriate when research questions are both exploratory and confirmatory (Plano Clark & Badiee, 2015). One example of how this research encompasses both is provided in Chapter Three, which shows how the exploratory interviews indicated a historical

component to locals' perceptions of management which was then confirmed using statistical analysis, and further elaborated on, using triangulation.

Second, due to the highly contextual nature of protected area impacts (Oldekop et al., 2015; West et al., 2006), research on protected area perceptions must necessarily be contextualized. At the same time, generalizable data (e.g. quantitative data) help understand how widespread such differences are (e.g. x % of respondents are positive/negative) and allow for easy comparisons between different geographical areas (Bath, 2013). Chapter Four provides an example of how quantitative data can be used to compare different locations, while also integrating qualitative data to provide detail not covered in the questionnaire.

Third, echoing a recent publication in *Methods in Ecology and Evolution*, "[b]eing too focused on seeking an 'instrumental outcome' can mean that we lose the capacity to recognise and understand the unexpected. It is often what we do not expect that explains why conservation succeeds or fails in a given context; qualitative data enables, and thus often leads to, unexpected discovery" (Moon et al., 2019, p. 298). The *unexpected* is key here. As I will show, conservation perceptions have relatively little to do with actual biodiversity conservation and is very much about political agendas (covered in Chapter Two), past experiences and current socio-economic climate (covered in Chapter Three), and awareness and trust (covered in Chapter Four). Implementing a questionnaire grounded in qualitative findings and then ground-truthing the quantitative findings, allows for

unexpected discovery, while also understanding how widespread given perceptions are.

Finally, by triangulating findings from different types of data such as numerical and statistical information (e.g. psychometric perceptions data), qualitative description (e.g. from semi-structured interviews and participant observation), and document analysis (e.g. memorandums, newspaper articles, public and private speeches uploaded to YouTube, TV and radio discussions on a specific subject), I have been able to gain a more nuanced understanding of *how* people have come to perceive conservation in a certain way and *who* is vocal in conservation debates. This not only has methodological and theoretical value, but also practical implications for conservation practitioners. I discuss these contributions in Chapter Five.

1.6 Ethical Considerations & Positionality

Prior to data collection, my research was reviewed and approved by Memorial University's Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research. Though this process my research instruments, methods, and amendments to either, were approved before I moved to Romania.

As Crang and Cook (2007) write, identities, experiences, and actions are racialized, classed, and gendered, and research must thus not only "identify where people are (both socially and spatially) – they must also question where they/we are coming from, going to and where on these paths research encounters have occurred" (Crang & Cook, 2007, p. 11). The context of my own research is also one characterised by marginalisation of minority groups and issues of social class. This includes the marginalisation of Roma and Rudari people in the Romanian society more broadly, but also the economic hardship that is the reality of many of the particularly older generation of people who participated in my research. Prior, during, and after conducting my field work, I have reflected on the ever-present politics of eastern vs. western Europe and the possible implications of myself being a western European female living in Canada, coming to an area that I had no prior relationship with, to investigate a contentious issue of landownership and management in the post-Communism context of nationalization and privatization. In this, my experience proved my initial concerns unwarranted. My Canadian association served as a point of

connection – several of the participants (interviewees or questionnaire respondents) had family members living abroad, often in the United States or Canada. Community members – participants or not – often invited me into their homes, gifted with homemade products or books, offered to help out, or asked me to refer to people by their affectionate name, the name only used by family members or close friends. I was, especially in Transylvania, encouraged to tell "all of my Canadian friends to move here, land is cheap" or shown appreciation because "it's good that someone like you is finally doing something about 'all of this'" – 'all of this' referring to the much-debated issue of illegal logging which the proposed national park was often equated with in one form or the another (see Chapter Two).

Researchers engaging with ethnographies have highlighted the (changing) power dynamics that are at play in ethnographic research between the researcher and the participants (Crang & Cook, 2007). Such dynamics extend beyond just the researcher – participants relationships and in this case includes the power relations and dynamics that the greater national park proposal represents (see Chapter Two). Occasionally, my intent was called into question, especially regarding my relation to the front-runner foundation, and in particularly by local mayors or vice mayors. I emphasized my research interests in understanding the human and social dimensions of conservation and made it clear that various members of ENGOs were among the study participants and that their agendas were under scrutiny as well. I emphasized my commitment to

communicate my research findings back to the participating communities and made it clear that, while I communicate my findings to interested ENGOs, my work was not merely that of a consultant wishing to please the client but a piece of primarily university-funded research.

1.7 Chapter Synopses

This introductory chapter (Chapter One), which provides the reader with the necessary background information on the conceptual and methodological approach I took in this research, is followed by three empirical chapters and a concluding chapter (Chapter Five) which summarizes and looks beyond this research.

Chapter Two, "Conservation Narratives & Conflicts over Protected Areas in Post-Socialist Romania" introduces the brewing conservation conflict that the FMNP proposal represents. Drawing on narrative analysis of key actors (conservationists, local decision-makers, and local community members), this chapter situates the conflict within the context of post-Communism and neoliberal conservation more broadly and illustrates the various power relations, scales, and political agendas that underpin conservation. This paper has been published in: Aastrup, M. L. (2020). Conservation Narratives & Conflicts over Protected Areas in Post-Socialist Romania. *Journal of Political Ecology* 27(1), 84-104.

Conservation does not happen in a vacuum. Perceptions are culturally constructed, and local perceptions of conservation are thus a product of the historical and cultural contexts in which they reside (Bennett, 2016). Chapter Three, "Colliding Agendas in Forest Conservation and Social Memory in Post-Communist Romania" serves to illustrate complexities of local experiences and histories in shaping local perceptions of prospective conservation initiatives, by drawing on theories of *social memory* and *nostalgia*. Social memory has received little attention with regard to environmental issues (Cater & Keeling, 2014; Nazarea, 2006). Yet, investigating local conservation perceptions through the theoretical lens of social memory shines a light on the complex relationships between how the present – and the future – is understood as a product of how the past is remembered and vice versa.

Chapter Four, "A National Park in the Making: Local Concerns and Equity Implications" draws on notions of equitable conservation that have emerged in the conservation social sciences in recent years (e.g. Zafra-Calvo et al. 2017; Friedman et al. 2018). Equity forms one of political ecology's normative aspirations and has thus been integral to political ecology literature (Svarstad & Benjaminsen, 2020). As a theoretical lens, equity has received little attention in the human dimensions literature. Human dimensions have, however, engaged with what could arguably be seen as components of the equity framework in relation to public participation in natural resource management (Bath, 2013; Chase, Decker, & Lauber, 2004; Decker & Bath, 2010) and the notion of

managing wildlife for the public interest, exemplified with the North American Public Trust Doctrine (Batcheller et al., 2010), although not explicitly framed as procedural equity. This chapter serves to illustrate the utility of perceptions research in regard to understanding equity concerns and provide insights into the planning and management of new protected areas. This paper is currently under review.

Chapter Five provides the conclusions and my parting thoughts. In this chapter, I outline the possibilities and limitations of my work, look at the implications for conservation, and provide recommendations for the park proposal moving forward.

1.8 Co-Author Statement

I have been the primary investigator behind this study, including research design and implementation, literature reviews, data analysis, and manuscript preparation. Co-authors on manuscripts and the committee members have contributed to this research by providing critical feedback on all stages of the study.

For all three empirical chapters presented in this dissertation, I am the primary and corresponding author.

The first manuscript, “Conservation Narratives & Conflicts over Protected Areas in Post-Socialist Romania” (Chapter Two) has been published in the *Journal of Political Ecology* in 2020 volume 27, issue 1, as a single-author piece.

The second manuscript, “Imagining future conservation: learning from local experiences and social memory of forest in Romania” (Chapter Three), is a collaborative effort with Dr. Stefan Dorondel (Romanian Academy) and Dr. Arn Keeling (Memorial University). This paper is under review in *Ambio*.

The third manuscript, “A National Park in the Making: Local Concerns and Equity Implications” Chapter Four), is a collaborative effort with Dr. Carly Sponarski (University of Maine) and Dr. Alistair Bath (Memorial University).

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Chapter Two: Conservation Narratives and Conflicts over Protected Areas in Post-Communist Romania

2.1 Introduction

Nature conservation activities are a minefield of potential conflicts over rights, access, environmental and social justice, ways of knowing nature, and management practices (Cortés-Vázquez, 2014; Sen & Pattanaik, 2017). Conservation practices, protected areas, their situated historical geographies, issues of access, and user rights have been the subject of much political ecology research (Brockington, 2004; Kelly, 2011; Neumann, 2015; Roth, 2004; Sodikoff, 2009). A political ecology perspective suggests that such conflicts do not occur in a vacuum but should be viewed in light of their historical, political, and social contexts (Bridge et al., 2015; Robbins, 2012a). The narratives about conservation and environmental protection employed by different actors may reflect different ideologies and political agendas – contradictions which become increasingly clear in the context of contemporary protected area establishment. Conservationists legitimize the establishment of protected areas by drawing attention to the potential benefits that protected areas bring to global publics and may bring to local communities (Bratman, Hamilton, & Daily, 2012; Jones, McGinlay, Dimitrakopoulos 2017; Sodhi et al., 2010). However, perhaps despite good intentions, protected areas do not always deliver on their social promises,

and research on the impact of protected areas on local people is vast (e.g. Holmes & Cavanagh, 2016; Jacoby, 2001; Pullin et al., 2013; West, Igoe, & Brockington, 2006). The designation of protected areas can disrupt local communities through displacement and loss of access to resources (Brockington, 2004; Cundill et al., 2017; Elmhirst, 2011; Neumann, 2001; Vaccaro et al., 2013). How different actors evaluate protected areas depends on the perceived detriments or benefits they anticipate protected areas will bring (Horowitz, 2010) Thus, understanding the conservation narratives different actors employ not only reveals how these actors position themselves in relation to the protected area in question, but also identifies potential conflicts or points of contention.

In this article, I will show how actors use different conservation narratives regarding a new proposed national park in the Făgăraș Mountains in central Romania, and how these contradictory narratives reflect the connections between broader political-economic ideals and land use management in their historical and contemporary contexts. The Romanian Communist regime (1947-1989) collectivized the lands surrounding the Făgăraș Mountains. Agricultural lands were collectivized in the *Cooperativa Agricolă de Producţie* (CAP) and forests were nationalized. Subsequently, with the fall of Communism, lands were privatized and in 2007 the Romanian state designated the Făgăraș Mountains a protected area under European Union (EU) law.

The Făgăraș Mountains are largely unpopulated but are surrounded by 25 municipalities, all of which have varying amounts of municipal land in the mountains. With the financial support of international philanthropists, a conservation foundation (Foundation Conservation Carpathia) is working towards establishing a national park in the Făgăraș Mountains. This Romania-based foundation, led by German, Austrian, and Romanian conservationists, is currently buying up land to establish a national park that will be returned to the public domain, with the foundation as custodian of the area. Due to the nature of various types of landownership, purchasing the entire 200.000 ha is not possible. The foundation owns approximately 10 per cent of the area currently, which is under private protection. Although the Făgăraș Mountains are not yet a national park, the area is an EU Natura 2000 protected area.

Political ecology provides a useful framework for answering the questions that arise in relation to how the Făgăraș Mountains "hybrid" public/neoliberal conservation initiative has come to be. How do different actors (conservationists, local decision-makers, and local community members) envision the future of a landscape that was once nationalized, then privatized, and then designated a protected area in an EU wide network? Where lie the contradictions, potential conflict points, and common understandings within these different conservation narratives?

To answer these questions, I used a mixed-methods approach based on qualitative interviews, a questionnaire, document analysis, and participant observation to carry out research in ten of the communities bordering the proposed park. I analyze the conservation narratives employed by different actors (local decision-makers, conservationists, and local community members) in order to reveal the (conflicting) landscape visions and agendas that different actors hold and how these narratives manifest across scalar arrangements. These narratives are situated within the historical, political, and ecological context of the Făgăraș Mountains. It is this context of land privatization, changing property rights and environmental policies that make conservation narratives around the Făgăraș Mountains particularly interesting. The conservation narratives do not only reveal actors' positions and power relations (Bixler, 2013; Campbell, 2007), but also tell a story about rapid societal change and the consequences thereof. I present three prevalent conservation narratives and show how these reflect the different visions for a transforming landscape, and how they are employed at different levels. These narratives reveal potential points of contention, and how actors situate themselves in the brewing conflict between global conservation ideas and local reactions.

2.2 Relevance of Political Ecology to Conservation in Eastern Europe

Parks and protected areas are always political projects, as they (re)define user and access rights to resources and draw borders (Adams, 2017; Neumann, 2015; Vaccaro et al., 2013). For example, Byrne and Wolch show how parks "are not ideologically neutral spaces" (2009, p. 745) with reference to how national parks in the U.S. were spaces of class and racial segregation, and how this ideological foundation is reflected in today's park use (e.g. less visitation to parks by African American and Hispanic Americans). While the literature dealing with conservation initiatives from a political ecology perspective is vast (e.g. Adams, 2017; Cortés-Vázquez, 2014), political ecologists have primarily paid attention to conservation issues in (post)-colonial conservation in the what is often termed the "Global South" or in Indigenous communities (e.g. Ambinakudige, 2011; Brockington 2004; King, 2010; Mombeshora and Bel, 2009; Neumann, 2001; Radel, 2012; Roth, 2004; Sen and Pattanaik, 2017; Sodikoff, 2009). Overall, literature dealing with the political ecology of nature conservation in the context of Eastern Europe is sparse (Blavascunas, 2014; Kay, 2014; Petrova, 2014; Staddon, 2009; Stahl, 2010), especially regarding conservation initiatives in Romania (Bauer et al., 2018; Cotoi, 2017; Dorondel, 2016; Vasile, 2008).

A major component of these environmental laws is the designation of ecologically representative protected areas and species under the Natura 2000 framework (Directive 92/43/ECC and Directive 79/409/ECC). The process of

Europeanization (i.e. the process of states adopting to the rules of the EU) conservation policies began, in some instances, prior to accession (Yakusheva, 2017). Following accession to the EU, many ECE (East Central European) countries experienced drastic increases in the percentage of land protected as a result of Natura 2000 designations (Iojă et al., 2010; EEA, 2012). This illustrates the role of meeting environmental law, and therein also the role of conservation efforts, as a means to a greater political end, namely becoming part of the EU. For new member states, aligning national environmental law to that of the EU is not considered to be a painless endeavor, but rather a "necessary evil" as part of a greater quest to obtain EU membership (Andonova, 2005; Yakusheva, 2017). This new type of nature protection has been met with strong opposition from local communities, as some Natura 2000 areas have been perceived by locals to be a nuisance, even by those who are generally supportive of conservation initiatives (Pietrzyk-Kaszyńska et al., 2012). This resistance is not only a characteristic of "new" member states, but also exists among members of the public in "old" member states (Keulartz, 2009).

2.2.1 The "Yellowstone of Europe"

The proposed Făgăraș Mountains National Park is an interesting case seen in the light of this historical development of protected areas. At a first glance, it represents a neoliberal conservation initiative, with the buying of land supported

by international philanthropists. What makes this case an interesting hybrid is the intention to return the park, once established, to the public domain with a written agreement on the (conservation-oriented) management of the area. This intention is a potential variation of neoliberal conservation, although the initiative is still rooted in such an approach (established through philanthropy, initial private ownership, and focus on conversation-oriented livelihood strategies) and employs neoliberal strategies to achieve its conservation vision. What is more, conservationists are promoting this hybrid conservation initiative under the banner of a "Yellowstone of Europe", in reference to Yellowstone National Park in the United States—the poster child for fortress conservation. So-called "fortress conservation" refers to the way in which early protected areas were established, which, as the name indicates, followed a "fences and fines" strategy of managing natural spaces (Fletcher, 2010), with power (typically) exercised by the state through evictions and restricted access (Brockington, 2004). This model has been criticized for its command-and-control strategies, for keeping people out, and displacing local resource users (Fletcher, 2010; Jacoby, 2001).

Neoliberal conservation strategies employ marketization, commodification, privatization, and decentralization to enact conservation initiatives. This type of conservation has become increasingly prevalent (Adams, 2017; Holmes and Cavanagh, 2016; Langholz and Lassoie, 2001; Vaccaro et al., 2013). Commodification of nature refers to the institutional or legal redefinition of elements as marketable products such as ecosystem services, endemic species

for pharmaceutical development (bioprospecting), ecotourism, and how these elements have entered the market and can be obtained through monetary payments (Fletcher, 2010; Holmes and Cavanagh, 2016; Kelly, 2011; Sodikoff, 2009). While protected areas following a fortress conservation model have been detrimental to local livelihood strategies, neoliberal conservation takes a different approach. It focuses on market-oriented livelihood strategies (e.g. ecotourism) and does so by providing incentives and advocacy for engaging in these (Holmes and Cavanagh, 2016). Within neoliberal conservation, the ties between private sector entities and protected areas have increased (Hoffmann, 2009). This may benefit local people if they can exploit these ties and connections (Haenn et al., 2014; Igoe and Brockington, 2007; West et al., 2006). While on one hand connections to the private sector can provide an outlet for local voices, neoliberal conservation risks increasing the influence of national and international private sector players on local resource uses (Fletcher, 2010). In the case of Romania, the (inter)national private sector is already indirectly influential in forest related issues, as logging is often carried out and/or processed by foreign interests.

Neoliberal conservation adds another layer to the ways in which protected areas may affect local people, as market-driven conservation depends on marketing, essentially through (certain) representations of nature and spectacle (Holmes and Cavanaugh, 2016). These representations serve the purpose of selling a commodity (not only goods and services, but also experiences) to potential tourists, which can ultimately also reshape the social landscapes they

portray (Holmes and Cavanaugh, 2016; Kelly, 2011). Related to tourism, Holmes and Cavanaugh (2016) highlight the quest for "authenticity" – a commodity sought by the post-modern tourist (Iorio and Corsale, 2010) – and how certain groups can become "iconic" for tourism operators. What is more, ecotourism is not necessarily an environmental impact-free pursuit (Buckley, 2011; Kiss, 2004). Ultimately, neoliberal conservation allows for private accumulation or "enclosure" of what was intended as a public good (Kelly, 2011), albeit sometimes privately owned. The commodification of local culture can also lead to cultural changes especially through the elimination of certain "undesirable" components of local culture, which do not fit with a romantic "old way of life" narrative that is portrayed to tourists (Overton, 1996). Moreover, working primarily through livelihood diversification, protected areas are, under a neoliberal umbrella, likely to exacerbate already existing inequalities (Holmes and Cavanagh, 2016) and serve as a new way of directing money to the elite (Haenn et al., 2014). Corrupt politicians and state agents for example, may not support the establishment of protected areas "(…) without an extraordinary economic payoff" (Kelly, 2011, p. 691) and only allow national park establishment over extractive activities in so far as the national parks provide financial resources for the state and thus the politicians and agents themselves (Kelly, 2011). Also, (eco)tourism is not a readily available livelihood strategy for all (Iorio and Corsale, 2010; Kiss, 2004), and as such neoliberal livelihood strategies may only provide benefits to the few.

Political ecologists have put protected areas under scrutiny as protected areas, to a large extent, "(…) are implemented by different social and institutional actors (often powerful), suffered by other social groups (often not so powerful), and enjoyed by yet another set of players (tourists and scientists)" (Vaccaro et al., 2013, p. 255). These contradictory origins and actors raise questions of resource use and access, conflict, and justice. Yet the ways in which protected areas affect (local) people are highly contextual, as local practices, culture, protected area establishment/management, and politics on local, national, and subnational levels can all affect the "success" of the protected area. Nevertheless, the demarcation between those who bear the costs and consequences of protected areas and those who benefit is one defined and circumscribed by relations of power among these actors (Kelly, 2011). Although evidence exists suggesting that local support for protected areas is key for their success (e.g. Pretty and Smith, 2004; Sodhi et al., 2010), their establishment does not always depend on local support (Brockington, 2004). For example, Brockington (2004) shows how resistance among weaker rural groups did not materialize in Tanzania, because the protected area had the support of powerful players (e.g. international environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs), the global public, foundations) and with effective means of controlling access to the area. Unjust treatment and oppression of local people(s) do not necessarily hamper the (ecological) success of conservation. At the same time, uniformity in agendas among powerful players is not necessarily a given, as

various actors at different levels (i.e. local, regional, national, global, and/or combinations hereof) potentially have divergent interests. These differences can manifest in power struggles over which narratives should dictate future development of a landscape. The Făgăraș Mountains represent such a struggle, where conservationists with international connections hold a particular vision for the future regional development that is in stark opposition to that of local decision-makers. At the same time, the community members have heterogenous, sometimes contradictory ideas about the desired trajectory of the landscape, rooted in both a hope for rural reinvigoration to combat depopulation and a wish to stop deforestation.

2.3 Context

The Făgăraș Mountains are an uninhabited mountain range covering approximately 200.000 ha, with the mountain ridge separating Transylvania from Wallachia. The mountains are surrounded by smaller villages and some urban centers (Figure 4). The gradient of the mountain range is steep in the north with a softer slope on the south side. The mountains have considerable stands of old-growth forest, with a high density of endemic plant species and wildlife, especially wolves (*Canis lupus*), bears (*Ursus arctos*), lynx (*Lynx lynx*), wildcats (*Felis silvestris*), and wild boars (*Sus scrofa attila*). The estimated number of large carnivores vary greatly. Hunters argue that the number of bears in Romania

amount to over 7.000 individuals, wolves to over 5.000, and lynx to over 2.000. Conservationists have questioned this estimate, pointing out that there is no basis of knowing the actual number of individuals as there are no transparent monitoring practices in place (e.g. no genetic sampling). Similarly, the amount of old-growth forest (often denoted as “virgin” or “quasi-virgin” in the Romanian context) is also a cause of debate. Efforts have been put into mapping the extent of old-growth forest with the Romanian National Catalogue of Virgin and Quasi-Virgin Forests (*Catalogul naţional al pădurilor virgine şi cvasivirgine din România*). These efforts have mapped approximately 1.000 ha of virgin or quasi-virgin forests on public lands in the Făgăraș Mountains (Ministerul Apelor și Pădurilor, 2019). Privately owned land is not (yet) included in the estimate. As a push for the completion and implantation of the National Catalogue, combined NGO and university efforts have developed their own initial *Potential Primary Forests Map of Romania* based on satellite images, estimating a potential 61.423 ha of old-growth forest in the Făgăraș Mountains (Kathmann et al., 2017).

The northern side of Făgăraș Mountains are designated an EU Natura 2000 Site of Community Importance (SCI), including the communities inside the SCI. On the southern side, the mountains are designated as a Natura 2000 Special Protection Area (SPA). The area is characterized by a mosaic of different land ownership including lands owned by private landowners, the state, municipalities (*pădure comunală*), as well as lands owned by the commons (*obște* in the south and *composesorate* in Transylvania). Differences between *pădure comunală* and

obște and *composesorate* should be noted. Residents of the municipality are, in theory, entitled to equal shares and access in *pădure comunală*, which is managed by the municipality in collaboration with the appropriate forestry entity (which can be private or public). While *obște* and *composesorate* are collective forms of landownership, the management of these varies considerably between individual associations. Noteworthy is that it is not a collective of land shares put together, but a system based on the number of votes one holds and the quantity of products that can be extracted from the land (Măntescu and Vasile, 2009). However, *obște* and *composesorate* landownership still exists within the project area and have been "(…) designed by law to remain 'fixed', attached to the communities and not blown by the wind of the market into foreign hands" (Măntescu and Vasile, 2009, p. 103). These commons typically provide the shareholders with either firewood or cash. Firewood is a pivotal resource for community members, as not all communities have access to natural gas and within the communities where natural gas is available, not all households are connected to the gas pipe, since costs are often prohibitive. Many therefore still depend on firewood as a primary or secondary source of heating.

During the Communist regime, privately owned lands and *obște* and *composesorate* were nationalized and collectivized. Bigger farms were merged into "state farms", which received state subsidies, while smaller farms were joined into "collective farms" (CAP), which did not receive state subsidies. The state and collective farms were, in this time period, characterized by monocultures and

changes in the agricultural species composition. During Ceausescu's rule (1965-1989), developing heavy industry became a political priority as a way of dealing with the "backwardness" of the countryside (Dorondel, 2016; Hitchins, 2014). At the same time, the forest was preserved for hunting grounds (Walentowski et al., 2013).

Following the Romanian Revolution in 1989 not all of the collectivized lands were re-privatized in full, if at all, and land management policies were largely dominated by neoliberal ideologies. This shift away from collective farming and nationalization of lands is exemplified by the first post-Communist land reform passed in 1991 (Land Law 18/1991) and the second in 2000 (Land Law 1/2000). The first law established land commissions at the local level, typically consisting of mayors responsible for implementing land and forest restitution. These reforms ultimately led to the privatization of land, based on ideas of restoring historical justice – that is, restoring landownership to former landowners, excluding the previous Roma slaves, today commonly referred to as "gypsies" although this term refers to two groups of people, both Roma and Rudari people (Dorondel, 2016). Rudari people are a minority in Romania, who speak Romanian and are often associated with forestry work. Despite a different ethnicity, language, culture, and self-identification, the Romanian state considers Rudari as *Roma* (Dorondel, 2007; Hansson and Trabelsi, 2017).

With the transition from national to private control followed deforestation as locals' newly acquired forests allowed for making quick profits by either selling

their forest, or the rights to the timber resources (Dorondel, 2016). Local as well as international forestry interests capitalized on this development, resulting in increasing deforestation rates. (Il)legal logging and deforestation issues are still prevalent in the area today.

In Romania, EU accession also brought about a new political strategy regarding conservation. As in many other ECE countries, with the accession of Romania to the EU in 2007 conservation took a new form. Where ECE environmental management was formerly dominated by central planning and top-down approaches, new member states' conservation efforts were characterized by an increase in protected area designations, decentralization of protected area management, and restructuring of conservation policies (Yakusheva, 2017). In Romania, EU conservation schemes took managerial precedence over Romanian conservation goals (Iojă et al., 2010). While land reforms worked towards privatization of land, becoming part of the EU also led to the designation of public protected areas – a simultaneous privatization and public protected area designation strategy (Dorondel, 2016). One result was the designation of the Făgăraș Mountains as a protected area under the EU-wide Natura 2000 protected area network in 2007. Today, the Făgăraș Mountains are facing a new potential landscape transformation: becoming an International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) category II, a national park. Adjacent rural, forest and farming-dependent communities could potentially be affected by a national park designation and the land use restrictions that follow, especially in the case of

firewood provision and restrictions on livestock herding. The complex landowner mosaic in the area prohibits a complete purchase of the 200.000 ha of land that the Făgăraș Mountains cover, thus the potential national park is reliant on management agreements between the different actors (municipalities, *obște* and *composesorate*, private landholders who are not willing to sell, the state), based on compensations being carried out between the conservationists and various landowners in the area.

Official census data estimates a total of approximately 70.000 people living in the three counties (Argeș, Brașov, and Sibiu) where I carried out fieldwork. Interviews with the local mayors revealed that the *de facto* population is likely much lower than the official data indicates. A mayor in one of the most densely populated municipalities estimated that only 60% of the official residents had their daily activities in the municipality. The remaining 40% were presumed to live elsewhere, despite having an official address in the area. Not unlike the rest of Romania, I frequently encountered people who have their primary work activities abroad (Spain, Italy, Germany) or people whose family members have permanently emigrated to other parts of Europe or North America. Relocating to urban areas, especially among younger people, is also a common phenomenon and the area is characterized by an aging population.

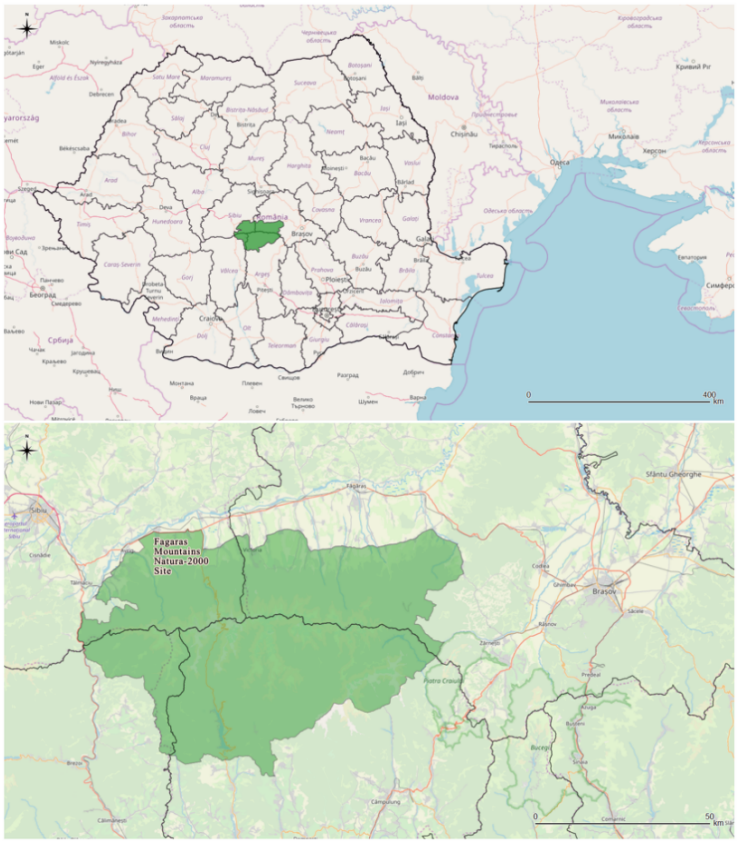

Figure 4 Study area: the Făgăraș Mountains. Source: Openstreetsmap and European Environmental Agency

As I will show, local community members do not form a homogenous group with one common identity and one unidirectional conservation narrative. Rather, the narratives employed by local community members are complex, often conflicting, and reveal the diversity in opinions and alliances held in local communities (Horowitz, 2011). In this research, I use the umbrella term *local community members* to denote people living in the area around the Făgăraș Mountains who employ various livelihood strategies. The livelihood makeup of these communities is complex and characterized by occupational pluralism and

semi-subsistence peasant-workers who pursue various livelihood strategies simultaneously. That is, besides having various types of waged employment, the majority of local community members I surveyed also indicated that they have livestock (73%), orchards (69%), and grow produce (87%) to meet their own needs. For example, besides running the local guest house, one interviewee was also the principal of the local school, part of the mountain rescue team, and related to the vice-mayor. This illustrates the complexity of the various social ties and relations that comprise the social makeup of these communities, where a person may hold various positions and represents different interests.

Resource dependence on the Făgăraș Mountains themselves is generally low and livelihood strategies carried out in the mountains are primarily herding of sheep or collecting berries, mushrooms, and nuts either for private consumptions or, in the case of Rudari people, as a source of income under employment in private companies. Firewood-dependent people primarily receive firewood from the municipality, from *obște/composesorate* if they are part of one, or they buy firewood from private companies. Obtaining permission to cut wood from one's private forest is a highly regulated activity. After obtaining the necessary permits to harvest trees, a forester will assess the wood stock on the private lands, mark the trees which can be cut, and then the harvesting can proceed, under the supervision of the forester. Forest stocks of 10 ha or less have an upper harvesting limit of 5 m^3/ha/year. Harvesting trees on larger forest areas must be done according to the forestry management plan.

2.4 Methods

In order to understand the different conservation narratives employed by conservationists, local decision-makers, and local community members, I employed a mixed methodology approach that included semi-structured interviews, a questionnaire, document analysis, and participant observation. After an initial visit to the study area in March 2017, I spent three weeks between September – October 2017 in the counties of Brașov and Sibiu in the north and Argeș in the south. I spent an additional four months in these areas between August – December 2018.

During the first field season I conducted semi-structured interviews with 29 key interviewees to identify issues relevant to the communities. Informed by these interviews, I employed a mixed methods approach[12] and conducted interviews with an additional 26 interviewees alongside administering a proportionate random sampled quantitative questionnaire (n = 644).[13] The questionnaire consisted primarily of closed-ended questions on a five-point Likert scale (strongly disagree; disagree; neutral; agree; strongly agree), focusing on issues of land use/management in a historical and current context, and the proposed national park (Table 2). The questionnaire was pretested on a

[12] All data collection was approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at Memorial University.
[13] Response rate of 30%.

convenience sample and translated from English to Romanian.[14] The questionnaire included the following sections:

1. Types of activities undertaken in the Făgăraș Mountains
2. Knowledge regarding Făgăraș Mountains' designation status
3. Perceptions of current land management
4. Perceptions of land management in historical perspective
5. Perceptions of the proposed national park
6. Acceptability of potential restrictions resulting from national park designation
7. Information regarding livelihood strategies
8. Demographic information

I carried out interviews with people whose primary activities were operating guesthouses, farming, sheep herding, home-making, as well as teachers, retirees, local historians, local decision-makers (mayors and vice-mayors), ENGOs present in the areas, civil servants at a national level involved in forestry, protected areas, and hunting, in a total of 10 different smaller communities (average size ranging from 1.000 – 6.000 citizens). In the following I will refer to people by an assigned pseudonym and their primary function, to allow the reader to understand their position within the communities.

[14] To ensure correct translation of the questionnaire it was reviewed by three separate native Romanian speakers.

Table 2 Sample questions from the questionnaire

I believe that the proposed Făgăraș Mountains National Park will…	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
... restrict fishing inside the park	1	2	3	4	5
… restrict wood cutting inside the park	1	2	3	4	5
… restrict the collection of berries and mushrooms inside the park	1	2	3	4	5
… restrict having grazing animals inside the park	1	2	3	4	5
… restrict hunting inside the park	1	2	3	4	5
… reduce access to roads	1	2	3	4	5

The first period served as an exploratory field season to identify issues around land use and management within the context of the newly proposed conservation area. As this work served as the foundation for future research, I wanted to understand the differences in use of the Făgăraș Mountains, the challenges and opportunities that might result from the proposed conservation area, and how different actors situate themselves in regard to this potential conservation development.

In this article, I will draw on the qualitative data from interviews and the voluntary comments left on the questionnaires (n = 264) alongside some items pertaining to the development of ski slopes (“I would support ski slope

development in the Făgăraș Mountains[15]“) and perceptions of potential restrictions resulting from national park designation (see Table 3).

Except for a few interviews conducted in 2017, I worked with the same local translator throughout each field season. All but five interviews were recorded, transcribed and translated from Romanian to English. I used NVivo 12.2.0 to code the interviews, questionnaire comments, and fieldnotes. Using inductive thematic coding (Braun and Clarke 2006), I first identified statements pertaining to different conservation narratives across respondent groups (conservationists, local decision-makers, and local community members) and then coded the statements according to the following themes: tourism (skiing, eco-tourism, protected area visitation, rural invigoration); restrictions (livelihood strategies, firewood, development), and deforestation (illegal logging, logging, wood mafia[16], thieves, protected areas). Each individual interview was also analyzed to identify any seemingly contradictory statements (e.g. appreciation for protected areas, but not supporting the designation of national parks).

[15] I asked this question using a five-point Likert scale ranging from “strongly disagree”, “disagree”, “neutral”, “agree”, “strongly agree”.

[16] The media has reported an increasing number of violent encounters between large-scale illegal loggers (the so-called “wood mafia”) and foresters across Romania in recent years (Ilie 2019; McGrath 2019). Although no such cases have been reported in the Făgăraș Mountains, locals still expressed concerns related to the wood mafia’s activities.

2.5 The Becoming of a National Park?

The political and socio-economic context of the area deeply inform narratives around the proposed conservation initiative. Three main themes dominate these narratives: tourism, anticipated livelihood restrictions, and deforestation. These themes manifest differently across actors. At one end of the spectrum are the conservationists, who include various regional and international ENGOs. This group is powerful in that they can purchase lands, have international connections, and are part of global conservation movements. As such, the vision of the conservationists mirrors the global discourse on biodiversity conservation and addresses audiences beyond the local scale, including foreign “eco”-tourists, philanthropists, and global publics. On the other end of the spectrum are local decision-makers, consisting of local mayors and vice-mayors, with positions of power at a local level with regional and national connections, and who possess the ability to create resistance to the proposed conservation area at a regional level. The results are summarized in Table 3 and described below. With the exception of rural and heritage tourism, the conservationists and local decision-makers employ narratives that are in stark contrast to each other. In between these two groups are the local community members, who hold diverse perspectives on the initiative. While the narratives among conservationists and local decision-makers were uniform, some local community members employed

multiple, and sometimes conflicting, narratives to describe their visions for the area.

Table 3 Overview of conservation narratives

	Conservationists	***Local Community Members***	***Local Decision-Makers***
Tourism	Wildlife/eco-tourism; rural tourism	Heritage tourism; agro-tourism; rural tourism; skiing tourism; eco-tourism	Skiing tourism; agro-tourism; rural tourism; heritage tourism
	With regard to tourism, local community members employ narratives that are sometimes contradictory, and reflect both conservationists and local decision-makers.		
Restrictions	Restrictions are not framed as bad. The narrative focuses on the ecological impact of human activity – especially logging and herding. Local livelihood needs are framed as important and conservation enterprises are seen as a viable strategy for the future.	Fear of restrictions prevail mostly regarding local livelihoods (especially firewood supply), potential impact on the built environment, and in relation to access.	Restrictions are believed to hamper all development, especially regarding the built environment and skiing.
	Local decision-makers employ the strongest restriction narrative. The local community members' narrative is not unidirectional nor as strong as the local decision-makers, yet the narrative is more connected to the local decision-makers' than the conservationists'.		
Deforestation	Deforestation and illegal logging are at the core of the narrative and serves as the chief motivation for establishing a national park.	Recognizes deforestation as a problem of concern. A national park could potentially hamper this development.	Deforestation is not considered an issue within the jurisdictional boundaries of the municipalities and do not form part of the local decision-makers' narrative.
	Deforestation is part of the chief narrative among conservationists. This is somewhat reflected in local community members' narrative, where a national park is seen as a potential "remedy". Local decision-makers are outside of this narrative.		

2.5.1 FMNP and Tourism

At a local decision-making level, the focal point is development. In this view, development means enhancing tourism infrastructure and the upkeep of the region's major tourist attraction, *the Transfăgărașan,* the only road running north-south through the mountains, built by the Communist regime for military purposes between 1970-1974. Besides forestry roads, this is the only road going through the proposed national park area. Due to the high seasonality in tourism, a primary concern is establishing winter tourism, especially building ski slopes in the mountains. Local decision-makers (and occasionally by community members) look to Austria as a desirable model for (skiing) tourism development and the Făgăraș Mountains are generally believed to be competitive with Austrian skiing. As Vlad, a local mayor, mentioned when asked if skiing would benefit his community:

> I think that for the winter season it would be the best option indeed. So, in those months, previously without visitors, one could have tourists here and a resort for visitors could offer opportunities to people of any age. People are looking for places like this, cozy, quiet, with very fresh air, nice nature and landscapes. (Vlad, mayor, interview, 2017)

This vision is in complete conflict to that of conservationists. Skiing is a competing land use to that of conservation and if ski slopes were to be developed, it would mean cutting down (potential) old-growth forest and disrupting the habitats that conservationists are looking to preserve. For

conservationists, ski resort development would represent a potential *coup de grâce* for the wilderness reserve they envision.

Protected areas are often seen as a panacea for mitigating habitat loss, putting a stop to extractive activities, and conserving biodiversity. The case of the Făgăraș Mountains is no different: establishing a well-managed national park is seen by conservationists as a means to preserve the last stronghold of large carnivores in Europe, old-growth forests, and endemic plant species, while ensuring livelihood diversification through "eco"-tourism. This vision of "wilderness" is illustrated by Mihai who works for an international ENGO:

> Basically, I'd like to see the Făgăraș Mountains remaining one of the wildest areas in Romania and Europe (…) That is, no intervention, left to their own evolutionary dynamics. And the rest of the forests outside should be managed in a responsible and sustainable manner. So not intensive use for commercial logging, but let's say used for the benefit of local communities: employment, things like that. Basically, it resembles a national park. (Mihai, conservationist, interview, 2017)

The narratives on tourism manifest as a clear dichotomy between skiing, supported by local decision-makers, and ecotourism supported by the conservationists. Six of the ten local decision-makers who participated in this research expressed support for developing ski slopes in the area. All but one of the six were against the establishment of a national park, with the primary reasons being the restrictions resulting from such a designation and suspicion around the intention of the conservation organization and its philanthropists. The one decision-maker who was not directly opposed to the potential national park designation thought the park could increase tourism to the area, especially in the

case of bison (*Bison bonasus*) reintroduction, which is on the agenda of conservationists. Four of the mayors did not immediately position themselves against the proposed park and recognized that there may be some potential (tourism) benefits from the project, without elaborating on how. They did not talk about skiing.

Alongside biodiversity conservation, conservationists also employ climate change as an argument against developing ski slopes, as the snow cover is decreasing. This argument is not accepted by the local decision-makers, who, overall, do not believe climate change to be a cause of concern for future skiing opportunities.

The narratives employed by local community members reflect the heterogeneity of this group. Among local community members, “nature” forms a greater part of the development narrative than among local decision-makers. However, local community members emphasize different types of tourism: to some, enhancing the number of tourists is central to their narrative, regardless of the type of tourism in question. To others, the desirable type of tourism is centered around nature and heritage, especially so-called “agro”-tourism, which denotes a certain type of rural farm tourism based on the preservation of rural life and capitalizing on this lifestyle by offering “authentic” experiences to tourists through for example the consumption of “pure” and “authentic” local produce. While local decision-makers question the overall feasibility of this type of tourism,

they, as well as the conservationists, recognize the selling point that rural life represents.

While positions of support or opposition to development initiatives can reflect anticipated outcomes and distribution of benefits, divisions can also occur among actors who could potentially be beneficiaries of either type of future landscapes. For example, when talking about protected areas and Bâlea Lake, a lake located on the Transfăgărașan in the Făgăraș Mountains (Figure 5), Raul, who works for a larger guesthouse complex, expressed his dissatisfaction with the area's current protection status:

> [a protected area] is stupidity. The bureaucracy prevents you to make ski slopes. The government implemented these protected areas so that people can't develop the area. (…) Maybe it works on paper but not in real life. At Bâlea Lake a national park could be established. (…) Up there [pointed towards the mountains], Natura 2000, protected areas, they're bullshit because you can't do anything in the area. You can make protected areas, but not where there are thousands of tourists! Either/or. (Raul, tourism operator, interview, 2017)

Figure 5 Market booths at Bâlea Lake. Photo credits: Marie Louise Aastrup

Here, conservation and development are seen as incompatible. This is, however, far from the dominant narrative among local community members, who do not regard the conservation agenda as conflicting with potential skiing development. The development of ski slopes is largely supported by local community members. The questionnaire data indicates that 74.5% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement “ski slopes should be developed in the Făgăraș Mountains.” This mirrors the narratives of local community members as expressed in the interviews. Here, supporters of the potential park do not see skiing as disruptive, but rather a desirable landscape

vision alongside that of a national park. Ioana, a local guesthouse owner, reflects on the conflicting plans for establishing skiing and a national park:

> It would be very good if they opened ski slopes, but I wouldn't know where. It would be very good for tourism, there would be more offers in the wintertime (…) Yeah it could be [a good idea to establish a national park] to protect the area and the environment because at Bâlea Lake they are building new stuff and it's not good to do that on the mountain. Better to leave it wild (…) Bâlea Lake needs to stay wild, now there are many constructions that ruin everything, the beauty is destroyed. It shouldn't be allowed to make that food market on the road at the lake. Before there was only a couple of lodges, not as many as nowadays. (Ioana, guesthouse owner, interview, 2017)

To Ioana, skiing does not encompass a negative, disruptive type of development that the small market booths do. For local community members positioning themselves against the national park narrative, conservation is understood to undermine any plans for skiing development. Like Ioana, there are also locals who are supportive of both. As such, the local understandings of what a protected area entails are far from that of conservationists. In this sense, the positions of local community members occupy a middle ground between the two dominating landscape ideologies, where the focal point is reinvigoration of the area through tourism.

2.5.2 FMNP & Restrictions

A central narrative for local community members revolves around potential restrictions on access to resources in the park. A national park is understood to restrict certain livelihood activities such as fishing (65.2% of respondents), picking

of berries/mushrooms/nuts (47.5%), grazing animals (49.5%), and hunting (65.4%). One-third (32%) also believe that a national park will reduce road access. It should be noted that, despite firewood dependence and sheep herding, local livelihood dependency on the area is low. Settlements are located outside the borders of the proposed park and so are the agricultural lands. However, fear of a Yellowstone model is prevalent, especially among local decision-makers and local community members. These fears do not only relate to loss of livelihoods, but also a fear of being erased physically as well as rhetorically from the landscape. One man refused to participate in the study since he told me that his community was one of herders, always had been, and should continue to be so, and therefore he did not want to engage in any conversations about a potential park. This illustrates a fear that other interviewees voiced – one of changing the cultural landscape of the communities.

Restrictions are framed as desirable (stopping the wood thieves) and undesirable (restricting livelihoods, mobility, and culture). For example, loss of access (e.g. being allowed to walk in or enter the area) is a concern that surfaces in 22 of the voluntary comments provided on the questionnaire and in the interviews. This is illustrated by the following questionnaire comment:

> I do not agree with a national park in the Făgăraș Mountains because we will no longer have access to walk through the forests, there will be no more firewood and we will not be allowed to pick the forest fruits. (Questionnaire no. 576)

Private consumption aside, picking of mushrooms, nuts, and berries is primarily carried out by Rudari people and the products are sold either to commercial enterprises, at roadside stands, or to other community members. Any potential livelihood restrictions resulting from the park designation would likely impact Rudari people and shepherds the most. These are also the two groups of people in the area with low employment security and lower incomes. As studies elsewhere note, restricting access can lead to loss of resources critical to livelihood strategies and culturally important practices, especially for marginalized people and minority groups (Cundill et al., 2017; Salafsky and Wollenberg, 2000), such as Rudari people and others who rely on access to local resources. Gathering of forest products (excluding firewood) for private consumption is likely not going to be impacted by a potential national park designation as national parks typically have zonings that allow for different levels of human activities.

The restrictions narrative is strongest among local decision-makers. While local community members highlight issues of firewood supply, local decision-makers articulate park restrictions as hampering every kind of development and effectively also tourism. Stefan, a vice-mayor in one of the local municipalities, holds strong opinions about protected areas:

> [Protected areas are] another trouble, another trouble (…) I don't really agree with them. (…) National parks cut down all investments, preventing all exploitation of the forest, even dead or fallen trees. No more hunting, no more building. It pretty much stops all possibilities. I also know this group of interest, foreign investors, that wanted to buy up forest land around here. (…) I don't really know, I don't think there's anything good behind it (vice-mayor Stefan, interview, 2017)

Restrictions also form part of the conservationists' narrative, but here restrictions are situated as an important step toward preserving the wild beauty of a landscape that "historically have had minimal human presence." This is especially prevalent for the case of (il)legal logging, deforestation, sheep herding, and hunting (especially of large carnivores). My data indicates that only very few local community members take part in hunting activities and that only few (16%) are concerned about the potential restrictions on hunting that a national park could cause. The Romanian state issued a hunting ban on large carnivores in 2016, which has also spurred conflict especially between conservationists and hunting associations, but it is also a cause of concern for some local decision-makers to whom hunting forms part of the tourist attraction offered in the area.

Local community members are less welcoming to any potential restrictions on livestock grazing and herding (32% indicated that they find this restriction unacceptable). While the conservationists recognize and integrate local livelihood strategies into their agendas, herding is one livelihood component that is framed as problematic due to its ecological effects. The narratives around herding situate local community members and local decision-makers in one camp and conservationists in another.

2.5.3 FMNP & Deforestation

The transition period from Communism to neoliberalism opened for the possibility of making quick profits by selling timber extraction rights. When the first Land Law (18/1991) was passed, previous landowners were assigned one hectare of forest land regardless of the size and location of their historical property. In many instances, this meant receiving lands that, for geographical reasons, were inaccessible to the new owners. This, combined with the economic hardship facing many households in the transition period, led to selling of property or timber rights to logging companies. Mirela, a homemaker and guesthouse owner, is among those who sold her forest at what she believed to be a low price: 2.250m^2 of forest for a current value of approximately US$450 (around 2 million old Romanian Lei). For the two hours we were sitting in her yard, eight trucks drove by us with full loads of wood. Noticing this, Mirela voiced her concern about deforestation, as she believed the logging activities, she observed to not be fully legal and that reforestation only rarely occurs:

> They are actually not just exploiting but shaving down the forest. It is never entirely legal, maybe a bit of it is legal. (…) The problem here is that they do it through old people, with or without papers and you lose their track. They offer some money to people for their forest, only with a verbal agreement, no papers, then they cut down the trees. (Mirela, homemaker, interview, 2018)

She explained that, following the Romanian revolution and privatization of lands in the 1990s, several of the elderly people in the village had been led to believe that their forests were sold, when in reality they only sold the timber

rights. In those cases, the actual owners were (unknowingly) legally bound to take the appropriate reforestation measures (Bouriaud, 2005). When this did not happen, the forestry department could not hold the actual owners (often poor, elderly people) accountable, and the forestry companies who had caused the deforestation had often left the area, closed the company, or moved abroad. The result was deforested areas with no reforestation in sight.

It is exactly this context that spurred the conservationists' vision of creating a national park: as a means of protecting the remaining old-growth forest, reforesting previously clear-cut areas, and ending illegal logging. This resonates with local community members. A total of 35 people volunteered written comments on the questionnaire on stopping the "wood thieves" and the park's potential in doing that. For instance:

> Starting a Făgăraș Mountains National Park would be a unique solution to stop the illegal logging and to protect the plants and animals from the forest. The lands management should be done by competent and fair people, not by thieves and mobs. (Questionnaire no. 64)

The concerns about deforestation do not mirror the narratives employed by local decision-makers. While recognizing that deforestation may be an issue in "other" geographically indeterminable areas, local decision-makers are not concerned about deforestation within their own juridical boundaries. The reasons for this are many. Designating the area as a national park will restrict forestry activities and this is a cause of concern, especially regarding local firewood supply. Local decision-makers may also be reticent to articulate any potential

benefits of the park (e.g. combatting deforestation) as this would undermine their own chief narrative, namely developing ski slopes. One local-decision maker completely dismissed the notion that a national park could bring any benefits to an area whatsoever. When asked to elaborate, he refused. Another reason why local decision-makers may not include deforestation in their narratives could be found in the micro-politics of the communities. I sometimes encountered stories that implicated certain local decision-makers in logging and deforestation activities. This has also occurred in other parts of Romania, where scholars have shown that local administrations have been engaged in forestry and illegal logging activities (Bouriaud and Marzano, 2014; Dorondel, 2016; Vasile, 2008). While my data does not support any conclusions on local decision-maker's involvement in illegal logging and forestry activities, such potential involvement could explain some of their opposition to the proposed national park.

2.6 Discussion & Conclusions

In 2016, a year prior to my first field season, an association of landowners gathered with local decision-makers and community members to discuss the proposed national park. Two meetings took place, out of which one was video recorded and later broadcasted at a local TV station which airs in *Tara Făgărașului*, in the northern side of the Făgăraș Mountains. Vlad, a local mayor recalls:

> We had a meeting (…) with all the mayors of the area regarding the conservation organization and its projects. They went a bit too far, it is too ambitious and somehow abusive, they wanted somehow to take over people's properties to include those in the national park: but it is private property, they can't just mislead people and not care about it. The meeting was against this conservation organization. There was a discussion between local authorities and the landowner association, and it just went too far. (Vlad, local mayor, interview, 2017)

Vlad was not the only person recalling this meeting. Others mentioned it as well, in the context of how a national park would restrict and completely shut down all investments. At this meeting, the participants (local decision-makers, the landowner association, some local community members) "(...) signed some papers and agreed not to have a national park around here" (Stefan, vice-mayor, September 25th, 2017). This document was later published on the landowner association's website in an article titled "*Save Romania's territory! "land grabbing" in the heart of the country,*" part of a series of articles opposing the proposed park. This emerging opposition hampered the national park front-runner organization's collaboration with local decision-makers. This meeting resulted in a lawsuit over the spreading of misinformation between the landowner association which initiated the meeting and the national park front-runner organization, which later won the lawsuit.

As this episode shows, untangling the various conservation narratives that emerge among different key actors highlights the ideologies, (power) relations, and values that characterize the different actors involved. These narratives can also fuel conflict between actors exercising different degrees and forms of power

through their connections at different scalar levels (Büscher, 2012; Neumann, 2009). In this case, the key actors include the local people who live around the mountains, the local decision-makers who guide municipal development, and the conservationists who are located in the area, in urban centers in Romania, and abroad. These actors exercise different types of power by fostering relationships at different scalar levels that are beneficial to them, with actors who are supportive of their conservation narratives. As my research shows, these scalar arrangements are constructed (Neumann, 2009; Walker and Fortmann, 2003) in ways in which rural landscapes become part of local, regional, national, and international management schemes (Vaccaro et al., 2013) – be they around "wilderness" or "development", the two conflicting narratives in this case.

The different actors' abilities to produce particular (contested) outcomes and relationships relates, as the Făgăraș Mountains case illustrate, to the actors' power relations and how they mobilize at certain scales. Fostering relationships across scalar levels is thus a strategy that different actors employ (Brown and Purcell, 2005; Campbell, 2007), which also reveal the power relations and the type of power actors can exercise. At the local and regional level, mayors and vice-mayors can utilize connections at these levels to support their agendas. Conservationists can exercise different types of power and have different audiences. While conservationists can acquire land and enforce restrictions on use and access on their lands, they do not hold the same local power as elected decision-makers who are supported by powerful politicians at regional and

national levels. However, in 2016 the front-runner organization and the technocratic government at the time signed a memorandum of understanding for the potential establishment of the Făgăraș Mountains National Park, illustrating the connections between conservationists and government officials and how conservationists also have the potential to influence national policy development. The signing of this memorandum caused a communication breach with local community members, with some confusion as to whether or not a national park had already been designated.

In between conservationists and local decision-makers is the heterogenous group of local community members, who have diverse visions and employ various conservation narratives. This is key in understanding what the "local" perspective may entail as local community members use different conservation narratives supportive of different visions for the future Făgăraș Mountains. Dissecting the "local" would aid an understanding of the different power relations that local community members are part of, as local community members include marginalized groups such as Rudari, shepherds, farmworkers who formerly worked on collective farms, urban dwellers enjoying their retirement in the countryside, business owners, and local public workers among others.

As my research shows, different actors' conservation narratives also illustrate their political interests (Campbell, 2007). The different actors' conservation narratives can reveal points of contention and potential "sites" of

conflict over the desired type of landscape and the meanings ascribed to the landscape, as well as their visions for the future of Făgăraș Mountains. There is no single, shared vision, nor one dominating conservation narrative that serves as a common ground between these actors, who have different political connections and abilities to dictate the future of the area. As such, the narratives also tell us about the ideological standpoints and political agendas of the actors, as different actors are likely to support initiatives which they believe to be beneficial to themselves (Horowitz, 2010; Walker and Fortmann, 2003). The overarching narrative for conservationists is one of establishing a new national park for biodiversity conservation and ecotourism. This vision spurs narratives over restrictions among local decision-makers and local community members alike. The chief narrative among local decision-makers is about developing ski slopes, a narrative that conservationists reject as nonsensical due to threats of snowmelt caused by climate change, and they position themselves against because it goes against their vision of environmental stewardship. The agenda(s) among local decision-makers focuses on development and rural invigoration primarily through increasing tourist infrastructure. Local decision-makers' primary concern is about local economic development, for which ski development is seen as the solution.

The political nature of the narratives is most evident among the actors who have greater power to influence the future of the landscape. The agenda among conservationists is one of protecting wilderness through designating the area as

a national park. Although “conservationists” as a group of key actors include various ENGOs, they represent a more homogenous narrative than the other two groups. Conservationists also employ this narrative through various means as they purchase land for protection, campaign regionally, nationally, and internationally, and establish connections at a national and subnational level. This illustrates the way in which neoliberal conservation schemes operate through private initiatives. The conservationists’ international connections are primarily related to financial support received from international philanthropists, collaboration with internationally based organizations, and communication through various media with environmentally concerned global publics.

Political ecology elucidates the ways in which a national park can change the ways of living with the forest – by both eliminating some ways of life and making new ways of living with the forest possible. A political ecology framework also aids our understanding of how certain powerful political actors (i.e. conservationists) are able to dictate this development and how local decision-makers, with their own political interests, are attempting to refuse or resist the conservation project. As such, the case of the potential Făgăraș Mountains National Park presents an emerging conflict between different actors attempting to materialize their own visions for the landscape. In between the two chief narratives employed by two of the main actors – conservationists and local decision-makers – are the divergent narratives around conservation that local community members employ. The array of diverse positions towards the

conservation initiative reflect the heterogeneity of local community members and how they may experience the detriments and benefits of the initiative differently (Horowitz, 2011, 2010). The socio-economic context of many of the villages surrounding the Făgăraș Mountains emphasize the need for local economic development, which is a concern among local community members as well preserving local way of life, especially livelihoods and land use. Both conservationists' and the local decision-makers' visions resonate, in different ways, with the local livelihood needs and practices.

Political ecology provides a useful framework for untangling these conservation narratives as it directs attention to the political economy, history, and socio-economic contexts of the issues under scrutiny (Robbins, 2012). The narratives around deforestation have strong roots in the history of land-use and the rapid change in the political landscape that Romania went through following 1989. In the wake of the Romanian Revolution, deforestation became an increasingly prominent issue in the Făgăraș Mountains and this development has formed local narratives not only regarding deforestation, but also conservation as a whole. This is a function of the rapid and drastic changes that characterize the shift from Communism to capitalism, especially the changes in property rights and the privatization of land with the land reforms in the 1990s and 2000s (Land Law 18/1991, 1/2000, and 247/2005). This complex historical context is crucial in understanding the conservation narratives of contemporary national park establishment. These changes in societal structures also shape the chief

narrative among conservationists, since their vision is based on un-doing what has been done (deforestation as a result of land restitution) and returning the Făgăraș Mountains to their “original” state as wilderness.

2.7. Chapter Two: Literature Cited

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Chapter Three: Colliding Agendas in Forest Conservation and Social Memory in Post-Communist Romania

3.1 Introduction

> I remember, as a child, that they [the Communist state] were spraying the forest by airplane. At the time, I didn't know what it meant, but after the Revolution, as we can even see on the TV, the forest has gotten a bit out of control. It was managed better during Communist time (Vlad, interview, 2017).

During a series of initial interviews with local residents in 2017 on the anticipated impacts of a new proposed national park in central Romania, interviewees continually offered unprompted reflections on the state of forest management during Communism (1947-1989), a period that ended nearly three decades previous. Just a few years earlier, the Făgăraș Mountains, a highly biodiverse area with extensive old-growth forests located in the southern Carpathian mountain range, became the focus of a conservation initiative sponsored by a private foundation (i.e. a privately protected area (PA) employing neoliberal tools such as marketisation and commodification (Holmes & Cavanagh, 2016)). This private foundation, *Foundation Conservation Carpathia* (FCC), is based in an urban center in the vicinity of the Făgăraș Mountains and, despite employing primarily Romanian citizens, is directed by a German-Austrian couple. FCC's conservation initiative – currently in the form of a privately PA covering approximate 10% of the Făgăraș Mountains 's 200.000 ha – is

expanding its geographical coverage with the vision of creating the largest forested park in central Europe – *The Făgăraș Mountains National Park* (FMNP). While the number of privately PAs have increased worldwide in the past decade (Stolton et al., 2014), this privately PA is, to our knowledge, the only one of its size in Romania. Located in the southeastern corner of the Făgăraș Mountains, this PA has been gradually established by FCC with financial support from international philanthropists as a response to the (much-debated) deforestation that occurred during the transition to a free-market economy.

Local community members' responses to the FMNP initiative, voiced during interviews and other research interactions in the region, frequently contrasted forest management in past versus the present. This sparked our curiosity: how do local experiences and "social memory" shape public responses to contemporary conservation and PA initiatives? How might local people's experiences of the past guide local perceptions of the nature and forest management? How might local social memory around the past be important in places with conflictual recent histories? The FMNP proposal means that the communities surrounding the Făgăraș Mountains are once again witnessing drastic changes in landownership and land management. Drawing on concepts in conservation social science and social memory studies, our research explores how these changes are frequently understood by local communities with reference to conflictual histories around foreign (resource) control, private ownership, corruption, and lack of trust.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

Research in environmental humanities has explored the historical context of conservation initiatives, the social conflicts they can create, and how they are experienced and remembered (e.g. Büscher, 2012; Gissibl et al., 2012; Jacoby, 2001; Kupper, 2014; Spence, 1999). History and memory are overlapping but distinct ways of knowing the past. Where history is empirically documented, memory is grounded in individual and collective experience (Lowenthal, 2015). Memories are tied to individual and collective identities, (ecological) knowledge, and social practices (Barthel et al., 2010; Cater and Keeling, 2013; Mistry et al., 2014; Nazarea, 2006). Memories warrant attention as they inform people's perspectives and experiences and provide insights into how both individuals and communities recall the past (Cellarius, 2004). With regard to conservation initiatives, (local) memories can offer important insights into how locals perceive (conservation) practices and reveals potential points of contention between locals and conservation managers. Cellarius (2004) for example, shows how memories and lived experiences can influence people's ideas about forest management in Bulgaria. Barthel and colleagues (2010) use the metaphor of a library to illustrate how community memory in ecosystem management retains and transmits (ecological) knowledge and managerial advice between the different people involved.

In this paper, we use the term *social memory* to denote these socially constructed, collective recollections of the past. Unlike individual memory, social memory refers to the collective and relational patterns of remembering and perceiving the past (Assmann, 2006; Rekść, 2015). Social memory is selective as it involves "selective remembering and deep forgetting" (Connerton, 2008; Rekść, 2015, 107) and forms a community of shared memories, while drawing attention to the social context of remembering and shared or contradictory perceptions of the past (French, 1995). "We remember with others and in response to their perceptions of both their pasts and our own," argues Sue Campbell (2017), and such "memory work" aims at providing a "usable past" for interpreting changing social worlds. Crucially, possessing such memory does not necessitate lived experiences of the past as such memories are transmitted intergenerationally through communication, meaning that social memory may have a "lifespan" of approximately 80 years (Assmann, 2006). Thus, memories are not necessarily reliable, accurate accounts of past events, but are still facts as "'wrong' statements are still psychologically 'true' and that this truth may be equally as important as factually reliable accounts" (Portelli, 2003, 68). Memory work allows researchers to explore events of the past as experienced by people in ways that official historical documents do not necessarily capture (Thompson, 2003) and can reveal how the meanings people ascribe to the past shapes their contemporary understandings and experiences (Portelli, 2003).

In the context of the post-Communist societies, social memory has been widely studied as “Communist nostalgia”: that is, longing for the Communist past (Boym, 2001; Todorova and Gille, 2010). This should not be interpreted as a manifestation of ignorance, but rather as a result of unfulfilled promises in a capitalist society and the yearning for certain aspects (medical care, employment security, car vouchers etc.) of the paternalistic state (Marin, 2016; Morariu, 2012; Rekść, 2015). As such, Communist nostalgia is not a desire to restore all aspects of the former regime, nor is it necessarily reflective of real experiences, particularly among the younger population. Such expressions of longing for an unlived past has been labeled imagined nostalgia (Bardan, 2018) and denotes the social memory of the younger populace who have not lived through the time that they “remember”. In the case of Romania, nostalgia for the Communist past manifests as a result of the economic and social challenges Romania faced in the decades following the Revolution in December 1989 (Marin, 2016). According to opinion polls, nostalgia for Communist times are widespread among Romanians (Georgescu, 2010; Marin, 2016). These opinions and memories continue to shape Romanians’ perceptions and understandings of a wide range of contemporary social, economic, and political issues, including, we suggest, land and forest use in the context of protected areas.

3.3 Materials and methods

3.3.1 Historical landownership in Romania: From Communism to Capitalism

Beginning in 1948, the Communist regime nationalized forests and nationalized and collectivized agricultural lands as either state farms (*Intreprindere Agricola de Stat*, IAS) or cooperatives (*Cooperativa Agricolă de Producţie,* CAP) (Dorondel, 2016; Verdery and Kligman, 2011). During Communism, the state was the primary owner (and manager) of the area. This meant that the state could control the entire area in accordance with state-defined management objectives (Zinveliu, 1971). Highly centralized management remained in place until the Romanian Revolution in December 1989. The decade following the revolution was one of drastic changes, including the introduction of free-market economy, privatization of land, and the initiation of accession to the European Union (EU). Immediately after the revolution, Romania's GDP plummeted by 35% in just three years (1989-1992), partially due to institutional changes, as well as declining demand for Romanian goods due to the demise of Comecon[17] and the wars in the Balkans and Middle East (Ibrahim and Galt, 2002). The institutional transition to a free-market economy took place in two stages, beginning with the period 1990-1996, characterized by gradual price

[17] The Council for Mutual Economic Assistance. Soviet-led economic organization (1949-1991) for the Eastern Bloc and other Communist ruled countries.

liberation and restructuring of the tax system, among other policies (Ibrahim and Galt, 2002).

This period also included major changes to land distribution and resource policies, including the passage of the first Land Law (18/1991). This law initiated the process of privatization, following a principle of historical justice by restoring agricultural and forest lands to their previous (pre-1947) owners (Dorondel, 2016; Vasile and Măntescu, 2009; Swinnen, 1999). This law led to the privatization of approximately 5% of Romania's forest area, about 350000 ha of forest lands (Lawrence and Szabo, 2005). The "shock therapy" transition of the second half of the 1990s followed, with rapid institutional restructuring of the Romanian economy and society to conform with western, especially EU, standards (Dorondel, 2016; Hitchins, 2014; Ibrahim and Galt, 2002). The second Land Law restored agricultural and forest lands to municipalities, churches, associations (*obște and composesorate*), and private individuals. In 2005, the third Land Law privatized what had been exempted by previous laws (Vasile and Măntescu, 2009). This process drastically changed forest ownership: state-owned forest shares decreased rapidly, declining from 100% of the forest in 1990 and 92% in 2000, to 53% in 2010, and now under 50% (Palaghianu and Dutca, 2017). Romania became an EU member in 2007, 14 years after it signed the Association Agreement with the EU (Hitchins, 2014). EU accession meant integrating EU environmental law into Romanian law, including adopting EU nature conservation initiatives and targets, including designating Natura 2000

PAs. For Romania, this resulted in the creation of a PA network consisting of 1323 sites primarily dominated by Natura 2000 management objectives. The amount of national territory designated as PAs increased from 4.1% pre-1989 to 19.29% in 2009 (Iojă et al., 2010).

3.3.2 Study Area

The Făgăraș Mountains is a highly biodiverse area located between Transylvania and Wallachia in Romania (Figure 6). The region falls under 25 different municipal jurisdictions, with a mosaic of different landowners including both public and private owners. Private owners include private individuals, companies, associations, schools, churches, municipalities, and the state[18]. In addition to seasonal residents, the area is characterized by a demographically older population who pursue diverse livelihood activities, many of whom also practice subsistence horticulture and livestock use.

[18] In the Romanian context, the state can also be a private owner.

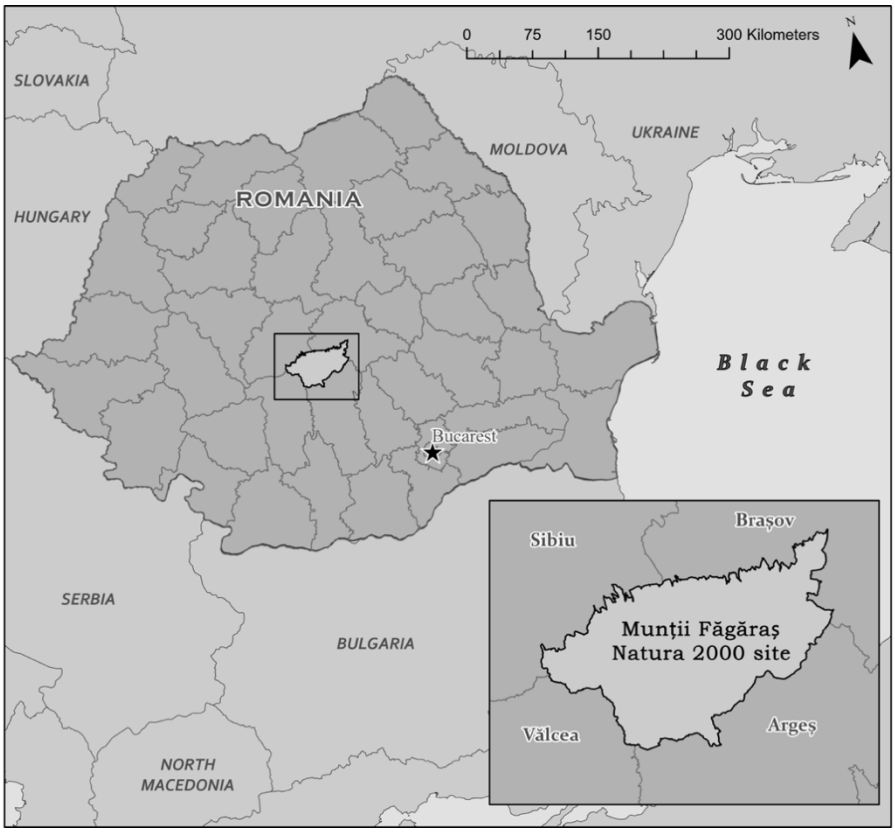

Figure 6 Map of the Făgăraș Mountains Natura 2000 sites. Made with Natural Earth. Free vector and raster map data @ naturalearthdata.com.

3.3.3 Data Collection

We collected data in communities surrounding the FM using a mixed-methods approach (56 semi-structured interviews, document analysis, participant observation, and a questionnaire). The first author collected data between September 2017 and July 2019 while intermittently living in the villages where she collected data. Based on the initial interviews in 2017, we inquired about forest management during and after Communism as a specific focus of the sequential data collection. The first author carried out 56 semi-structured

interviews (Table 5) and distributed a quantitative questionnaire (n = 644) among local community members (Table 5) in ten different municipalities in the study area between August – December 2018. The implementation of the questionnaires followed a Drop-Off-Pick-Up method with a random proportionate sampling frame (Vaske, 2008), yielding a response rate of 30%. The questionnaire also provided the opportunity for respondents to volunteer qualitative comments at the end (n = 264), which we also draw upon for this analysis.

Table 4 Profile of the qualitative interview participants

Sample group	No. interviews (total 56)	Description
Local mayors/vice mayors	13	Interviews took place in 10 different municipalities
Governmental representatives	4	Relevant local and national divisions
ENGOs	5	Different types of ENGOs with various levels of involvement in the proposed park
Local community members	32	**Age range:** 22 – 88 years old **Sex:** female & male **Primary occupation*:** Farmers; shepherds; retirees; school employees; a student; a priest; local historians; guesthouse owners; tourism employees; people belonging to the minority group *Rudari*

* Several of the interviewees pursued a variety of livelihood strategies such as running a guesthouse alongside full-time employment elsewhere; many practiced semi-subsistence horticulture and livestock production.

Table 5 Demographic profile of the questionnaire respondents. We grouped respondents between the age of 18-45 (24.6%; n = 155) as “Imagined” and grouped respondents between the age of 46 and older (75.4%; n = 470) as “Lived”. Respondents who did not indicate their age (i.e. missing values; n = 19) have been omitted from the ANOVA and T-test analysis.

Demographics (n = 644)		Percentages
Sex	Female	48,8%
	Male	50,9%
Age category		
	18-25	3,0%
	26-35	7,7%
	36-45	13,9%
	46-55	21,6%
	56-65	29,0%
	65+	24,8%
Employment during Communism		
	Factories	5,6%
	Heavy industry	17,7%
	IAS	6,1%
	CAP	13,5%
	Hunting lodges	2%
	Other	28,9%
Current employment status		
	Full time	44.4%
	Part time	3.1%
	Unemployed	4.0%
	Retired	41.0%
	Student	6.5%
	Other	1.0%

3.3.4 Data analysis

Using interpretative practices consistent with “grounded theory” approaches (Deacon and Baxter, 2012), the first author carried out inductive thematic coding (Braun & Clarke, 2006) on the interview transcripts, questionnaire comments, and fieldnotes, and discussed the codes and excerpts with the coauthors. The authors identified three prevalent themes: forest health and management in past/present; resource sovereignty/foreign control; and corruption. All interviewees were assigned a pseudonym.

We divided the survey respondents into two groups (Table 5): those with imagined experience of forest management during Communism who were 16 years or younger in 1989 (24.6%; n = 155) and those with lived experience who were 17 years or older in 1989 (75.4%; n = 470). We ran a one-way ANOVA comparing the two groups to evaluate forest management and the forest condition in 1989, 2007, and 2013 in respect to today (Table 6). We compared people with lived and imagined experience of forest management during Communism using independent samples T-tests but detected no statistically significant differences between the two groups. We used an independent samples T-test to compare the two groups across a number of items dealing with deadwood and the state (Table 7).

3.4 Results

3.4.1 Deforestation, forest management, and firewood

> Do you know why people thought it was better back then? Because in Communism, the forest was protected. Today, it's damaged. It's enough just to look at Făgăraș Mountains, there are bald patches everywhere! It was protected in Communism because all the land belonged to the state with regulations. Not like now where it's allowed to destroy everything. (Elena, interview, 2019).

Elena is not alone in her view on forest management during Communism and how the Făgăraș Mountains have evolved since 1989. Respondents evaluated the current management of the Făgăraș Mountains as worse than during Communism ($\bar{x}$ = -1.07; SD = 1.090), worse than 2007 ($\bar{x}$ = -.80; SD = 1.088), and worse than 2013 ($\bar{x}$ = -.75; SD = 1.987), with statistically significant differences between people's evaluations of 1989 compared to 2007 and 1989 compared to 2013 (*p*-value <.001) (Table 6). We did not detect any statistically significant differences between people with lived and imagined experiences. This could potentially be explained by the generational aspect to social memory, as memories of the collective past can be shared between members of a group across generations (Assmann, 2006).

Thirty of the interviewees and 12 of the questionnaire comments raised the issue of firewood availability and increasing costs of firewood. This was often illustrated with statements comparing communities near the forest with the capital city: "it's our [community's] forest but we pay the same for wood as people in Bucharest,", or simply noting the irony of it being equally difficult to obtain

firewood in the countryside as in the capital, despite the villages' location near the forest. The shortage of available firewood and recent forestry activities form a crucial context for understanding local perceptions of the proposed park, in somewhat contradictory ways. On one hand there is a strong local concern regarding deforestation and its possibly illegal character while, in the wake of the current firewood crisis on the other hand, locals are also concerned about access to firewood, a vital livelihood resource. This simultaneously boosts and hinders support for conservation initiatives.

Conservation practices do not necessarily align with local understanding of "proper" management, especially when they are perceived as disregarding local livelihood needs. When talking about current forestry practices, notions of "cleaning up the forest" (i.e. cutting and removing branches, old/sick trees etc.) often surfaced as an ideal for managerial efforts, both in the interviewees and questionnaire. As a local mayor explained: "There is an NGO that exploits the wood in this area, and there are signs indicating that they aren't doing this in a very correct way, leaving part of the trees on the ground. For example, an ill tree is felled, chopped up and left there: it could be very valuable because there are people with problems of heating. People have an average age of 70+, they risk being found frozen in their houses" (Ciprian, interview, 2017). This utilitarian perspective on forestry is dominant among local community members, whose primary concern is meeting basic livelihood needs in form of firewood, rather than preserving deadwood for biodiversity purposes. This is also reflected in the

quantitative data, where especially the older group believes that sick trees (Imagined: $\bar{x}$ = 1.23; Lived: $\bar{x}$ = 1.50; t(-3.060551); *p*-value = .003) and old trees (Imagined: $\bar{x}$ = .66; Lived: $\bar{x}$ = .98; t(-2.532); *p*-value = .012) should be cut for people to use (Table 7). One interviewee, who was highly critical of the park proposal noted: "When the state owned the mountains, it was easier than now. Everyone steals - politicians, business owners. They say that there isn't enough forest, but the pastures were abandoned, and turned into forest. There is nowhere for the shepherds to go (…) Because of the shortage of wood, the price increases. Heating with wood would be better than gas, which is even more expensive" (Marius, interview, 2018). Here, perceived contemporary mismanagement of the forest contrasts with the memory of stronger state regulation in the past. Respondents evaluated the forest condition today compared to 1989 as being much worse ($\bar{x}$ = -1.38; SD = .951) and worse today compared to 2007 ($\bar{x}$ = -1.01; SD =1.052) and 2013 ($\bar{x}$ = -1.00; SD = 1.046) with statistically significant differences between 1989 and 2007, and 1989 and 2013 (*p*-value <.001) (Table 6). These findings illustrate how locals remember the forest and forest management during Communism as being better than today, while not necessarily supporting conservation-oriented forestry practices (e.g. leaving deadwood in the forest).

Table 6 ANOVA comparisons of questionnaire respondents' perceptions of the forest condition in the Făgăraș Mountains (FM) and the management of the Făgăraș Mountains (FM) today compared to the years: 1989, 2007, 2013 for the sample overall, respondents with lived experiences (age 16+ in 1989) and imagined experience (under age 16 in 1989) at the 0.05 significance level. The superscripts a and b denote significant differences between means based on the Tamhane and Bonferroni post hoc tests. In cases where we detected equality of variances, we used Bonferroni post hoc, otherwise we used Tamhane post hoc test. Variables with the same letter do not have statistically significantly different means. †The items were asked on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from much worse (-2) over about the same (0) to much better (+2). * Equal variances not assumed.

	1989	**2007**	**2013**	*F* value	*P* value	Eta (η^2)
The way the FM is managed today compared to... †						
Overall						
mean ($\bar{x}$)	-1.07[a]	-.80[b]	-.75[b]	15.455	< .001	.017
std. deviation	1.090	1.088	1.087			
Lived						
mean ($\bar{x}$)	-1.07[a]	-.77[b]	-.72[b]	12.887	< .001	.019
std. deviation	1.114	1.113	1.103			
Imagined						
mean ($\bar{x}$)	-1.08[a]	-.88[ab]	-.82[b]	2.451	.087	.011
std. deviation	1.028	.1027	1.059			
The forest condition in the FM today compared to…†						
Overall*						
mean ($\bar{x}$)	-1.38[a]	-1.01[b]	-1.00[b]	27.209	< .001	.030
std. deviation	.951	1.052	1.046			
Lived*						
mean ($\bar{x}$)	-1.40[a]	-1.02[b]	-0.97[b]	23.353	< .001	.035
std. deviation	.939	1.943	1.058			
Imagined						
mean ($\bar{x}$)	-1.33[a]	-0.97[b]	-1.05[b]	4.641	.010	.021
std. deviation	1.001	1.102	1.022			

3.4.2 Colliding Agendas: Conservation, Private & State Interests

The thematic analysis revealed suspicions regarding the nature of the park initiative, in particular around the conservation directors' international connections, potential "foreign" ownership over local land and resources, and hidden agendas behind the proposal. This is also reflected in the questionnaire comments, where 83 respondents volunteered their perspectives on the park proposal and forestry activities in relation to wood theft, deforestation, and corruption. Ionut, a member of a local landowner association, illustrated the lack of trust in the park initiative:

> I expect political reasons are behind keeping the region undeveloped. That's my opinion. There might be others with the same opinion, and they might not be as willing to talk. Someone is behind it: the EU, politicians …Who is behind park initiative? I understand there is a foundation, but who is behind it? Uncle Sam? (…) Many people bought their lands for huge sums and now, do you think they would like to give them up? In Romania you get money for your land, compensations. If you know the right people you might get it valued three times higher (Ionut, interview, 2018).

The privatization of state assets also meant increasing foreign direct investment (FDI); Romania experienced an increase in FDI stocks from €5,323 million in 1999 to €62,291 million in 2015 (Stab and Paraschiv, 2017). The presence of foreign investors in Romania also shaped local perceptions of FCC's FMNP proposal. When asked to imagine what the local community would look like if he woke up tomorrow with a park in the backyard, Vlad compared the park proposal to the loss of Romanian economic assets:

> People would not be able to access, manage, or even exploit their forest. It would turn as it happens throughout Romania, as with the gas or electricity companies after Communism; Romanian sold their country to private investors and now they have to obey them: if they want to turn off the gas tomorrow, we couldn't do anything. The same would go with the forest. The foundation would take over the forest and the locals would lose them from their hands and already so many things have been given away (Vlad, interview, 2017).

This feeling of "selling Romania" is especially prominent in relation to selling assets to foreign interests and induced feelings of losing local control and resource sovereignty. As Stefan noted: "Well if they were capable of selling the methane gas, the energy to the foreigners… Selling the land to foreigners? How is it possible to be a slave in your own country?" (Stefan, interview, 2018). Feelings of distress and frustration with the general state of the country often surfaced in the interviews when talking about the proposed landscape changes. These were particularly pronounced in comments written on the questionnaire or during questionnaire distribution in the field, where people would initiate conversations with the first author about their fears relating to foreigners and occasionally *neamțul* ("the German" commonly used nickname for the director of FCC) in particular. As one respondent reflected in a questionnaire comment:

> We inherited these forests from our ancestors, and we want to take care of them for our followers. In our area its cold for 6-7 months a year, so we need firewood, which we take from the forest (deadwood, sick, curved/bad trees). When the park will be implemented, the forest will be closed for the locals, the foreign rich people will sell all the wealth of the forest (wood, animals, mushrooms, berries and the underground goods). We are going to be left poor and cold in our wealthy country (Questionnaire no. 571).

These concerns for a loss of economic control were echoed in anti-corruption sentiments. Like many post-Communist countries, Romania suffered from (and

continues to deal with) high rates of corruption during the transition from Communism (Petrova, 2014; Vasile, 2009). In 2018, Romania scored 47/100[19] on the Corruption Perception Index, ranking 61/180 countries, compared to Bulgaria (42/100), Hungary (46/100), and Poland (60/100) (Transparency International 2018). Multiple respondents pointed towards the possibility of a park being another opportunity for corrupt conduct. One interviewee explained how a park, despite possibly good intentions, would just allow the corrupt neo-Communists to enter a new playing field: "When there is a new park, they'll change their work position from the Forest Department and become Park Managers. And once they've changed their jobs, they'll continue to do the same thing they've always done, steal from the state forests and not care at all" (Octavian, interview, 2018). Octavian illustrates how the lack of trust in prospective conservation initiatives are shaped by past experiences and how these are remembered.

This mosaic of landownership creates a complex landscape which does not allow for one unified landowner but possibly one land custodian or management entity. Although local community members preferred state management of the Făgăraș Mountains during Communism, this preference does not necessarily carry over into current-day state ownership and management of the Făgăraș Mountains. The quantitative data indicates diverse views on whether the state should manage (Imagined: $\bar{x}$ = -.03, SD = 1.226; Lived: $\bar{x}$ = -.04; SD = 1.439) or

[19] This rank is based on public perception of corruption, where 0 is very corrupt and 100 is very clean

own (Imagined: $\bar{x}$ = -.09, SD = 1.230; Lived: $\bar{x}$ = -.08; SD = 1.412) the Făgăraș Mountains. While we detected no statistically significant differences between the two groups, the distribution of responses provided additional insights. The majority of respondents with imagined experience of Communism indicated that they were neutral toward state management (38.2%) and state ownership (35.6%), while respondents with lived experience were uniformly distributed across response categories.

Both groups of respondents had more pronounced views regarding the statements “the state wants control over my private land” (Imagined: $\bar{x}$ = -.54, SD = 1.171; Lived: $\bar{x}$ = -.64; SD = 1.285) and “establishing the FMNP is a way for the state to gain control over the area” (Imagined: $\bar{x}$ = .68, SD = 1.120; Lived: $\bar{x}$ = .77; SD = 1.194) (Table 7). Feelings towards the state are divergent and contradictory. On one hand, the majority of respondents felt that designating a park would result in state control; however, this is not perceived as including people’s private land. Whether the state should manage the area also causes disagreement, which is also reflected in the qualitative data. For instance, Bogdan contends: “FMNP shouldn’t be administered by private people, but the Romanian state is also not good enough to administer FMNP as in Communism” (Bogdan, interview, 2019), reflecting social memories of Communist state management.

Table 7 Independent samples T-test comparisons of questionnaire respondents with lived (age 16+ in 1989) and imagined experience (under age 16 in 1989) at the 0.05 significance level. All items were asked on a five-point Likert-scale ranging from strongly disagree (-2) over neutral (0) to strongly agree (+2). * Equal variances not assumed.

	Mean		Std. Deviation					
	Imagined ($\bar{x}$)	Lived ($\bar{x}$)	Imagined (SD)	Lived (SD)	T	df	*P* value	Cohen's d
Sick trees should be cut for people to use*	1.23	1.50	1.016	.68	-3.060551	200.753	.003	-.312
Old trees cut for people to use*	.66	.98	1.376	1.218	-2.532	235.917	.012	-.245
The FM should be owned by the state*	-.09	-.08	1.230	1.413	-.030	296.337	.976	-.003
The FM should be managed by the state*	-.03	-.04	1.226	1.439	.069	289.297	.945	.006
The state wants control over my private land*	-.54	-.64	1.171	1.285	.830	570.000	.407	.081
Establishing the FMNP is a way for the state to gain control over the area	.68	.77	1.120	1.194	-.856	571	.392	-.083

3.5 Discussion

Local perceptions of past forest management, the conflict-laden history of land privatization, and experiences with capitalism all influence local perceptions and anticipation of the proposed park. As Andrei reflected: “Our past experience proved that everything that was done through these PAs did not involve the local community. Everyone had an interest behind. All the time we were told half of the story.” (Andrei, interview, 2018). When the Făgăraș Mountains were initially designated a Natura 2000 site, locals did not feel consulted, and Andrei illustrates how previous experiences serve as a cautionary tale for supporting new conservation initiatives. These plans are perceived as alien blueprints imposed from outside (outside of the community, outside of the country) and give a sense of “occupation” by a foreign power. These previous experiences extend beyond the events of EU accession and include memories of Communist forest management. The general mistrust in the state and its various bodies are heightened by the fact that the state does not provide the social security people anticipated, nor the social security the Communist state provided. The local experiences of Communism and the transition to democracy have manifested as nostalgia towards certain aspects of Communism, such as healthcare, security, and employment (Rekść, 2015). It is the unfulfilled promises of free-market economy that leave people longing for the past in economic and social terms, while forgetting the undesirable aspects of this past (Angé and Berliner, 2015;

Boym, 2007). Physical objects, including forest resources, can trigger nostalgia for the past (Angé and Berliner, 2015) and are important for how nostalgia can manifest towards objects of the past. Forests and related forest resources that were used in different ways pre-, post-, and during Communism, have become part of such objects for longing. Although forests are under continuous change, forests form part of the physical landscapes that people remember, especially in the context of future-oriented conservation proposals. Uncertainties, anxieties, and expectations surrounding the future manifest as a social memory of the past and foster nostalgia towards past forest management and forest landscapes (Angé and Berliner, 2015). As Svetlana Boym writes "[t]he fantasies of the past determined by the needs of the present have a direct impact on the realities of the future." (2007, p. 8).

Perceptions of contemporary forest resources and PAs strategies are informed by the social, political, and economic upheavals experienced by Romanians since WWII, and memories of these. After WWII, Romania faced extensive war reparation payments to the Soviet Union, partly in the form of timber resources (Nita et al., 2018). Forest management during the Soviet occupation of Romania (1944-58) focused on timber extraction, clear cutting, and replanting of fast-growing species and monocultures such as spruce. Despite this period of heavy forest exploitation, Communist forestry practices as a whole were concerned with forestation and natural regeneration. For example, in 1976 the state developed a long-term National Program (1976-2010, abolished: 1990) that

set an upper limit for annual wood harvest at 20 million ha. per annum and a limit on contiguous clear-cutting at 10 ha. This program also laid out afforestation plans and seedling production in nurseries (Nita et al., 2018; Palaghianu and Dutca, 2017). The evaluations of both forest condition and management today compared to Communism, EU accession, and the recent past (2013) are a product not only of forest management during Communism, but also the experiences of a changing rural landscape over the past 30 years. The past is remembered as a time with reliable firewood supply, reforestation efforts, and without wood theft, in contrast to the current situation which people associate with deforestation and shortage of firewood supply. These perceptions resonate with one of the most prominent changes in the rural landscape: the privatization of forest and agricultural lands, and the consequent logging activities.

Locals explained the effectiveness of the Communist state in managing forests by alluding to the ways in which the state exercised power through coercion, speaking to the selective nature of social memory: “In Communism it was better because of fear, no one dared to steal. So, in this sense, it was better” (Comment from fieldnotes). During Ceaușescu’s regime, Romania’s totalitarian state exercised coercive power (Deletant, 1995) and had an extensive network of informants in the secret police (*Securitate*) (Rusu, 2017). This power was curtailed with the fall of the regime and in its absence, the initial conditions were favorable to corruption and theft of state assets (Negoita, 2011). Alongside the slow and fragmented privatization of forest lands, this enabled some to make

quick profits by means of extracting timber (Sikor et al., 2017), the legality of which was not always clear. States have been criticized for exercising coercive power in environmental management practices (Neumann, 1998; Peluso and Watts, 2011; Youdelis, 2013); however, the withdrawal of the state has generated its own concerns. “Back then, many of us hated Communism, but we realize after 25 years of democracy that it was better in Communism (…) Back then, they exploited the forest much better than now. Then we had the law and fear, now we have the power of money” (Stefan, interview, 2018). Here, Stefan is also invoking the idea of the now-absent paternalistic state, leaving both the forest and the people exposed to market forces and foreign interests – foreign interests which are advocating for a national park. Local perceptions of the park proposal are diverse: some are concerned with loss of resource sovereignty; others perceive a park as an opportunity to combat deforestation and (il)legal logging. Deforestation is an issue of great concern among people in the Făgăraș region, as various actors (international, local, commercial, and private) have engaged in (il)legal logging activities in the past thirty years. The extent of and the parties responsible for deforestation in Romania are much-debated issues in the media and the literature (Agent Green, 2018; Palaghianu and Dutca, 2017). Social media plays a significant role in debating and condemning deforestation, legal or illegal. Media coverage of deforestation has focused especially on the role of foreign companies. For example, an Austrian wood-processing company operating in Romania made headlines with pictures of a bear scavenging through urban bins

next to a long freight train, loaded with lumber, and captions such as "*Bears look for food in the bins because the Austrians stole their home*". Such images have created strong emotions on social media and fueled negative perceptions concerning deforestation and environmental degradation, especially the role of international forestry companies. Some international forestry companies who have previously been involved in logging in Romania and are still processing timber in Romania, are currently part of a platform consisting of ENGOs and private interests who are working towards defining standards for forestry activities and protected areas across Romania.

3.6 Conclusion

Conservation initiatives do not occur in a vacuum. Historical and political developments like those experienced and remembered by Romanians often frame the realities of the people living inside or adjacent to PAs. This context influences not only people's social memories of the past, but also their perceptions of the future (Angé and Berliner, 2015; Boym, 2007; Cellarius, 2014). Establishing a park is not simply a question of drawing borders and assigning a certain status to a landscape. It is also a question of changing landownership, access to and control of resources, potentially conflicting management visions, power, local livelihoods, local knowledge, and how all of these aspects relate to

conservation (Büscher, 2012; Fletcher, 2010; Gissibl et al., 2012; Holmes and Cavanagh, 2016; Jacoby, 2001; Sen and Pattanaik, 2017).

In the Făgăraș Mountains, the proposal to expand the current privately PA and designate the area as a national park carries with it (for some local residents) several connotations of corruption, foreign control of resources, and lack of trust, which are shaped by local social memories. Following the collapse of the Communist regime, land restitution and privatization in Romania was far from a painless endeavor. The struggles of pre-Communist landowners included the location of the land plots and providing sufficient evidence for one's historical ownership, sometimes resulting in drawn-out court cases (Dorondel, 2016; Verdery, 1997). Local perceptions of conservation initiatives must be understood in this historical context of struggles between state and landowner first with collectivization and forest nationalization (Verdery and Kligman, 2011) and later privatization of land, as these experiences and memories hereof shape perceptions of prospective conservation. By combining social memory with attention to historical developments we can capture how these divergent issues and at times seemingly paranoid statements are relevant to understanding how people perceive the park proposal, its advocates, and its anticipated impacts on local communities.

Through a mixed-methods approach, this research demonstrates that local community memories of Communist forest management have planning and policy implications for current conservation. While the paternalistic state owned

the area and managed it according to centralized management objectives (Zinveliu, 1971), this does not equate support for current state ownership, nor state level management. While the proposed FMNP would not be managed directly by the state but by a custodian organization, managerial decisions would still reflect state interests. Furthermore, local ideals of “best practice” forest management (i.e. that of Communist management) as reflected in local social memories may not necessarily correspond with contemporary conservation managerial goals and visions. As such, social memory of forest management can be indicative of potential conflicts around future management. Social memory and historical context sheds critical light on people’s experiences with the transformations from state-led economy to capitalism and democracy including land privatization, corruption, and experiences with foreign corporations. These experiences affect perceptions of the current park proposal and indicate that nature conservation in and of itself is not necessarily the main cause for concern. Rather, concerns relate to loss of local livelihoods, loss of (sometimes arduously achieved) local resource sovereignty, and anxiety around (hidden) agendas and motivations behind the proposal. As this research demonstrates, conservation initiatives should be attentive to local historical context and social memory, which can reveal points of contention and potential conflicts.

3.7 Chapter Three: Literature Cited

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Chapter Four: A National Park in the Making: Local Concerns and Equity

4.1 Introduction

Parks and protected areas (PAs) play an important role in mitigating biodiversity loss (UNEP-WCMC, IUCN, and NGS, 2018). Conservation of biodiversity through the establishment of PAs sometimes comes at the costs of local communities in or adjacent to such areas (Coad et al., 2008; Holmes and Cavanagh, 2016; Neumann, 2001; West et al., 2006;). Conflicts between local communities and PAs have spurred attention to issues of equity not only in academia, but also in guidelines provided by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and conservation targets formulated by the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD) (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010; Dudley, 2008; Stolton et al., 2014). Attention to the distribution of benefits and the involvement of local communities in PA management have often been warranted by the argument that gathering local support for conservation is paramount to the longevity and success of PAs (Bennett and Dearden, 2014; Mannigel, 2008; Pietrzyk-Kaszyńska et al., 2012). According to IUCN guidelines, PAs should provide benefits for local communities in so far that doing so does not conflict with the PA's conservation objectives (Dudley, 2008; Stolton et al., 2014); however, obtaining local support for PAs can prove difficult, and depends upon a

number of factors such as ecological effectiveness, good governance, and social impacts (Bennett et al., 2019).

The ways in which PAs impact local communities are complex and contextual (Holmes and Cavanagh, 2016; Oldekop et al., 2015) and depend on the characteristics of the PA, such as geographical region (e.g. Eastern Europe), designation status (e.g. national parks), size of area (e.g. 200.000 ha), biome (e.g. temperate conifer forest), governance structure (e.g. co-management), and a range of social impacts (Oldekop et al., 2015). Such social impacts are also highly context dependent and can include dispossession and displacement (Brockington, 2004; Elmhirst, 2011; Jacoby, 2001; Neumann, 2001), loss of access to resources and livelihoods (Bennett and Dearden, 2014; Sen and Pattanaik, 2017), and impacts on culture and social structures and re-distribution of power (Jones et al., 2017), among others. PAs can also provide a range of potential benefits, such as providing alternative livelihood strategies through for example employment in the PA or related to tourism (Coad et al., 2008; Jones et al., 2017), empowering locals (Oldekop et al., 2015), improving physical and mental wellbeing of local community members and visitors (Bowler et al., 2010; Bratman et al., 2012; Romagosa et al., 2015) and enhancing ecosystem services (Jones et al., 2017; Sodhi et al., 2010). The benefits and detriments of PAs are likely to be felt unevenly by different stakeholders, which have led scholars to call for more equitable conservation (Oldekop et al. 2015; Vaccaro et al. 2013).

There are two major reasons why equity should be considered in conservation. First, because it is just, and second because it ensures conservation effectiveness (Brockington, 2004; Dawson et al., 2018). Although equity is considered key to the effectiveness of conservation areas (i.e. an instrumental view on equity), it should be noted that power relations underpin local opportunities to reject and oppose protected areas (Holmes, 2013). This means that in cases where strong rule-enforcement is in place, conservation effectiveness can be unaffected by the lack of local support (Brockington, 2004; Holmes, 2007). Such scenarios, however, completely disregards the equity concerns, which we argue are central to any conservation efforts.

Equity as it pertains to conservation has gained increasingly more scholarly attention in the past decade, with the CBD's recognition of equity as a guiding principle for conservation with Aichi Target 11 which calls for 'effectively and equitably managed' protected areas (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010) and the Nagoya Protocol on Access and Benefit Sharing which calls for 'fair and equitable sharing of benefits ' related to the use of genetic resources (Convention on Biological Diversity, 2010, p. 1; Friedman et al., 2018; Zafra-Calvo et al., 2017). Equity is a complex and context-specific concept that is fundamentally value-laden (Dawson et al., 2018; Haas et al., 2019; Law et al., 2017; McDermott et al., 2013; Zafra-Calvo et al., 2019) and has been defined as 'the fair or just treatment of individuals or groups' (Law et al., 2017, p. 4). As such, equity is not

synonymous with equal distribution, but includes 'evaluating change in the relative situation of particular groups in society' (McDermott et al., 2013, p. 417).

Regarding PA management, equity is related to how people perceive the distribution of benefits, their participation in decision-making, and deprivation of rights (Zafra-Calvo et al., 2017). Scholars have highlighted three dimensions of equity, namely *distributional,* distribution of benefits and detriments arising from conservation; *procedural,* the inclusion of stakeholders in conservation decision-making; and *recognitional,* recognising stakeholders' cultural identities, knowledge systems, management practices, and values (Clements et al., 2018; McDermott et al., 2013; Noelia Zafra-Calvo et al., 2019). Some scholars (e.g. Friedman et al., 2018) have considered a fourth dimension, *contextual equity,* the historical, social, cultural, and economic context in which the conservation area unfolds, while others do not consider contextual equity a dimension in itself, but rather that factors underpinning the three dimensions of equity (Haas et al., 2019). Where distributional equity has been the focus of most scholarly work, recognition and contextual equity has received relatively little attention (Friedman et al., 2018). Understanding local perceptions of new conservation initiatives and their anticipated impacts can help ensure equitable conservation design that incorporates stakeholders' concerns and allows for stakeholder involvement at an early stage, in ways that are meaningful to all parties involved (Zafra-Calvo et al., 2017). Perceptions research can help contextualise equity concerns around social impacts, ecological outcomes, governance legitimacy, and management

acceptability (Bennett, 2016; Dawson et al., 2018) and can reveal if local stakeholders consider conservation initiatives equitable (Ward et al., 2018). To better incorporate stakeholders and stakeholder concerns into PA planning, we investigated local community members' perceptions of a proposed national park in the Făgăraș Mountains in central Romania in two areas around the Făgăraș Mountains: locals near an existing privately protected area (PPA) and locals in 8 other communities around the Făgăraș Mountains. The PPA comprises landholdings owned and administered by *Foundation Conservation Carpathia* (FCC). These landholdings are located in the southeast corner of the Făgăraș Mountains and are administered by FCC as a PPA. FCC is directed by an Austrian/German couple, who has put forward a proposal to designate the Făgăraș Mountains National Park (FMNP). FCC has, for the past 10 years been acquiring land for private protection.

In this article, we focus on the distributional and contextual aspects of equity in relation to FMNP and build upon this to provide recommendations for procedural equity pertaining to the establishment of FMNP. We focus on contextual, distributional, and procedural aspects of equity, as our data do not indicate any local concerns around recognition. We argue that understanding local perceptions of any PA proposal is critical for the construction of socially equitable PAs. There are lessons to be learned from the PPA in the future work towards potentially establishing FMNP, as understanding local perceptions can help mitigate any detriments felt by local community members as a by-product of

conservation. We also highlight the importance of attention to context (e.g. history, political economy, governance, culture) in ensuring procedural equity.

4.2 Methods

4.2.1 Study Area

The Făgăraș Mountains are located in the southern Carpathian mountain range in Romania (Figure 7). The area covers approximately 200.000 ha and is home to vast wildlife populations, endemic plant species, and extensive old-growth forest. While unpopulated, the Făgăraș Mountains are surrounded by 25 municipalities with approximately 70.000 people living in the area. The Făgăraș Mountains were designated a Natura 2000 site in 2007 but functioned without a management plan for the first 10 years. For the purpose of this paper, we divided the study area into municipalities located near a PPA in the South-eastern corner of the Făgăraș Mountains, and 8 other municipalities located in both the North and South of the Făgăraș Mountains, but not adjacent to the PPA.

The PPA covers approximately 10% of the Făgăraș Mountains and is under FCC's private governance. The PPA consists of different landholdings, primarily located in two different municipalities. The PPA does not cover the entirety of the two municipalities. The population density in the PPA area is much higher (26-35 people/km2) than in other parts of the Făgăraș Mountains, where the density is sometimes as low as 3 people/km^2. The PPA primarily falls within the jurisdiction

of two municipalities which had a combined population of approximately 10.000 people in 2016. The villages adjacent to the PPA are among the biggest in the entire study area and are located along major roads connecting important urban centres. The villages are also neighbouring important touristic sites including Piatra Craiului National Park and Bran Castle. This creates an opportunity for the development of tourism infrastructure and explains why this area has a higher level of tourism compared to other parts of the Făgăraș Mountains.

To compare the PPA to the rest of the Făgăraș Mountains, we chose an additional 8 municipalities in the Făgăraș Mountains. We limited our research to these 8 municipalities in order to be able to carry out ethnographic fieldwork alongside our quantitative questionnaire. To ensure a representative sample, we chose these 8 municipalities based on the following matrix: official census data (low/high number of residents); location (north/south); amount of land within the borders of the proposed park that fall under municipal jurisdiction; and presence/absence of touristic facilities (e.g. guesthouses). The number of guesthouses in the area varies greatly, where some villages have no official guesthouse facilities, others have multiple accommodation offers. Not all guesthouses are officially operating. The Transfăgărașan, the only public road in the area and a prominent tourist attraction, crosses the mountains at their centre connecting the south to the north and is only open in the summer months.

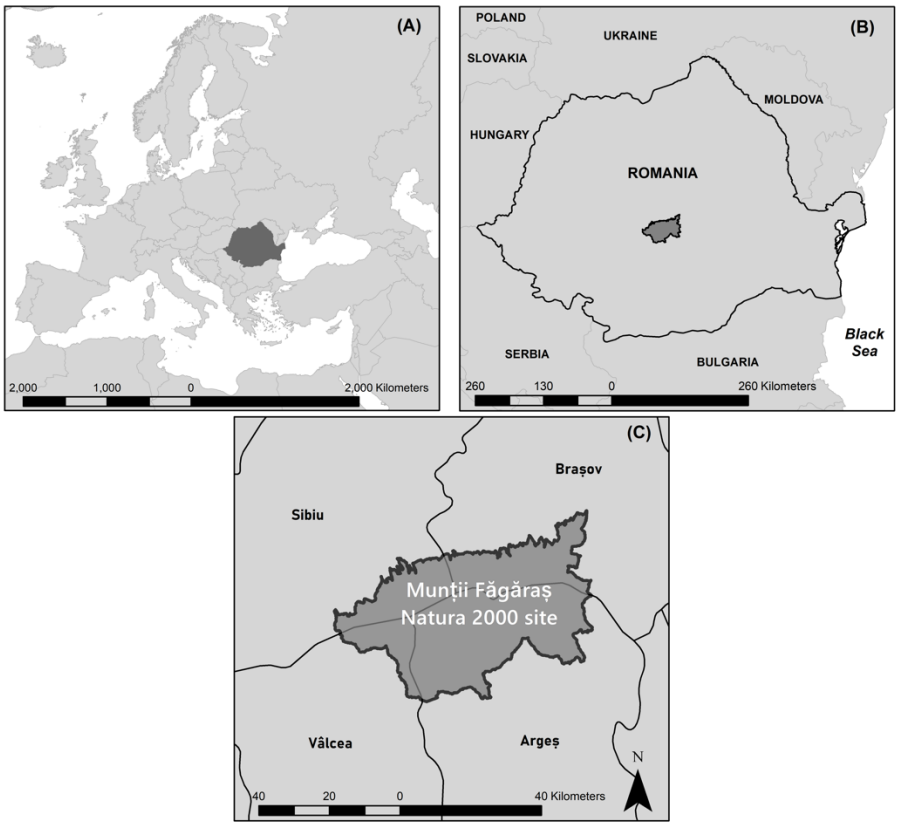

Figure 7 Location of the study area: (A) Map of Europe; (B) Map of Romania; (C) Map of the Făgăraș Mountains Natura 2000 sites (the proposed national park boundaries) including FCC's privately protected landholdings in the S/E corner of the Făgăraș Mountains. Made with Natural Earth. Free vector and raster map data @ naturalearthdata.com.

4.2.2 Data Collection

We collected data in three stages (September – October 2017; August – December 2018; April – July 2019) using mixed methods consisting of semi-structured interviews and a quantitative questionnaire. We carried out interviews at all three stages (n = 56) with decision-makers at the local and national levels, representatives for local, national, and international organisations, and local

community members (i.e. farmers, shepherds, retirees, former/current school teachers and principals, a student, a priest, local historians, guesthouse owners and tourism employees, and people belonging to the minority group Rudari). Of the 56 interviews, 13 of the interviewees lived adjacent to the PPA, 34 of the interviewees lived in other villages around the Făgăraș Mountains, and 9 lived in urban centres in Romania.

During the second stage of data collection (August – December 2018) we distributed a quantitative questionnaire (n = 644) with a proportional random sampling frame using the Drop-Off-Pick-Up (DOPU) method (Vaske, 2008) with a response rate of 30%. We sampled an even number of people identifying as male or female in both areas (Table 8), with a similar residency and landownership status (Table 9). The content of the questionnaire was based on (1) the qualitative interviews conducted in the first stage in 2017; and (2) a literature review of the social impacts of protected areas with items inspired by Bennett and Dearden (2014), Dimitrakopoulos et al. (2010), and Pietrzyk-Kaszyńska et al. (2012). Questionnaire respondents also had the opportunity to volunteer qualitative comments on the questionnaire (n = 264), which we draw upon to better understand the quantitative results.

4.2.3 Data Analysis

We carried out inductive thematic coding (Braun and Clarke, 2006) of the 26 exploratory interviews (collected in September – October 2017) in NVivo 12. Codes related to PA benefits (tourism, nature protection, stopping illegal logging); PA detriments (access, loss of rights, hindering development); ecosystem services (regulating, provisioning, and cultural); knowledge of PA designation status; tourism (skiing, ecotourism, agritourism, monasteries); illegal logging; corruption; wildlife-human interactions (conflict, losses, compensation); and livelihoods. We used these codes to inform the development of the quantitative questionnaire.

We coded the qualitative data collected between August – December 2018 and April – July 2019, consisting of 29 semi-structured interviews and the qualitative questionnaire comments (n = 264), according to the early developed codebook. We collated the codes into categories fitting with the quantitative data to map the different perceptions of FMNP and compared these themes to the equity framework (e.g. what do perceptions of benefits tell us about distributional equity?).

For the quantitative data, we used an independent samples T-test on the different perception items to detect differences in mean values between the PPA (n = 217) and the rest of FM (n = 427) and used Cohen's *d* as an effect size

measure (Table 10). A *d* value of 0.20 indicates a small effect, 0.50 a medium effect, and 0.80 a large effect (Vaske, 2008).

Table 8 Sex and age frequencies for the sample population.

Sample population	FM (n = 427)	PPA (n = 217)
Sex		
Female	50.1 %	50.2 %
Male	49.6 %	47.1 %
Other	0.2 %	0.5 %
Age Category		
18-25	2.2 %	4.7 %
26-35	7.7 %	7.6 %
36-45	15.0 %	12.3 %
46-55	21.0 %	22.3 %
56-65	29.2 %	28.4 %
65+	24.9 %	24.6 %

Table 9 Residency and landownership frequencies for the sample population.

Sample population	Primary Residency		Owns Land		Owns Land in Association	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
FM (n = 427)	77.9 %	22.1 %	53.6 %	46.4 %	21.3 %	78.7 %
PPA (n = 217)	76.0 %	24.0 %	48.0 %	52.0 %	8.8 %	91.2 %

4.3 Results

Results are organised according to the perceptions of benefits (general benefits, tourism, environmental protection value) and detriments (human – wildlife conflicts, restricting livelihood activities, access, and development) related to the proposed FMNP. Quantitative and qualitative results are presented simultaneously, and all interviewees have been assigned a pseudonym.

Table 10 Independent samples T-test between the privately protected areas (PPA) and the rest of the Făgăraș Mountains (FM). Cohen's d as an effect size measure. *Equal variances not assumed based on Levene's Test with 0.05 significance level.

Questionnaire Items[1]	PPA		FM				
I believe the proposed FMNP will …	$\bar{x}$	SD	$\bar{x}$	SD	*t* value	*p* value	Cohen's *d*
Impact on Life							
…change the way I live my life	.58	1.14	.42	1.16	1.62	.107	.142
…positively affect the way I live my life	.64[a]	1.14	.42[b]	1.10	2.23	.026	.197
…negatively affect the way I make a living	.37	1.20	.49	1.14	-1.19	.233	-.105
Environmental Protection Value							
…help protect nature	1.33	.96	1.19	1.04	1.587	.113	.140
…help protect wildlife	1.39	.90	1.16	1.16	2.656	.008	.239
…help protect plants*	1.44	.79	1.21	1.01	3.084	.002	.260
Benefits							
…increase job opportunities related to tourism	.98	1.05	.79	1.10	1.927	.054	.168
…increase number of tourists visiting the Făgăraș Mountains	1.24	1.06	1.21	.99	0.376	.707	.033
…bring better infrastructure (roads and transportation) to the Făgăraș Mountains	1.03	1.13	1.01	1.11	0.227	.820	.020
…benefit me personally*	.22	1.23	.05	1.14	1.599	.111	.144
…benefit my family*	.28	1.21	.11	1.10	1.732	.084	.155
…benefit the community I live in	.83	1.15	.59	1.11	2.493	.013	.216
Restrictions							
…restrict fishing inside the park	1.04	1.05	.91	1.12	1.324	.186	.119
…restrict wood cutting inside the park	1.18	1.08	1.01	1.24	1.661	.097	.148
…restrict the collection of berries and mushrooms inside the park	.43	1.26	.39	1.24	.416	.677	.036
…restrict having grazing animals inside the park	.47	1.25	.46	1.28	.114	.909	.010
…restrict hunting inside the park	.94	1.23	.90	1.17	.346	.729	.030
…reduce access to roads	.24	1.31	.10	.99	1.200	.231	.104

[1] Measured on a 5-point Likert-like scale from (+2) Strongly Agree, (+1) Agree, (0) Neutral, (-1) Disagree, (-2) Strongly Disagree

4.3.1 General Benefits

Respondents in both areas believed that a park would impact their lives, but not negatively impact the way they make a living (Table 10). Respondents in the PPA believed, to a greater extent than other respondents, that a park would positively affect the way they live their lives (PPA: $\bar{x}$ = .64, FM: $\bar{x}$ = .42) with statistically significant differences ($t(573) = 2.231$; $p = .026$) between the two areas. However, when asked to indicate who would benefit from park designation, respondents' beliefs are less clear, with less pronounced opinions on whether designating a national park would benefit them personally or their families. However, respondents were more convinced that the potential national park could create benefits for the community they live in (PPA: $\bar{x}$ = .83; FM: $\bar{x}$ = .59). We detected significantly different means ($t(582) = 2.493$; $p = .013$) and a small effect ($d = .216$) between the two areas, indicating that respondents in the PPA area perceive more benefits to their community than respondents in other parts of the Făgăraș Mountains (Table 10).

4.3.2 Tourism

Overall, respondents in both areas believed that a national park would increase the number of tourists to the area. Respondents in both areas believe that establishing FMNP will increase employment in the tourism sector (PPA: $\bar{x}$ = .98; FM: $\bar{x}$ = .79; $t(596) = 1.927$; $p = .054$; $d = .168$) (Table 10). Several

interviewees referred to the current state of tourism as highly seasonal (operating mostly in the months of July and August) and primarily 'weekend-tourism' (i.e. visit of 2-3 days duration). Overall, interviewees did not believe that a national park alone could address the issue of seasonality, nor that nature-based tourism is the most prosperous type of tourism. Interviewees highlighted heritage tourism, agritourism, and skiing tourism as the most desirable tourism types. As a local mayor in the north of Făgăraș Mountains noted: 'I envision a kind of agritourism, but we are behind Bucovina [region in the North of Romania]. Tourist come here for 2-3 days, see how you milk a cow, eat fresh eggs and so on. We have hiking trails in the mountains, but visitors come, spend one night here, go up the mountain and go down on the other side. (…) they have no reason to stay here longer, they get bored. What can you do in the same place for more than a day, besides drinking and eating?' (Radu, FM, interview, 2018).

4.3.3 Environmental Protection Value

Generally, respondents in both areas recognised the protection value of a potential park, with mean scores greater than 1 across all items (Table 10). Respondents adjacent to the PPA believed significantly more strongly than those living farther away that designating the FMNP would help protect wildlife (PPA: $\bar{x}$ = 1.39, FM: $\bar{x}$ = 1.16; t(585) = 2.656; p = .008) and would help protect plants (PPA: $\bar{x}$ = 1.44, FM: $\bar{x}$ = 1.21; t(447.465) = 2.803; p = .002). This may be

explained by FCC's activities in the PPA, which include extensive reforestation activities, restoring a native trout species, and introducing European bison in the PPA.

The qualitative data also reveal how local community members in both areas recognise the environmental protection value of establishing FMNP, often related to preserving the beauty of the area, the country, or God's creation. To explore local ideas of ecosystem services provided by the vast forests in the Făgăraș Mountains, we asked interviewees about the function of the forest during the exploratory interviews in 2017. Interviewees identified regulating, provisioning, and cultural ecosystem services (Sodhi et al., 2010). These included the firewood and timber provision, provision of forest products for private consumption (e.g. berries, nuts, mushrooms), clean and healthy water from springs, and regulating services such as fresh air and protection from adverse weather events (e.g. strong winds). Interviewees also identified a number of cultural services provided by the forest, especially as a place of worship. Other cultural services related to the beauty of the forest, the tranquillity it provides, the outdoor recreation value, the historical importance of the forest as a place of resistance, and the role of the forest in Romanian folklore.

The degradation of the forest ecosystem was a prominent concern among the interviewees, especially regarding illegal logging. Following the Romanian Revolution in 1989, the Făgăraș Mountains, as other places in Romania, experienced high levels of forestry activity and deforestation (Dorondel, 2016).

This context has shaped local perceptions of forest management and the proposed FMNP. As one questionnaire comment highlighted: “Creating FMNP would be a good thing because the nature and fauna will be conserved, and the illegal logging would stop. A healthier environment for us and our children.” (FM, questionnaire comment #196). Interviewees in either area brought attention to the connection between nature protection and deforestation. Where some believe that FMNP could improve the current conditions, others were sceptical of the intention behind the initiative, questioning if designating the area as a national park was a front for further forest exploitation and resource control.

4.3.4 Human – Wildlife Conflicts

While the quantitative data suggest that respondents believe FMNP will help protect wildlife, increased wildlife protection also represents a risk. The qualitative data reveal that locals anticipate an increase in wildlife-human conflicts, illustrated by the comment:

> Starting FMNP would lead to excessive breeding of wild animals, restricted access to the forest, and there will be no owners on the lands. All this makes daily life so much more difficult. We will not enjoy anything left and we and our household animals will be in a real danger’ (FM, questionnaire comment #169).

Although respondents in the PPA area more strongly believed that FMNP would help protect wildlife, interviewees across the study area reported wildlife-human conflicts. In November 2016, the Romanian government introduced a hunting ban on large carnivores which led hunting associations in the area, who

are also responsible for wildlife management, to change wildlife management tactics. During this time, hunting associations halted the practice of feeding wildlife in the forest. Several interviewees in both areas experienced an increase in bear sightings in the villages, and some also indicated that bear predation on livestock and the impacts of wild boars on crops had become increasingly more prominent issues. At the same time, locals found it difficult to obtain compensation from wildlife losses at the local municipal office. An interviewee in the PPA area comments on this, and suspects logging activities to have caused the increased sightings:

> We have major problems with bears and wild boars recently. They came with helicopters. The bears don't have anything to eat on the mountain. [Wood harvesters] are destroying their natural habitat. My friend woke up with a bear in the front yard. They come more often lately (Iulian, PPA, interview, 2018).

While local community members recognise the protection value of a national park, some are also wary of the potential increase in wildlife-human conflicts that could occur with a national park designation. In contrast, as Iulian illustrates, some locals also blame the increase in bear sightings on logging activities, which would be limited by a national park designation.

4.3.5 Restricting Livelihood Activities, Access, & Development

Overall, respondents in both the PPA and in the rest of the Făgăraș Mountains recognised that a national park would bring restrictions and we detected no significant differences between the two areas (Table 10).

Respondents perceived restrictions inside the proposed park to affect fishing (PPA: $\bar{x}$ = 1.04, FM: $\bar{x}$ = .91), hunting (PPA: $\bar{x}$ = .94, FM: $\bar{x}$ = .90), and wood harvesting (PPA: $\bar{x}$ = 1.18, FM: $\bar{x}$ = 1.01). Although wood harvesting is already a highly regulated activity, respondents still believed that FMNP would restrict wood cutting even further. The mean values suggest that the respondents have less pronounced attitudes toward possible restrictions to road access (PPA: $\bar{x}$ = .24, FM: $\bar{x}$ = .10), collecting berries and mushrooms (PPA: $\bar{x}$ = .43, FM: $\bar{x}$ = .39) and grazing animals inside the park (PPA: $\bar{x}$ = .47, FM: $\bar{x}$ = .46). This is reflected by the questionnaire comment:

> The consequences the proposed park will have on the nearby communities matter a lot. What should be allowed: touristic and infrastructural development, herding, picking fruits and mushrooms. What should be limited: hunting, deforestation or wood exploitation on big surfaces (FM, questionnaire comment #74).

Some local community members expressed concerns about access, not only to the resources such as berries and mushrooms in the potential park, but also being allowed to enter the area. Access to the park and its resources were among the most prominent concerns expressed in the qualitative data. One questionnaire comment highlighted this as well: “I do not agree with a NP in FM because we will no longer have access to walk through the forests, there will be no more firewood and we will not be allowed to pick the forest fruits.” (FM, questionnaire comment #573).

Some interviewees believed that the restrictions resulting from a national park designation would hamper development of infrastructure and thus also

obstruct tourism development, especially related to skiing. One interviewee explains:

> A national park would mean that I can't take the car into the mountains, can't get wood and the winters are long. It's really a political matter, with the NGOs who support this. There would be no more construction approvals, even here in the village it will be harder to get permits for construction. Investments in ski slopes would be good for the economy, for jobs, for keeping people here. (Ionut, FM, interview, 2018).

To Ionut, establishing a national park means losing access to vital resources and hampering development in the area. As our quantitative results show, community members perceive both benefits, especially ecological ones, and restrictions relating to the park. People in the PPA area are generally more positive towards the proposed park than respondents in other communities. The qualitative data provide some explanation of other concerns relating to the park proposal. These include 1) ecotourism not sufficiently addressing the current issue of high seasonality in tourism, 2) imposed restrictions on (ski) development, 3) enhanced human-wildlife conflicts, and 4) issues of trust in management. Contrary to these concerns, the qualitative data also show how support for the FMNP is rooted in the belief that the proposed park can halt illegal logging.

4.3.6 Contextual Factors

The qualitative data collected from questionnaire comments, interviews, and ethnographic observations show that very few community members were aware of the region's existing Natura 2000 status and did not feel like they were

consulted when the designation occurred under the EU protection scheme. An interviewee working in protected area management reflected on the "unfulfilled" promises and implementation of previous conservation areas:

> When Natura 2000 was created, everybody said 'look, millions of tourists will come, and it will be great' and nothing happened. And the mayors, and the locals, they need guidance and direct support. (…) Because when the other national parks were established, they decided overnight—it was a scandal, but people got used to it. (Gheorghe, interview, 2017).

Other concerns relate to the administration and management of the potential park, the potential for corrupt conduct, and the lack of trust in authorities, conservation organisations, and corporations. All of these concerns are rooted in local experiences of past events. After the fall of Communism in 1989, the state initiated the process of privatising land and forests that had been nationalised and collectivised with the rise of Communism in 1947. Privatisation followed a principle of historical justice, i.e. returning lands and forests to their pre-1947 owners, which also meant excluding the minority groups Roma and Rudari, commonly referred to as gypsies. The process of privatization took place in three stages with the passing of three Land Laws in 1991, 2000, and 2005 respectively (Dorondel, 2016; Vasile and Măntescu, 2009). The land restitution process in Romania was an arduous affair followed by lengthy court cases.

Interviewees across the study areas continued to return to the theme of historical land and forest ownership. Less than 30 years after the process of regaining private ownership of the forest, the idea of state-led management and shifting ownership rights did not appeal to local owners. Especially in the PPA,

people expressed feelings of the PPA administration violating historical ownership and not respecting traditions around historical landowner associations located in various parts of the Făgăraș Mountains. These historical landowner associations were "designed"' to avoid changing land ownership (Vasile and Măntescu, 2009). However, local community members in both areas still expressed concerns about potential changes in land ownership which may result from establishing FMNP. As one respondent reflected on the questionnaire: "I would agree with the national park as long as the landowner association properties will not be affected" (FM, questionnaire comment #77). Another comment illustrates similar concerns and highlights the importance of traditional livelihood activities and historical ownership: "I do not agree with the National Park if it eliminates the property of *composesorate* [historical landowner associations] and the alpine herding" (FM, questionnaire comment #6).

4.4 Discussion

4.4.1 Perceived Distribution of Benefits

Our findings show that local community members perceive generalized benefits from establishing FMNP, but struggle to identify any direct benefits a park may bring to themselves or their family. This is not necessarily surprising given that tangible benefits might be difficult to envision. The respondents in the PPA area are slightly more positive that establishing FMNP will positively affect

their lives, benefit their community, and increase tourism employment[20]. Respondents in the PPA also perceived greater ecological protection value than respondents in the other area. The geographical characteristics of the PPA area may account for the observed differences between the two areas as the communities closer to the PPA have better developed infrastructure. The current PPA area has a more urban character, with a higher number of tourism facilities, and easily accessible by car or even (sparse) public transportation. This is starkly different from the other villages in the Făgăraș Mountains – some of which are comparably inaccessible due to their remote locations and poor infrastructure. Currently, the size and the quality of accommodation offers within the study area varies greatly. While some villages have a hotel, guesthouses are the most common accommodation type. These guesthouses vary from being fully equipped with multiple rooms and facilities, such as swimming pools and event spaces, to more primitive spaces, such as a room in a private home. Of the villages included in this study, only one, located close to the PPA, had restaurants, severely limiting the opportunity to dine out. Interviewees in the tourism sector found this to be a major obstacle, but at the same time they did not think that obtaining the necessary permits to open a restaurant was economically viable. We anticipate that tourism benefits resulting from FMNP designation will be uneven for locals, depending on the location of the communities. The locals in

[20] The p-value for this item is at the significance threshold t(596) = 1.927; p = .054; *d* = .168.

both areas were also not convinced that the type of tourism that PAs support will prove a legitimate alternative livelihood strategy.

Research has shown that benefits within and between communities surrounding PAs are likely not to be homogeneously distributed, as the ability to benefit is highly localised (Ward et al., 2018) and depends on the people's initial condition. This means that people who already possess the necessary livelihood assets (Bennett and Dearden, 2014) or are in positions of power (Cortés-Vázquez, 2014) are more likely to derive benefits from PAs. In establishing new PAs, managers should therefore be attentive to the distribution of benefits and detriments, while also recognizing that locals may struggle to envision the effects of conservation, especially regarding what it means for the individual and their families.

Bennett (2016) argues that perceptions of ecological effectiveness and related benefits shape local acceptance of conservation initiatives; however, our data suggests that while local community members recognise the ecosystem services provided by the Făgăraș Mountains and the potential ecological benefits of a park, these are also related to fears and concerns regarding increased human-wildlife interactions. Increasing acceptance of the proposed park will therefore also depend on implementing effective compensation schemes that are easily accessible to locals of all educational backgrounds. Such schemes are already being implemented in the PPA.

The distribution of benefits and detriments should not only be considered spatially, but also temporally. While locals may experience the negative effects immediately or shortly after the implementation of a PA (e.g. loss of access, enhanced wildlife-human conflicts), benefits such as increased tourism may appear after a longer period of time (Ward et al., 2018), suggesting that managers should address the negative effects at an early point in time.

4.4.2 Implication for Procedural Equity & Parks Establishment

Context can reveal the initial social conditions and processes which have created injustices (McDermott et al., 2013). Local perceptions are formed within the context of histories and lived experiences, and attention to context can shed light not only on these pre-existing conditions, but also on how these have shaped current perceptions. Depending on people's previous experiences with conservation, they may be less inclined to engage with future conservation initiatives (Ward et al., 2018). Private conservation initiatives have been shown to elicit mistrust in management and rumour spreading (Holmes, 2015; Louder and Bosak, 2019). This is also the case for the FMNP, where FCC has been the target of campaigns against conservation initiatives put forward by a local landowner association, as well as rumour-spreading among locals. The issue of rumour-spreading became increasingly clear in the ethnographic portion of this work. For example, locals adjacent to the PPA claimed that local landowners in the village had been cut off from accessing their private lands because of the

PPA, while the conservationists claimed that all landowners had a key to the gate blocking the dirt road access to forests around the PPA. This context is key for understanding decision-making for the potential FMNP, as it reflects local concerns about vulnerable traditional land uses (e.g. herding), historical land ownership, past experiences with conservation initiatives, and trust, both generalised and in potential owners and managers.

Ignoring aspects of equity can lead to local resistance towards conservation initiatives (Zafra-Calvo and Geldmann, 2020). Attending to equity issues at an early stage and throughout conservation planning can ensure just and effective conservation. In the FMNP case, some barriers to procedural equity exist. These barriers are strongly linked to the Romanian context, where there has been a long history of top-down management due to Romania's Communist past (Lawrence, 2008), corruption in the forestry sector and beyond (Vasile, 2009) and where the state just recently (in the 1990s and early 2000s) privatized previously nationalized forests (Dorondel, 2016). While the past 30 years have brought an increase in protected areas from approx. 4% in 1989 to 19% in 2010 (Iojă et al., 2010), news stories about illegal logging inside PAs are frequent in the media (Agent Green, 2018) questioning the effectiveness of PAs. Previous experiences and lack of trust in conservation organisations can be a hindrance for participation and has led some people to be sceptical of the proposed park. As Octavian reflects:

> The development of infrastructure and tourism is pathetic. The loggers do not help us in any way, they cut down everything. The roads towards the mountain are ruined by their trucks. (...) And with this proposed park it's going to be even worse [with restricting development] (...) The communities around also have to keep their traditions, for thousands of years the mountains were pastures for the sheep, you cannot ban this now. I was in other areas where herding is restricted, like the Retezat National Park [Romania's first national park], and it is no good. From my point of view, I would restrict logging (…) and there has to be an actual park done. Not like Natura 2000, which is only declared, and no one does anything. There should be rangers as in other areas, it should be controlled, you cannot leave it [without proper management]. (Octavian, FM, interview, 2018).

Here, Octavian highlights the intermingled relationship between past experiences with conservation, trust, restrictions, and current logging activities that shape local perceptions of the prospective park.

Perceptions research is thus helpful in understanding locals' past experiences and current ideas about conservation and can reveal local perceptions of, and for, PA managers, which influence conservation success (Pietrzyk-Kaszyńska et al., 2012). Procedural equity can take many forms (McDermott et al., 2013), and understanding local perceptions of a conservation initiative is the first step towards recognizing the values and concerns of different stakeholder groups, as local communities are heterogeneous (Horowitz, 2011) and may have divergent views on equity (Dawson et al., 2018). Understanding local perceptions of new conservation initiatives can also reveal issues of trust and beliefs about distribution of benefits, and thus highlight the importance of establishing trust between the conservation organisation and local community members. As such, perceptions research is a first step towards ensuring that local perspectives are accounted for in prospective management initiatives. While

we do not argue that this is sufficient to ensuring procedural equity, it is a starting point for including locals in PA decision-making. However, before this can be achieved, building trust in management and enhancing local awareness of managerial efforts (such as wildlife management initiatives and compensations schemes), as our results show, is essential. Trust is necessary for effective and just management: it can minimise fear of being "cheated" (Gilmour et al., 2015), improve perceptions of social impacts (Jones et al., 2017), lower operation costs (Gilmour et al., 2015; Cvitanovic et al., 2018), and help legitimize managerial efforts to locals (Turner et al. 2016). Legitimacy is a key component in ensuring compliance with management efforts (Cvitanovic et al., 2018). Trust in PA management also depends on managers perceived cultural understanding (Stern, 2008), highlighting the importance of understanding the decision-making context (Moon et al., 2019) and taking local historical context into account in management. Procedural equity thus depends on whether or not the process of establishing the PA is perceived as legitimate, locals feeling heard and accounted for, and on levels of trust in management efforts.

These findings have implications for the future direction of the FMNP proposal. We suggest that moving beyond initial human dimensions research to more comprehensive involvement of locals in the management of the existing PPA and future design, planning, and implementation of the FMNP can help to minimise conflict and maximise equity. While FCC has commenced some social initiatives that may result in trust-building, such as a food program for the elderly

during the COVID-19 pandemic, these do not substitute the need for formal procedural equity processes. We suggest expanding social efforts to include implementing easy-to-access compensation schemes for livestock losses caused by wildlife, as well as undertaking participatory mapping of traditional use areas (e.g. herding) inside the proposed park and including local stakeholders in the planning, design and management of the park. Additionally, we stress the need for locally relevant education efforts on sustainable development (Irvine et al. 2016). These efforts should extend beyond simply communicating FCC's social programs.

4.5 Conclusions

New conservation initiatives should pay careful attention to the context in which they operate (Kaltenborn, Riese, and Hundeide, 1999). The FMNP is a unique case for observing a conservation initiative in the making, and thus an important opportunity to ensure equitable planning, implementing, and management of the potential park. As our results show, contextual factors underpin the opportunity to ensure procedural and distributional equity. Furthermore, attention to local community members' perceptions of conservation proposals reveal local concerns and anticipated PA outcomes, identifying potential issues of distribution and building trust with local stakeholders. By comparing perceptions of people living near the already existing PPA to other

areas in the Făgăraș Mountains, we can draw on local perceptions and experiences to guide the further implementation of the park in an equitable manner. This includes using adaptive equity definitions that are reflexive and considerate of local cultural norms (Dawson et al., 2017; Ward et al., 2018), which are defined in conjuncture with those affected by the program, project, or policy in question.

Using individual-level data (i.e. interviews, questionnaires, participant observation) to reveal differences between the PPA and 8 other municipalities adjacent to the proposed park highlights the contextual factors that underpin local stakeholders' perceptions and ability and willingness to participate in PA decision-making. The perceived impacts of FMNP give some indication as to how the risks, costs, and benefits related to the proposed FMNP will be distributed. Locals adjacent to the PPA hold stronger beliefs regarding the environmental protection value, the positive impacts of a park on their lives, and that a park will increase tourism jobs. There are great variations in the initial conditions across the Făgăraș Mountains. The location of the current PPA is advantageous in terms of accommodating tourists with asphalted roads, restaurants, nearby urban centres, and cultural tourism facilities that are not found in all corners of the Făgăraș Mountains. We anticipate that benefits related to enhanced tourism will be concentrated in certain areas of the proposed park. Some local communities and some community members may anticipate more challenges than others. PA benefits are often global in nature (e.g. biodiversity conservation), while

detriments (e.g. restricted access) are felt locally, especially among already marginalised groups (Vaccaro et al., 2013; Zafra-Calvo et al., 2019).

Our results show that managers should be particularly attentive to local histories, as these shape local perceptions of management. Furthermore, locals do anticipate homogenous spatial distribution of benefits and managers should seek to counterbalance any inequities in cost/benefits that may arise. New conservation initiatives should also be attentive to the time-lapse in locally felt costs and benefits. Restrictions on livelihood activities may be felt immediately, while developing tourism takes time (Ward et al., 2018).

Taking local perceptions into account and working with local stakeholders at an early stage in the PA design is key in ensuring equity (Zafra-Calvo et al., 2017). This includes using adaptive equity definitions that are reflexive and considerate of local cultural norms (Dawson et al., 2017; Ward et al., 2018), which are defined in juncture with those affected by the program, project, or policy in question. PA managers should implement social initiatives at an early stage and in collaboration with locals in an effort to establish trust and build support for the PA.

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Chapter Five: Discussion & Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This conclusion is not solely a product of my three empirical chapters, but rather the result of extensive conversations that I have had over the course of the past four years with locals, mayors and vice mayors in the Făgăraș Mountains, conservationists and academics in Romania and abroad. As such, this conclusion represents a reflective exercise that goes beyond the FMNP proposal and touches on the methodological tools which researchers employ to understand the social components of conservation, the role of critical enquiry in these pursuits, and conservation practices and policies more broadly.

When *Foundation Conservation Carpathia* (FCC), a private conservation foundation located in Brașov, began its "quest" to designate the Făgăraș Mountains as a national park, it embarked on a long and important conservation journey to protect the rich biodiversity in Romania and the Carpathian region. The FMNP proposal represents an important step towards reaching the CBD's 2020 Aichi Targets and current blueprint for a 2030 target calling for protecting 30% of important biodiverse terrestrial sites. The ecological importance of such a pursuit is unquestionable. However, the park proposal is also situated within a complex and changing rural context and has significant implications for local land uses and economies. Taking these social contexts into account by understanding the

values, attitudes, and perceptions of local people is a critical early step in ensuring the park's success not only in conservation terms, but in terms of its social acceptability. My work set out to understand how people come to perceive conservation in certain ways by attending to this complex context and history, the (political) agendas of certain actors, and locals' beliefs and attitudes. The FMNP proposal illustrates an important research problem regarding how new or emerging protected areas can spur conflict among different actors and resource users. As I have shown in the three empirical chapters, attention to the historical and geographical context of a place is key in understanding the dynamics of protected area planning. As I discussed in Chapter Two and Chapter Three, local histories, lived experiences with conservation, landownership, and land management frame locals' perceptions of current conservation initiatives. These experiences, in addition to the general lack of knowledge about the proposal itself, have left locals suspicious of the park proposal and its instigators.

Attention to these lived experiences and local perceptions are important for ensuring procedural equity in park planning. Through this dissertation, I have shown how local relationships with the state, past and present, with foreign investments and investors, and previous experience with conservation in Romania have shaped local perceptions of the proposed park. This is not to say that people living in the Făgăraș Mountains do not value the landscape or appreciate the ecosystem services it provides. Rather, for some in the region, suspicion around the proposal is born out of past experiences. The park proposal

carries with it connotations of foreigners and state interests, and as such also of mistrust. This is perhaps the core challenge with regard to a future Făgăraș Mountains National Park and locals: to create trusting and lasting relationships between FCC and community members. Understanding the complex reasons behind why people may be hesitant to support new conservation initiatives is the first step towards involving locals in the procedural and planning aspects of parks and protected areas, and ultimately in building trust.

As I have shown in Chapter Three, reactions to the park proposal itself are tightly linked to people's sense of fate control. The rapid changes in landownership and the high levels of corruption in forestry that followed the Romanian Revolution have left a mark on local perceptions of forest conservation and *national* parks. The social memories of the state during Communism illustrate how locals remember the Communist state as a good forest manager, yet this does not necessarily translate into current-day support for state ownership nor management of the potential park. Following the land and forest restitution throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, land and forest owners did not welcome state intervention and regulations. My results show that local people have contradictory and divergent perspectives on state management of the Făgăraș Mountains; the idea of the *national* aspect of the FMNP seems to imply a loss of sovereignty to some, where local control is sacrificed for state or foreign interests. "Foreigners," as I have illustrated throughout this dissertation, are also not welcomed custodians. The experiences with foreign investors following the

Romanian Revolution have left locals in the Făgăraș Mountains reluctant to lose local control of land and forests. Lacking sense of fate control and feelings of losing sovereignty reinforce the need for equitable conservation—that is, conservation initiatives which take context and distribution of benefits and detriments into account, ensure early and effective involvement of users in the planning and management of protected areas, and recognize groups with diverse identities and values (Friedman et al., 2018). As discussed in Chapter Four, inclusion of relevant local stakeholders in the decision-making around FMNP (procedural equity), is particularly salient with a view to overcoming the loss of local control.

Park proponents and supporters suggest that a national park can provide economic and social benefits to the surrounding communities. Locals and some decision-makers welcome such rural invigoration. However, the social benefits of protected areas are often intangible and vague. This is also evident in my findings: locals (and to some extent decision-makers) often hold contradictory and conditional views on national park designation. The expectation that FMNP will be beneficial to locals does not seem to account for the heterogenous landscape that the Făgăraș Mountains represent, both geographically and socially. The ability to benefit from park-related tourism depends on a number of factors such as the available human, social, financial, institutional and physical capitals (Iorio & Corsale, 2010; Stone & Nyaupane, 2018). As I have shown in Chapter Four, there is evidence suggesting that areas with already-existing

tourism infrastructure perceive more benefits from the park designations. Attention to the spatial differences between different sites within the boundaries of and adjacent to the proposed park can shed light on issues of distributional equity. To this end, FCC has, beyond requesting conservation social science studies, focused on various social initiatives including hiring local forest rangers, cooperated with local hunters and hunting associations, and carried out education programs in local schools close to their project area.

5.2 Methodological Considerations

My findings are a product of my methodological approach, building on qualitative ethnographic approaches, including interviews and extensive time spent in the communities, combined with quantitative human dimensions/conservation management methods. I approached my research with an adaptive strategy, where I modified my research tools to the context. A quantitative monomethod approach would have provided limited insights into lived experiences and would not have revealed local concerns about sovereignty and foreign "control." A qualitative monomethod approach would, on the other hand, have provided limited insights into geographical differences and complicated the opportunity to compare different subgroups across a larger survey population. Combining the two approaches also meant losing some opportunities. A strictly ethnographic approach could have allowed me to "study up" on the supposedly powerful public and private actors that are present

physically or financially in the Făgăraș Mountains to gain insights into these actors and their conservation narratives (Chapter Two). A strictly quantitative approach would have allowed me to compare all of the villages spread across the 25 municipal jurisdictions that cover the Făgăraș Mountains, gaining a more fine-grained understanding of the spatial differences, but at the cost of contextual nuance.

However, by drawing on both qualitative and quantitative methods in an exploratory sequential and convergent research design (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), I gathered data which allowed for both deep description and generalization. This proved fruitful for a number of reasons. First, with the quantitative data I was able to compare differences and similarities across age groups (Chapter Three) and geographical area (Chapter Four). I did not necessarily detect the differences I anticipated across different demographic groups, which is likely explained by the complexity and uncertainty pertaining to the park proposal. A proposed prospective park is not only difficult to envision, especially for someone with limited involvement in the project and limited conservation knowledge, but the consequences of such a park are also highly speculative in nature and hardly tangible. Here, the qualitative comments volunteered on the questionnaires proved especially valuable, as they often elicited certain conditions under which a park would be acceptable (e.g. if the park could combat illegal logging and deforestation; as long as herding would still be possible etc.), bringing to the forefront insights for future perceptions research

and policy directions for the proposed park. As shown in Chapter Three, the questionnaire data also allowed me to compare respondents' perceptions of forest management at three different points in recent history and draw on the qualitative work to further understanding of social memory in environmental issues. Drawing on both quantitative and qualitative methods permitted me to statistically test social memory theory regarding the role of generational memory (Assmann, 2006), while remaining faithful to the ethnographic methods that underlie oral history and memory studies (Hamilton & Shopes, 2008).

Mixing methods represents an opportunity for enhancing inter- and trans-disciplinary research and bridging different conservation social science perspectives. This is key as conservation is not merely about biodiversity conservation but has complex social and human dimensions (Bath, 2013; Bennett et al., 2017a; Bennett et al., 2017b), as my research also indicates. Mixing methods may allow for bridging different epistemological cultures and collecting different types of data to tackle the complex social aspects of conservation.

Often, mixed methods results are reported separately within the same manuscript, losing some of the synergistic potential. Mixed-methods researchers have highlighted the need for further exploring *integration* of mixed-methods results (Hesse-Biber & Johnson, 2013). I addressed this by triangulating my different data types and, as showcased in the three empirical chapters, integrated and reported the different data types as a coherent piece. For triangulation, I

compared qualitative statements from the questionnaire comments and interviews with the numeric data from the questionnaires and related these to my field notes and document analysis (i.e. official documents, reports, and online content) to identify themes.

Although based on a large number of surveys and extensive interviews in 10 communities surrounding the Făgăraș Mountains, this dissertation falls short in its attention to recognitional and distributional equity as they pertain to Roma and Rudari peoples. My own lack of detailed engagement with the issue is not because I do not deem these groups important nor think that they should be prioritized. Rather, such engagements would require a deeper understanding of Rudari relations in Romania and extend beyond the scope of this research. My lack of engagement with ethnicity, race, and gender are nonetheless limitations that future research on the FMNP proposal should address as conservation initiatives often fall short in accounting for the distribution of impacts, positive or negative on those potentially most affected (Holmes & Cavanagh, 2016).

5.3 Planning for New Protected Areas: Narratives, Memory, and Equity

This research has contributed to opening a new critical space that encourages theoretical cross-fertilization across the conservation social sciences. By drawing on concepts from both human dimensions of conservation and political ecology, this dissertation as a whole has developed new theoretical

insights into conservation social sciences in three distinct ways. First, I have showed the fruitfulness of investigating conservation narratives among different actors, who draw on their different scalar connections. National parks represent a multiplicity of meanings, depending on the eyes and actors that see (Gissibl, Höhler, & Kupper, 2012). Such conservation narratives also vary across sociopolitical and geographical scales (Bixler, 2013; Campbell, 2007). Conservationists active in the Făgăraș Mountains operate at local, national, and international scales, and advance their conservation narratives around biodiversity protection across these scales. In this way, rural landscapes (and their envisioned trajectories) extend beyond their local and regional physical boundaries and become part of national and international discourses and management schemes. Second, by framing conservation perceptions around social memory and nostalgia, I show how people's perceptions of prospective conservation measures is shaped by their lived experiences and historical memories. Memories often underpin conservation research in the form of oral histories and past relations with the land (Gissibl, Höhler, & Kupper, 2012). Yet, few studies have explicitly used social memory as the theoretical lens on conservation (e.g. Nazarea, 2006) or environmental issues more broadly (Barthel, Folke, & Colding, 2010; Cater & Keeling, 2014; Cellarius, 2004). And finally, by understanding the relationship between conservation perceptions and distributional equity, I show how conservation planners and managers can utilize perceptions research to ensure equitable conservation, plan for the inclusion of

local communities, and address how the perceived costs and benefits are distributed. In these ways, my research draws attention to the complex scalar arrangements and power relationships that underlie conservation efforts, the social and environmental histories that shape conservation, and how these conditions influence the planning and managerial aspects of establishing protected areas. I draw on human dimensions studies broadly while also critiquing them, echoing Paul Robbins' (2015) reflections on political ecology's engagements with other fields: "Even while political ecology adopts and mimics the practices of its neighbors, lending them conceptual apparatus and perspectives, it remains steadfastly critical of these fields." (ibid. 94). I believe that this engagement is a fruitful attempt at inviting more applied perspectives to political ecology, while introducing critical approaches and reflections into conservation management.

FMNP represents new ways of doing conservation in which private actors are becoming increasingly more important (Stolton et al., 2014). The FMNP case illustrates another opportunity as it raises a set of questions regarding who funds and who designates protected areas. While beyond the scope of this dissertation to answer, these questions merit consideration, as the FMNP illustrates an emerging form of conservation in which (typically Western) billionaires decide, through their philanthropic activities, *where* "nature" is worthy of protection and, perhaps indirectly, *from whom* is it being protected. Here, I should probably make my position clear: these questions are not intended to position myself as an

opponent of conservation in general, nor the FMNP in particular, but rather to highlight the somewhat contradictory practices characterizing present day conservation (e.g. Adams' "Faustian bargain[21]," conservation's engagement with corporations [W. Adams, 2017]). Furthermore, I hope that attention to such questions can help avoid, or possibly mitigate, some of the conflicts that may arise when designing new protected areas.

5.4 Significance & Implications

Moving forward, at least two conservation social science strategies are relevant to the FMNP proposal. One is to conduct participatory mapping with local resource users to determine where and what kinds of land use and recreational activities take place in the Făgăraș Mountains. Understanding which areas are particularly important for sheep herding in the alpine region of the mountains, or for livestock grazing at lower altitudes, can identify user areas and aid policy development in defining and drawing user zones. Such information would greatly improve any human dimensions studies, as inquiry could be made regarding specific areas (e.g. measuring behavioural intention to herd outside designated areas). Other relevant research approaches include participatory scenario planning (Nilsson et al., 2017; Oteros-Rozas et al., 2015) or discrete choice experiments (Paltriguera, Ferrini, Luisetti, & Turner, 2018; Rakotonarivo et

[21]Faust is a fictional character in classic German folklore, where the protagonist, Faust, makes a pact with the devil by selling his soul for power.

al., 2017), where respondents are asked to evaluate specific restriction scenarios in different geographical parts of the Făgăraș Mountains. Such scenarios would, however, require ENGOs active in the Făgăraș Mountains to define more tangible conservation policies.

This dissertation raises another relevant managerial question regarding FCC's strategy. Currently, the strategy consists of acquiring available land and setting up different socio-economic initiatives on their acquired and/or managed land (e.g. a biodiversity farm; highly specialized ecotourism; compensation schemes for wildlife losses). However, these activities are currently limited to FCC's landholdings or managed hunting areas. Regarding the larger project at hand—the proposed national park—the strategy is visionary, and fairly intangible. This may not be the most effective strategy. As shown in this research, the vaguely defined proposal—that is, a proposal that talks about designating a national park but cannot define its specific borders, specific governance structure, nor user areas—potentially opens up for further rumour spreading, mistrust, or conspiracy regarding this proposal. Ultimately, the lack of concrete policies and the vaguely defined management "specifics" (e.g. restrictions) enhance suspicion where competing conservation narratives win footing, as shown in Chapter Two.

Through this research and by carrying out knowledge mobilization, I have contributed to some level of public engagement and have, by the mere action of instigating conversations on the topic, helped bring the issue of FMNP to local community members' attention. My work has contributed to awareness raising

both through my and other researchers' presence in the communities, inquiring about the park, and through my community outreach efforts. I engaged in community outreach and knowledge mobilization by hanging outreach posters (Appendix C) at local city halls, schools, and other public places and distributing pamphlets (Appendix D) in participating communities. I met with mayors and vice mayors to discuss the findings and outreach materials. My outreach material offered quantitative findings regarding wildlife conflicts, perceived benefits from the park, and support for ski development, among other items. Developing outreach material means making judgements about the type of information that is available to certain actors. As I have shown in Chapter Two, different actors employ different conservation narratives which reveal their political agendas and power relationships. The research is not outside of the conflict presented in Chapter Two, and my findings may be used to advance different political agendas. My choices on what information to in- and exclude in the outreach material were informed by the conservation narratives and corresponding agendas laid out in Chapter Two. Recognizing that the primary beneficiaries of this research would be the academic community and conservation organisations in Romania, disseminating knowledge also meant empowering (somewhat) equal access to the information as far as possible, and ensuring that I reported information of local relevance, and communicated "uncomfortable" findings (e.g. support for ski development) also to the involved ENGOs.

As such, my intentions for the outreach material were twofold. First, I hoped to make key findings with high relevance to local actors as accessible as possible. Numeric findings are good for that, as they can be presented with simple, relevant icons and percentages. In this, I also wanted to present locals' perceptions of possible benefits of a park – benefits which were occasionally denied by local decision-makers – while also highlighting the perceived fragility of these benefits and locals' call for more "reliable" year-round tourism in the form of skiing. Second, research has a regrettable history of being an extractive industry and while I make no claim to this being truly community-based research (Castleden, Morgan, & Lamb, 2012), it was nonetheless important for me to counteract such research practices and provide participants with access to the findings and opportunities to comment on these. The effectiveness of this type of knowledge mobilization may be questioned. It was, nonetheless, the most cost-effective measure to implement. On a more personal note, despite my many field sites across the Făgăraș Mountains, I did establish meaningful relationships with some participants. I was often gifted with homemade goods, books, and produce, and invited to sit at the family table, asked to address participants by their nicknames (only used by close family members), or was confided in (especially by those participants whose own expatriate family members I reminded them of!). Although my research activities in the Făgăraș Mountains had come to an end, it was important for me personally to show gratitude and respect to the participants

who put their time and effort into making this research possible, by sharing the findings of this research.

As I have shown, nature conservation is a contested issue and does not happen in a vacuum. For some, conservation raises fears around loss of livelihoods and resource access, and brings with it scepticism of intentions and hidden agendas. Nature conservation also presents opportunities for some and can foster a sense of pride and care for one's local environment. Understanding people's positions on nature conservation requires careful attention to local histories and lived experiences, power relationships amongst local, state, and (international) private actors, land ownership, environmental law, plans and management objectives, and local beliefs and perceptions. As others have shown before me (e.g. Huggan and Tiffin, 2015; Fairhead et al., 2012; Gissibl et al., 2012; Smith, 2009; Spence, 1996), parks and protected areas represent different meanings to different people and groups of people. Understanding what has shaped (and is shaping) these meanings and their implications for planning new parks, is an endeavour characterised by complexity. Yet, attempts to simplify or ignore such complexities may result in opposition.

Human dimensions of conservation and political ecology are both fields of inquiry primarily situated at western (especially North American) institutions. To borrow Cold War terminology, both fields of research have focused primarily on the First World (i.e. western societies, especially North American) or the Third World (i.e. the Global South) conservation (e.g. Cortés-Vázquez, 2014; Glikman,

Bath, & Vaske, 2010; Neumann, 2003; Sponarski, Vaske, & Bath, 2015; Tanakanjana & Saranet, 2007; Teel, Dayer, Manfredo, & Bright, 2005; Walker & Fortmann, 2003). The differences and commonalities between doing political ecology in the First and Third World dominated debates in the field in the first decade of the new millennia (Robbins, 2002; Schroeder, St. Martin, & Albert, 2006; Walker, 2003) – but this debate did not include studies in Eastern Europe and former USSR countries. In this dissertation I offer insights into conservation in what has previously been referred to as the Second World – that of the Eastern Bloc. In so doing, I show the extent to which methodological frameworks and theories developed (primarily) at western institutions to understand realities in the "other" worlds, can make sense of "Second World conservation".

While these are not unproblematic geographical frames (Walker, 2003), there is still something to be said for the lack of political ecology theorization in Eastern Europe. Like other post-Communist context, Eastern Europe experienced rapid changes from Communism to capitalism brought about a restructuring of society, introduction of new land laws, and rapid privatization of previous state assets (Dorondel, 2007, 2016; Sikor, Dorondel, Stahl, & To, 2017; Vasile, 2009). However, Eastern Europe is unique in that the 1990s and 2000s for many countries meant accession to EU and adopting associated environmental laws, including the designation of Natura 2000 areas. In Romania, this transformation from Communism to neoliberal capitalism happened simultaneous with state (and in the case at hand, private) conservation efforts

(Dorondel, 2016). These rapid changes in political economy and political structure of society alongside state conservation efforts, are relevant for the theorization of conservation in the so-called Second World. The ways in which landownership and access has been theorized in relation to conservation in colonial contexts (Neumann, 2001, 2003; Sandlos, 2014; Saunders, 2018) do not quite explain the realities of Eastern Europe. Nor does the way private protected areas become and a theorized in neoliberal Chile (Holmes, 2015), quite explain what we can observe in Romania, although there are obvious parallels between the Tompkins and FCC's conservation initiatives. Even Western European research falls short of explaining how, for example, Western philanthropists and conservatists and their associated conservation activities are perceived by locals, as these perceptions are tied up not only in global conservation politics, but also East-West politics, previous experiences with Western investors and the EU, and tumultuous introduction to western capitalism and democracy. These findings suggest, it may be worth revisiting an old(er) political ecology debates around conservation in the "First", "Second", and "Third Worlds".

To this end, adopting an exploratory sequential and convergent mixed-methods research design proved particularly advantageous. This research design allowed me to be attuned to the local realities and to reflect on the theoretical opportunities and limitations that political ecology and human dimensions offer in making sense of them. By approaching this research project with a set of exploratory interviews to guide further research development, I allowed myself

the opportunity to be surprised: rather than addressing this research with a set of pre-fixed ideas of what I would encounter, I let my research be guided by empirically grounded findings. This provided an opportunity to engage with conversations on social memory and nostalgia, and contribute to theorizations of memory in the conservation literature.

This dissertation expands our understanding of memory in conservation by looking at the role of memory in shaping how locals perceive conservation initiatives and different actors involved in conservation. Memory work in conservation has often dealt with the issue of shifting ecological baselines (Arce-Nazario, 2007; Turvey et al., 2010), yet memories of the past also shape local understanding of current conservation actors and social acceptability of new access, ownership, and management regimes. Observing conservation initiatives as they unfold shines light on how perceptions of social impacts and conceptualizations of equity do not follow the establishment of protected area but are rather broader processes that are tied to past experiences and concur with new protected areas. In this sense, while this dissertation is an opportunity to invite more political ecology conversation on conservation in Eastern Europe, it is also an opportunity for conservation social sciences more broadly to engage with social memory and equitable conservation planning in conflictual contexts beyond Eastern Europe (e.g. Schreckenberg, Franks, Martin, & Lang, 2016).

It is hardly news to conservation social scientists that efforts to conserve biodiversity, ameliorate or even halt loss of species, are not only issues of

ecology and management. Throughout this dissertation I have shown how global conservation goals manifest as political projects, intertwined with human behaviours and needs, past histories, and perceptions. This makes conservation a political problem operating at multiple scales, with globally-oriented “solutions” often in conflict with local socio-political realities. As 2020 is coming to an end, so are the conservation goals laid out for the past decade, among them Aichi Target 11. With an ambitious goal of protecting at least 17 % of terrestrial and inland water areas globally, it is hardly surprising that the global society struggle to meet the “deadline”. The UN CBD has drafted new targets for the decade to come – 30% of all land and sea by 2030 – ambitious objectives which have already been endorsed by world leaders (CBD, 2020; Thomson, 2020). The prospect of implementing such global targets bear with them a risk to further accentuate conflicts in the meeting between global conservation ideas and local reactions towards these ideas. The research I have presented in this dissertation provides insights into how such a meeting can take place in ways that are cognisant and respectful of local histories and realities, in an attempt to transform conservation so that biodiversity and equity goals are pursued in tandem.

5.5 Chapter Five: Literature Cited

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Appendix A: Interview Guides

Interview Guide #1

Are you willing to take part in an interview as part of a research project titled "Parks and People: Working with People to Protect the Făgăraș Mountains". This project aims to understand people's values, beliefs, and attitudes toward nature in the Făgăraș Mountains.

- This research is led by Marie Louise Aastrup, a PhD student in the Geography Department at Memorial University (St. John's, NL, Canada). Her supervisor is Dr. Alistair Bath in the Geography Department at Memorial University in Newfoundland, Canada. This research is funded by Memorial University.

- In this study, we will ask you a series of open-ended questions regarding how you think and feel about the Făgăraș Mountains, and its conservation. This will take approximately 30 minutes to an hour to complete. In order to most accurately document the interview, we would like to audio-record the interview. If you do not want the interview being audio-recorded, we can instead take written notes. After the interview, you will be able to review the transcript of your interview, and add, change, or remove any information from the written notes.

- The data will be reported in aggregate form, so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. If direct quotations are used, we will use a pseudonym to protect your anonymity. Moreover, the consent forms and audio recordings will be stored separately from the physical transcripts of the interview, so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses. Every reasonable effort will be made to assure your anonymity.

- There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this interview as the questions do not cover sensitive topics. If you wish, we can provide you with a copy of the questions before the interview begins in order for you to gauge your comfort level with topics being discussed.

- You may have your data removed from the research study until the end of the data collection period (August 1st, 2017), after which point the data can't be removed from the study.

- You may withdraw from this interview at any point. You may also feel free to ask me any questions before, during, or after the interview.

- The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 1-709-864-2861

- Do you consent to participate in this research?

Research Goals:

1. *Determine how people value the Făgăraș Mountains environment.*

2. *Determine perceived impacts of Făgăraș Mountains national park on local livelihoods.*

3. *Determine the level of support for Făgăraș Mountains national park.*

4. *Provide direction for outreach material.*

Interview Schedule

1. **Tell me about yourself and living in the Făgăraș Mountains.**
    a. [prompts: age, education, length of residency in this region, occupation, previous occupations, life-long resident—why?, mover to the area—why?)]
2. **Describe your relationship with the outdoors.**
    a. [prompts: time spent outdoors for recreation and work, changes in outdoor activity—why?, types of activities, seasonal activities. Dependency on the land; importance of being outside – why?; Importance of biodiversity, conservation]
3. **Describe the natural environment in and around the Făgăraș Mountains.**
    a. [prompts: Who is financially benefitting from the natural environment in Făgăraș Mountains? Who should benefit from the natural environment in Făgăraș Mountains? How do you think this can be achieved? Large carnivores, issues around large carnivores, virgin forest, logging, issues around logging]
4. **Describe what kind of issues you think are facing the Făgăraș Mountains.**
    a. [prompts: What are some of the issues in the area?; Young people moving away for jobs and not returning; employment opportunities.]
5. **Imagine what you would like the Făgăraș Mountains to look like in the future.**
    a. [What are the prospects of the area?, most prominent activities etc.; Tourism.]
6. **Describe what you think of tourism in Făgăraș Mountains.**
    a. [prompts: how many tourists, where are they from, what do tourists do in the area, importance for the economy, is tourism a viable way of life for people in the Făgăraș Mountains?]
7. **A national park has been proposed in the Făgăraș Mountains. How do you feel about that?**
    a. [prompts: benefits/issues, trust]

Interview Guide #2

Are you willing to take part in an interview as part of a research project titled “Parks and People: Working with People to Protect the Făgăraș Mountains” This project aims to understand people’s values, beliefs, and attitudes toward nature in the Făgăraș Mountains.

- This research is led by Marie Louise Aastrup, a PhD student in the Geography Department at Memorial University (St. John’s, NL, Canada). Her supervisor is Dr. Alistair Bath in the Geography Department at Memorial University in Newfoundland, Canada. This research is funded by Memorial University.

- In this study, we will ask you a series of open-ended questions regarding how you think and feel about the Făgăraș Mountains, and its conservation. This will take approximately 30 minutes to an hour to complete. In order to most accurately document the interview, we would like to audio-record the interview. If you do not want the interview being audio-recorded, we can instead take written notes. After the interview, you will be able to review the transcript of your interview, and add, change, or remove any information from the written notes.

- The data will be reported in aggregate form, so that it will not be possible to identify individuals. If direct quotations are used, we will use a pseudonym to protect your anonymity. Moreover, the consent forms and audio recordings will be stored separately from the physical transcripts of the interview, so that it will not be possible to associate a name with any given set of responses. Every reasonable effort will be made to assure your anonymity.

- There are no foreseeable risks associated with participating in this interview as the questions do not cover sensitive topics. If you wish, we can provide you with a copy of the questions before the interview begins in order for you to gauge your comfort level with topics being discussed.

- You may have your data removed from the research study until the end of the data collection period (December 1st, 2018), after which point the data can’t be removed from the study.

- You may withdraw from this interview at any point. You may also feel free to ask me any questions before, during, or after the interview.

- After the interview, you will be able to review the written notes that have been taken during the interview, and add, change, or remove any information from the written notes. If you would like to review the final transcript and add, change, or remove any information from the final transcript you are welcome to contact me per email: mlaastrup@mun.ca.

- I would also like the opportunity to conduct so-called “participant observation”. This means that I would be joining you for potential town meetings, while you collect wood, or do your agricultural activities. This is a way for me to learn about what kind

of activities people do in Făgăraș Mountains. If you want me to, I would like to help out to any extent that you are comfortable with. I will be taking field notes during the activities and using these notes as data in my research to support my other research findings.

- The proposal for this research has been reviewed by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research and found to be in compliance with Memorial University's ethics policy. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at 1-709-864-2861

- Do you consent to participate in this research?

Research Goals:

5. *Determine how people value the Făgăraș Mountains environment.*

6. *Understand land use and management in the Mountains*

7. *Determine perceived impacts of Făgăraș Mountains national park on local livelihoods and land use.*

8. *Determine the level of support for Făgăraș Mountains national park.*

8. **Tell me about yourself and living in the Făgăraș Mountains.**
    a. [prompts: age, education, length of residency in this region, occupation, previous occupations, life-long resident—why?, moved to the area—why?)]

9. **Describe the natural environment in and around the Făgăraș Mountains and how people use it.**
    a. [prompts: Who is financially benefitting from the natural environment in Făgăraș Mountains? Who should benefit from the natural environment in Făgăraș Mountains? How do you think this can be achieved? Issues around large carnivores, virgin forest, logging]
    b. How are the type of activities you do different/similar to what others do?

10. **Describe the land uses in the Făgăraș Mountains during communism**
    a. [what kind of activities were and weren't allowed during communism; vision for land use; types of jobs people had relating to the land]

11. **Describe the land management in the Făgăraș Mountains during communism**
    a. [prompts: forest management; resource use; local uses]

12. **Describe the land use and management changed in the Făgăraș Mountains following communism**
    a. [prompts: land restitution; land laws 1991 and 2000; how is that reflected today]

13. **Where Romania joined the EU, where there any changes in land use and land management?**
    a. [prompts: changes in livestock composition; establishment of protected areas; Natura 2000; EU subsidies]

14. **A national park has been proposed in the Făgăraș Mountains. How do you feel about that?**
    a. [prompts: benefits/issues, trust]

Appendix B: General Public Questionnaire

Study on how local residents' feel about nature in the Făgăraș Mountains

Dear local resident,

I invite you to participate in this research project. I am sending this questionnaire to a select number of local residents, so your participation is very important. Your participation is voluntary. You will not be reported to community or government officials for your participation; it will be used as a part of my PhD dissertation at Memorial University of Newfoundland in Canada. The purpose of this study is to understand how land in the Făgăraș Mountains has been used and managed, how people living around the Făgăraș Mountains think and feel about these changes, and how local people would like the Făgăraș Mountains to be in the future.

You are free to respond positively, negatively, or neutrally to each question and you can skip any questions that you do not wish to answer. You also have the right you can stop at any time before your responses are collected. Your answers will be kept **anonymous** and strictly **confidential**, and they will be grouped with those of other respondents. I, Marie Louise Aastrup, will arrange to pick up your completed questionnaire within a couple of days.

Thank you for your time and for expressing your views about this issue. If you have any questions about the project or would like to set up a face-to-face interview, please feel free to contact me by phone at 0746328327or by e-mail at mlaastrup@mun.ca.

Section 1 addresses how you use and think about the Făgăraș Mountains. Section 2 is about the Făgăraș Mountains in the past. Section 3 is about the proposal to make the Făgăraș Mountains a National Park. Section 4 asks some general questions.

Thank you for your participation. It is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,

(Insert Signature) (Insert Signature)

Marie Louise Aastrup, PhD. Candidate
Project Coordinator
Memorial University of Newfoundland
Office: SN1018
Email: mlaastrup@mun.ca

Dr. Alistair Bath
Project Supervisor
Memorial University of Newfoundland
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Email: abath@mun.ca

The proposal for this research has been approved by the Interdisciplinary Committee on Ethics in Human Research at Memorial University. If you have ethical concerns about the research (such as the way you have been treated or your rights as a participant), you may contact the Chairperson of the ICEHR at icehr@mun.ca or by telephone at (**709) 864-2561**.

SECTION 1: Questions on how you use and think about Făgăraș Mountains today.

How often do you do the following activities? *(For each statement, circle the number that best represents your response.)*

In Făgăraș Mountains…	Never	Less than once a month	Once a month	Once a week	More than once a week
… I go fishing	1	2	3	4	5
… I collect firewood	1	2	3	4	5
… I pick berries/mushrooms/nuts	1	2	3	4	5
… I go for walks	1	2	3	4	5
… I have picnics	1	2	3	4	5
… I go hunting	1	2	3	4	5
... I graze livestock	1	2	3	4	5
… I pick medicinal plants	1	2	3	4	5

To what extent do you *disagree or agree* with *each* of the following? *(For each statement, circle the number that best represents your response.)*

	Strongly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Neutral	Slightly Agree	Strongly Agree
The forest in the Făgăraș Mountains is unique compared to the rest of Europe	1	2	3	4	5
The wildlife viewing opportunities in the Făgăraș Mountains are unique compared to the rest of Europe.	1	2	3	4	5
The amount of wildlife in the Făgăraș Mountains is unique compared to the rest of Europe	1	2	3	4	5
The mountains in the Făgăraș Mountains are unique compared to the rest of Europe	1	2	3	4	5

For each statement, choose one of the following responses (tick the box):

Făgăraș Mountains are…

…a Natura 2000 site	☐ no	☐ don't know	☐ yes	☐ I don't know what Natura 2000 is
…a protected area	☐ no	☐ don't know	☐ yes	☐ I don't know what a protected area is
…a national park	☐ no	☐ don't know	☐ yes	☐ I don't know what a national park is
…a collection of private properties	☐ no	☐ don't know	☐ yes	

SECTION 2: These questions are about how you think the Făgăraș Mountains have changed over time.

To what extent do you *disagree or agree* with *each* of the following? *(For each statement, circle the number that best represents your response.)*

	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
Actively managing the forest in the Făgăraș Mountains does more harm than good	1	2	3	4	5
During Communism, forest management practices in Făgăraș Mountains were better than today	1	2	3	4	5
Joining the EU benefitted agriculture in Romania	1	2	3	4	5
Joining the EU benefitted the natural environment in Romania	1	2	3	4	5
Doing nothing in the forest is not responsible	1	2	3	4	5
Getting financial compensation for losses (crops, livestock etc.) caused by wildlife is difficult	1	2	3	4	5
Ski slopes should be developed in the Făgăraș Mountains	1	2	3	4	5
Sick/dead trees should be cut for people to use	1	2	3	4	5
Old trees should be cut down for people to use	1	2	3	4	5

For each statement, choose one of the following responses *(For each statement, circle the number that best represents your response.)*:

	Much worse	Somewhat worse	About the same	Somewhat better	Much better
Compared to 1989, the forest condition in the Făgăraș Mountains today is…	1	2	3	4	5
Compared to 2007 (when Romania Joined the EU), the forest condition in the Făgăraș Mountains today is…	1	2	3	4	5
Compared to five years ago, the forest condition in the Făgăraș Mountains today is…	1	2	3	4	5
Compared to 1989, the way the Făgăraș Mountains is managed today is…	1	2	3	4	5
Compared to 2007(when Romania Joined the EU), the way the Făgăraș Mountains is managed today is…	1	2	3	4	5
Compared to five years ago, the way the Făgăraș Mountains is managed in the Făgăraș Mountains today is…	1	2	3	4	5
Compared to 1989, the amount of wildlife in the Făgăraș Mountains today is…	1	2	3	4	5
Compared to 2007 (when Romania Joined the EU), the amount of wildlife in the Făgăraș Mountains today is…	1	2	3	4	5
Compared to 2016, the amount of wildlife in the Făgăraș Mountains today is…	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 3: Questions on what you think about the proposed Făgăraș Mountains National Park (FMNP).

There has been a proposal to make Făgăraș Mountains a national park (Făgăraș Mountains National Park (FMNP). A national park is a natural area that is set operated differently from its surrounding area – usually and to provide various opportunities for people.

<u> The proposed park has not been established, nor is it certain that it will be established **</u>**

To what extent do you *disagree or agree* with *each* of the following? *(For each statement, circle the number that best represents your response.)* FMNP refers to Făgăraș Mountains National Park.

I believe that the proposed FMNP will…	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
… change the way I live my life	1	2	3	4	5
… increase job opportunities related to tourism	1	2	3	4	5
… benefit the community I live in	1	2	3	4	5
… benefit my family	1	2	3	4	5
… benefit me personally	1	2	3	4	5
… help protect nature	1	2	3	4	5
… help protect wildlife	1	2	3	4	5
… help protect plants	1	2	3	4	5
... restrict fishing inside the park	1	2	3	4	5
… restrict wood cutting inside the park	1	2	3	4	5
… restrict the collection of berries and mushrooms inside the park	1	2	3	4	5
… restrict having grazing animals inside the park	1	2	3	4	5
… restrict hunting inside the park	1	2	3	4	5
… reduce access to roads	1	2	3	4	5
… increase number of tourists visiting the Făgăraș Mountains	1	2	3	4	5

… bring better infrastructure (roads and transportation) to the Făgăraș Mountains	1	2	3	4	5
... be a way for the state to gain control over the Făgăraș Mountains	1	2	3	4	5
… positively affect the way I live my life	1	2	3	4	5
… negatively affect the way I make a living	1	2	3	4	5

For each statement, circle the number that best represents your response.
In general, do you *think* of a national park as:

Bad	1	2	3	4	5	Good
Harmful	1	2	3	4	5	Beneficial
Negative	1	2	3	4	5	Positive

For each statement, circle the number that best represents your response.
In general, do you *think* of the proposed Făgăraș Mountains National Parks as:

Bad	1	2	3	4	5	Good
Harmful	1	2	3	4	5	Beneficial
Negative	1	2	3	4	5	Positive

To what extent do you find each the following acceptable or unacceptable? (*for each statement, circle the number that best represents your response.).* FMNP refers to the proposed Făgăraș Mountains National Park.

How acceptable or unacceptable is to establish FMNP if it means…	Completely Unacceptable	Slightly Unacceptable	Neutral	Slightly Acceptable	Completely Acceptable	No opinion
… I cannot hunt inside the proposed FMNP	1	2	3	4	5	0
… I cannot fish inside the proposed FMNP	1	2	3	4	5	0
… I cannot cut wood inside the proposed FMNP	1	2	3	4	5	0
… I cannot collect berries/mushrooms inside the proposed FMNP	1	2	3	4	5	0
… I cannot herd sheep/cattle inside the proposed FMNP	1	2	3	4	5	0

To what extent do you disagree or agree with each of the following? (*for each statement, circle the number that best represents your response.).*

	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
Land is best managed at the local level	1	2	3	4	5
Land is best managed at the county level	1	2	3	4	5
Land is best managed at a state level	1	2	3	4	5
Different types of ownership of land in Făgăraș Mountains is acceptable, as long as each person gets to make their own decisions regarding their land	1	2	3	4	5
The land in Făgăraș Mountains should be owned by private individuals in the area	1	2	3	4	5

The land in Făgăraș Mountains should be managed by private entities	1	2	3	4	5
It would be better if the land in Făgăraș Mountains was owned by composesorate/obște in the area	1	2	3	4	5
The land in Făgăraș Mountains should be managed by composesorate/obște	1	2	3	4	5
The land in Făgăraș Mountains should be owned by the municipalities	1	2	3	4	5
The land in Făgăraș Mountains should be managed by the municipalities	1	2	3	4	5
The land in Făgăraș Mountains should be owned by the state	1	2	3	4	5
The land in Făgăraș Mountains should be managed by the state	1	2	3	4	5
The state should not have a say in what activities I can do on my own land	1	2	3	4	5
The state wants control over my private land	1	2	3	4	5

SECTION 4: Some general questions

Which of these describe you?

Full-time employed	☐ no	☐ yes (specify sector):_____
Part-time employed	☐ no	☐ yes (specify sector):_____
Self-employed	☐ no	☐ yes (specify sector):_____
Not employed for pay	☐ no	☐ yes
Unemployed	☐ no	☐ yes
Homemaker	☐ no	☐ yes
I am retired	☐ no	☐ yes
Student	☐ no	☐ yes
Other (please specify):		

Do you, or your family, take part in any of the following activities?

Grow own produce	☐ no	☐ yes
Have livestock to meet own needs	☐ no	☐ yes
Have a guest house/hotel	☐ no	☐ yes
Pick berries/mushrooms/nuts	☐ no	☐ yes
Farm trout	☐ no	☐ yes
Keep bees	☐ no	☐ yes
Have orchards	☐ no	☐ yes
Sell produce & other homemade products	☐ no	☐ yes
Involved in the tourism industry	☐ no	☐ yes
None of the above (specify):		

At some point during the period 1947 – 1989, did you work in any of the following?

☐ Collective agricultural farm
☐ State agricultural farm
☐ A factory
☐ A hunting lodge
☐ Heavy industry
☐ Other (please specify sector): _____
☐ Not applicable

How interested or useful would you find each of the following types of information about the proposed Făgăraș Mountains National Park?

It would be useful to have information about…	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
… how the potential park would be managed	1	2	3	4	5
… which kind of activities could take place inside the potential park	1	2	3	4	5
… land ownership within the potential park	1	2	3	4	5
… who can access the potential park	1	2	3	4	5
… whether or not the activities I am currently undertaking in the Făgăraș Mountains will be permitted	1	2	3	4	5
… where the borders of the potential park would be	1	2	3	4	5
… how big the potential park would be	1	2	3	4	5
… the different types of user zones in the potential park	1	2	3	4	5

How would you like to receive information about the proposed Făgăraș Mountains National Park? Circle all that apply.

☐ Books
☐ Magazine/Newspaper
☐ Radio
☐ Television
☐ Video (DVD/VHS/YouTube)
☐ Internet website
☐ Government agency
☐ Environmental groups
☐ Booklets
☐ Social media (Facebook, Twitter etc.)
☐ Friends & family
☐ Other (please specify): _____

Are you:

☐ Male ☐ Female and/or ☐ Identify as other

How old are you?

☐ 18-25 ☐ 26-35 ☐ 36-45 ☐ 46-55 ☐ 56-64 ☐ 65 +

Do you own private lands?

☐ No ☐ I am part of obște/composesorate ☐ Yes

If you answered yes to question 8:	Strongly Disagree	Moderately Disagree	Neutral	Moderately Agree	Strongly Agree
I have exclusionary rights to my own land. That means, I am the only one who can use the forest on my private land	1	2	3	4	5
I have exclusionary rights to my own land. That means, I am the only one who can use the pasture on my private land	1	2	3	4	5
I have non-exclusionary rights to my own land. That means, I am not the only one who can use the forest on my private land	1	2	3	4	5
I have non-exclusionary rights to my own land. That means, I am not the only one who can use the pasture on my private	1	2	3	4	5

Is this your primary residence?

☐ No ☐ It is my secondary house ☐ Yes

In total, about how long have you lived in this area?

I have lived here for about _____years.

Where did you grow up?

☐ Area around Făgăraș Mountains

☐ Elsewhere in Romania (indicate county):
_____

☐ Other (indicate):
_____

Before returning the survey, please make sure that you have answered all the questions. If you have any additional comments about the land use and management in the Făgăraș Mountains or the proposed Făgăraș Mountains National Park, or about the survey itself, we would be grateful if you shared your feedback below. Thank you for participation. Your participation is very important and highly appreciated.

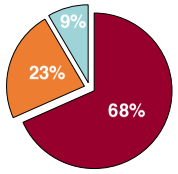
Zona Munților Făgăraș

Appendix C: Community Outreach Poster

Studiu privind modul în care localnicii se simt în legătură cu natura în Munții Făgăraș

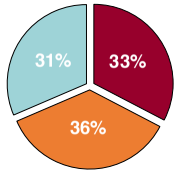
În lunile Septembrie-Octombrie 2017, am realizat 26 de interviuri cu membri ai comunităților locale din jurul Munților Făgăraș. Am analizat aceste interviuri și am dezvoltat un chestionar pe baza acestora.Timp de patru luni (August-Decembrie 2018) am vizitat comunități din județele Brașov, Sibiu și Argeș. Un total de 644 de membri ai comunităților locale au luat parte la studiul nostru. Acestea sunt câteva dintre rezultatele reieșite din studiu. Am realizat acest studiu ca fiind parte dintr-un studiu mai mare legat de perspectivele locale privind problemele legate de pădure, animale sălbatice, modul de viață al localnicilor, și a propunerii de a înființa Parcul Național Munții Făgăraș. Sperăm că această informație va ajuta factorii decizionali să ia în considerare perspectivele localnicilor în deciziile administrative.

În comparaţie cu 5 ani în urmă, starea pădurilor din Munţii Făgăraş....

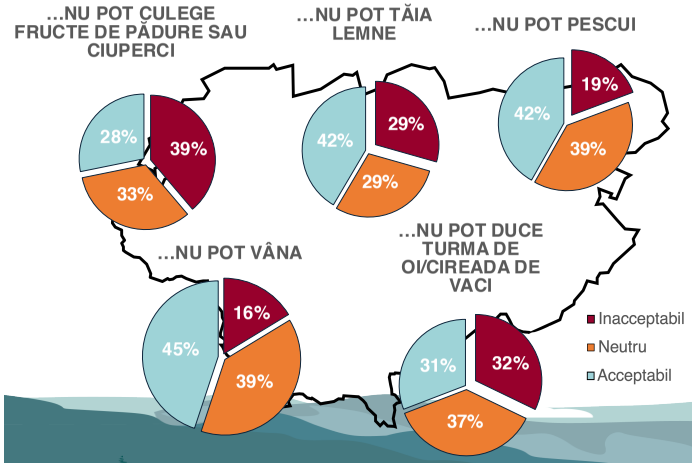


„este astăzi mai rău”
„este astăzi cam la fel”
„este astăzi mai bine”

În comparaţie cu anul 2016, numărul de animale sălbatice din Munţii Făgăraş



Cât de acceptabilă sau inacceptabilă este înfiinţarea Parcului Naţional Munţii Făgăraş dacă înseamnă că…



Să obţii compensaţie financiară de la autorităţi pentru pierderi cauzate de animalele sălbatice...

76,5% “este dificil”
8,8% “este ușor”

Ar trebui construite pârtii de ski în Munţii Făgăraş

78%
11%

Cred că parcul național propus va mări numărul turiştilor în Munţii Făgăraş

85%
7%

Cred că parcul național propus va ajuta comunitatea în care trăiesc

67%
15%

Marie Louise AASTRUP[1], Alin PUIU[2],
[1]Memorial University, mlaastrup@mun.ca
[2]Transilvania University of Brașov, alinpuiu96@yahoo.com

MEMORIAL UNIVERSITY

Appendix D: Community Outreach Pamphlet

Dragă localnic,

Mă numesc Marie Louise Aastrup. Sunt doctorand la Universitatea Memorial situată în Newfoundland, Canada. Lucrarea mea de doctorat este despre perspectivele locale cu privire la folosirea terenurilor în Munții Făgăraș. Timp de patru luni (August – Decembrie 2018) împreuna cu traducătorul meu Alin am vizitat comunități în județele Brașov, Sibiu, și Argeș. Un total de 644 de membri ai comunităților locale au luat parte din studiul nostru. Am pus o serie de întrebări legate de gestionarea pământurilor, pădure, turism și propunerea înființării parcului național Munții Făgăraș. Acestea sunt unele dintre rezultatele reieșite din studiu. Am realizat acest studiu ca fiind parte dintr-un studiu mai mare legat de perspectivele locale privind problemele legate de pădure,animale sălbatice,modul de viață al localnicilor, și a propunerii de a înființa Parcul Național Munții Făgăraș. Sperăm că această informație va ajuta factorii decizionali să ia în considerare perspectivele localnicilor în deciziile administrative.

Mulţumim frumos!

- Mulțumim pentru implicare! Suntem extrem de recunoscători pentru participarea și interesul dumneavoastră legat de această lucrare științifică.Sperăm că acest studiu a ajutat la exprimarea perspectivei localnicilor privind luarea deciziilor pentru Munții Făgăraș în viitor.
- Rezultatele vor fi înaintate autorităților locale,funcționarilor publici, planificatorilor de conservare și vor fi folosite în publicații științifice.
- Dacă aveți orice fel de întrebări,nu ezitați să ne contactați.

Contactaţi-ne

Marie Louise Aastrup
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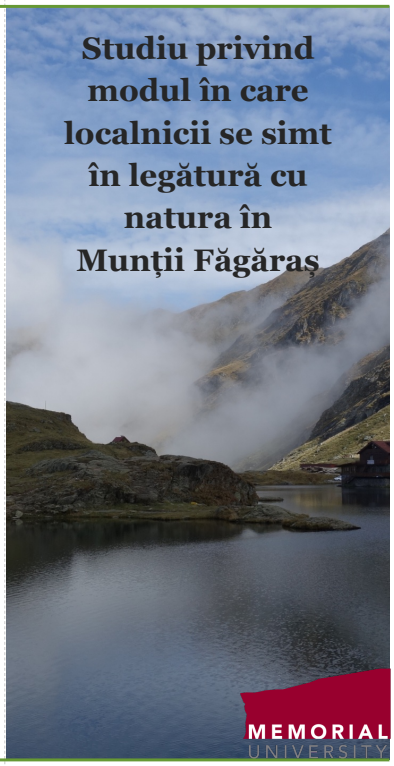
Universitatea Memorial, Canada
mlaastrup@mun.ca

Alin Puiu
Asistent de cercetare & Traducător
Universitatea Transilvania din Brașov

Studiu privind modul în care localnicii se simt în legătură cu natura în Munţii Făgăraș

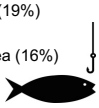


Parc national propus

- Cei mai mulți oameni (67%) cred că înființarea unui parc național va fi benefică pentru comunitatea lor.

- Majoritatea oamenilor (87%) cred că înființarea unui parc național va ajuta la protejarea naturii.

- Din cele 644 de chestionare,am aflat că oamenii sunt cel mai mult îngrijorați că un parc național va:
  - Restricționa culesul de fructe de pădure sau ciuperci (39%)
  - Restricționa accesul cu turma de oi/cireada de vaci (32%)
  - Rectricționa tăierea de lemne (29%)
  - Restricționa pescuitul (19%)
  - Restricționa vânătoarea (16%)



Turism în Munţii Făgăraş

- Mulți oameni (78%) ar susține dezvoltarea pârtiilor de ski în Munții Făgăraș.

- Cei mai mulți oameni (85%) cred că realizarea parcului național Munții Făgăraș va crește numărul turiștilor ce vor vizita zona.

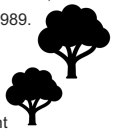
Animale salbatice

- Per total, oamenii nu cred că numărul de animale sălbatice din prezent este mai mare în comparație cu cel din trecut.

- Majoritatea oamenilor (76%) consideră că este dificil să primești compensații pentru pierderile cauzate de animalele sălbatice.

Păduri

- Majoritatea oamenilor (84%) cred că starea pădurilor este în prezent mai rea decât era în 1989.
- Mulți cred de asemenea că starea pădurilor este în prezent mai rea decât era în 2007.
- Per total (74%), oamenii cred că modul în care Munții Făgăraș sunt administrați astăzi este mai rău decât în 1989.



- Mai mult de jumătate (61%) cred că Munții Făgăraș sunt administrați mai rău în prezent decât în 2007.

- Aproape toată lumea crede că arborii bolnavi trebuie tăiaţi pentru a fi folosiţi de oameni (92%).
- Mulți cred de asemenea că arborii bătrâni trebuie tăiaţi pentru a fi folosiţi de oameni (74%) .