

## Participatory Management of Protected Areas in Slovakia: Reconciling nature conservation and local development

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### Abstract

#### Slovakian

Tento dokument predstavuje interdisciplinárny projekt, ktorý zahŕňa účasť všetkých zainteresovaných strán (stakeholderov), regionálny rozvoj a manažment chránených území. Výskum sa uskutočnil v kontexte úsilia Štátnej ochrany prírody Slovenskej republiky rozvíjať a zlepšovať metodiku pre participatívne riadenie veľkoplošných chránených území v Karpatoch. Súčasťou interdisciplinárneho výskumu bolo, že tím zložený zo slovenských a švajčiarskych výskumníkov, vypracoval základné hodnotenie vybraných chránených území zahŕňajúce oblasť ekológie, spoločnosti a ekonomiky. Osobitná pozornosť bola venovaná rozdielu medzi odľahlými a vyľudňujúcimi sa slovenskými Karpatmi s ich bohatstvom prírodných zdrojov a mestskými centrami s ich dynamicky sa transformujúcou ekonomikou z centrálnej na trhovú. Interdisciplinárny výskum sa tiež zamerával na participatívne procesy so stakeholdermi vo vybraných veľkoplošných chránených územiach a vytváranie spôsobov na prepojenie ochrany prírody s hospodárskym rozvojom (pozri Obr. 2). Okrem toho Program švajčiarsko-slovenskej spolupráce umožnil slovenským projektovým partnerom implementovať malé inovatívne projekty navrhnuté lokálnymi stakeholdermi, tzv. Seed Money Actions (životaschopné aktivity). Očakáva sa že prinesú konkrétny a trvalý prínos lokálnym stakeholderom, predovšetkým poľnohospodárom pôsobiacim vnútri a v okolí chránených území. SMA reprezentovali úsilie o ochranu prírody (napr. kosenie lúk) (pozri Obr. 3a, Obr. 3b), ale aj projekty na zlepšenie turistickej infraštruktúry a iné aktivity navrhnuté miestnymi starostami alebo skupinami stakeholderov. Náš výskum poukázal na to, že takýto prístup môže byť novou produktívnou formou spolupráce medzi správami chránených území a miestnym obyvateľstvom, čo môže pomôcť vyššej akceptácii ochrany prírody medzi miestnymi obyvateľmi. Zároveň ponúka slovenským poľnohospodárom v horských oblastiach viac konkrétnych výhod plynúcich z blízkosti chránených území.

#### English

This article presents transdisciplinary 'action research' approach integrating stakeholder participation, local development, and protected area management. The research was carried out in the context of efforts by the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic to develop and improve its methodology for participatory management of large protected areas in the Carpathians.

As part of the transdisciplinary research, a joint team of Slovak and Swiss researchers carried out baseline assessments of selected protected areas concerning their ecology, society, and economy. The specific research approach adapted to the transition context of Slovakia also included facilitation of participatory processes (see Fig. 2) with stakeholders in selected large protected areas to negotiate ways of linking nature conservation with economic development (see Fig. 1).

Moreover, a joint Slovak-Swiss financing mechanism enabled Slovak project partners to implement small innovative projects proposed by local stakeholders – so-called Seed Money Actions (SMAs) (see Fig. 3a, Fig. 3b). They are expected to bring tangible and lasting benefits to local stakeholders, mostly farmers, within and around protected areas. SMAs included landscape conservation efforts such as mowing of pastures, as well as projects to improve tourism infrastructure or other actions proposed by local mayors or stakeholder groups. Our research shows that this could be a fruitful new form of cooperation between protected area managers and local populations, as it may ultimately lead to a higher acceptance of nature conservation among locals while offering Slovak mountain farmers more tangible benefits from nearby protected areas.

### Keywords

Transdisciplinary research; participatory management of large protected areas; Parks and people; Seed Money Actions (SMAs); Scaling-up to protected areas in Slovakia and to the entire region of the Carpathian Convention

### Research questions

1. What potential exist for reconciling nature and landscape conservation and local sustainable development in Slovakian Large Protected Areas?
2. What could be the specific transdisciplinary research methods aiming at the implementation of Seed Money activities 'on the ground'?
3. What are the specific Institutional challenges – local to national to transboundary level?

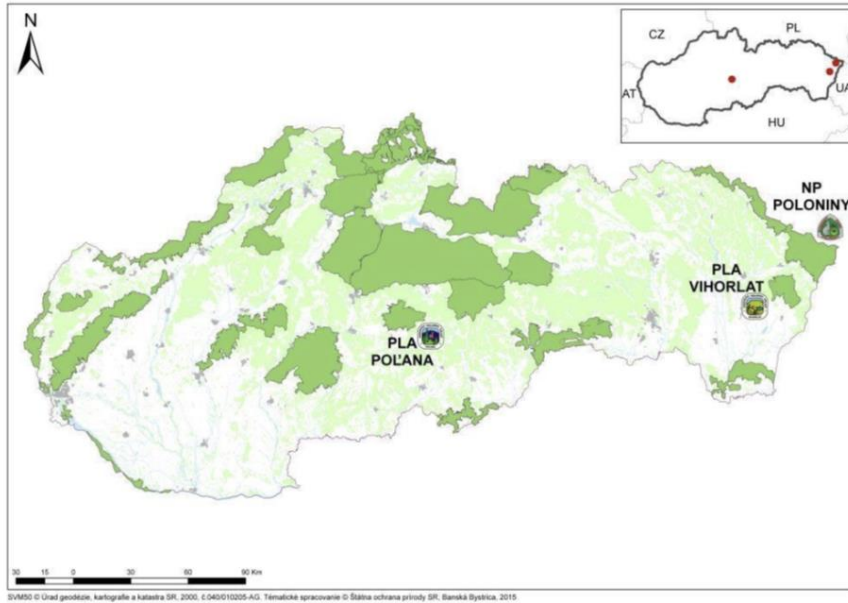


Figure 1: Location of the Pilot-Protected Areas assessed with Slovakia (colored – black/white)

## Results

The transdisciplinary research approach facilitated participatory processes with stakeholders in selected large protected areas of Slovakia (see map). Stakeholders with a forum process negotiated ways of linking nature conservation with economic development. Moreover, a joint Slovak-Swiss financing mechanism enabled Slovak project partners to implement small innovative projects proposed by local stakeholders – so-called Seed Money Actions (SMAs) (see Fig. 3a, Fig. 3b).

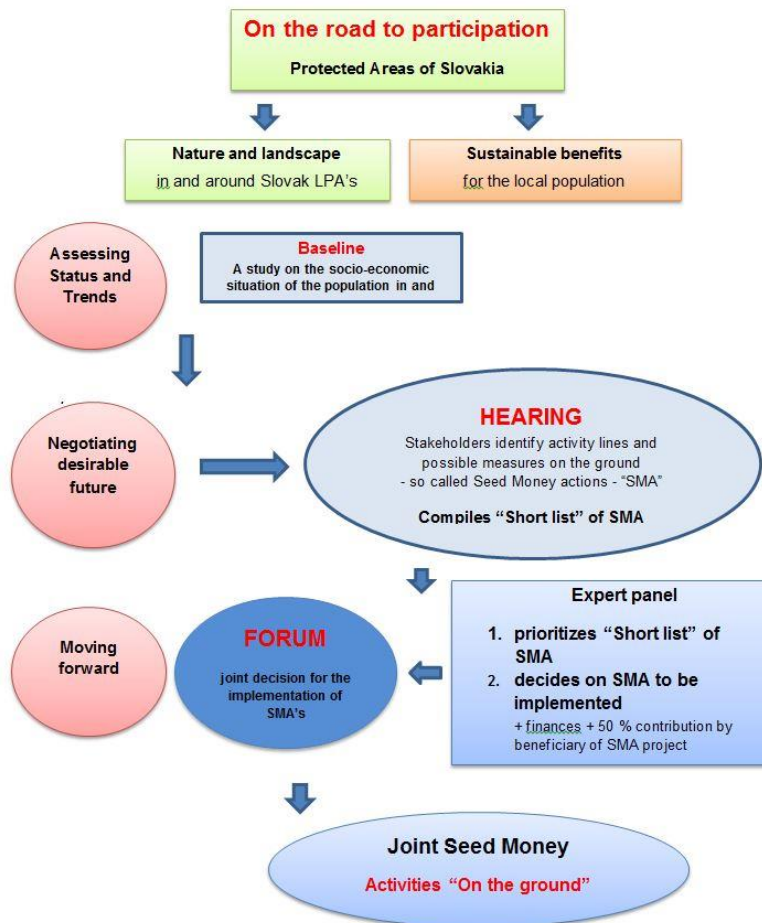


Figure 2: Procedure during 'Forum-Process' The Forum Process aiming on concrete action on the ground: Linking the national objectives of nature conservation with the local interests of a long-term development perspective.

## Discussion and preliminary conclusions

People are not part of the problem, they are part of the solution or to say it in the words of Nelson Mandela, former President of the Republic of South Africa

*'Ultimately conservation is about people. If you don't have sustainable development around these parks, the parks will not survive.'*

## Recommendations and future perspectives

for innovative transdisciplinary research strategies on 'parks and people' could be summarized within the following seven basic steps:

1. Carry out baseline study on LPA
2. Cooperate with stakeholders – identify local needs for and beyond conservation (FORUM process)
3. Find areas of common interest
4. Implement Seed Money Actions (SMAs) (see Fig. 3a, Fig. 3 b)
5. Document the results
6. Elaborate Manual on lessons learnt for the specific context of participatory management challenges
7. The way forward – transboundary (see Fig. 4, Fig. 5)

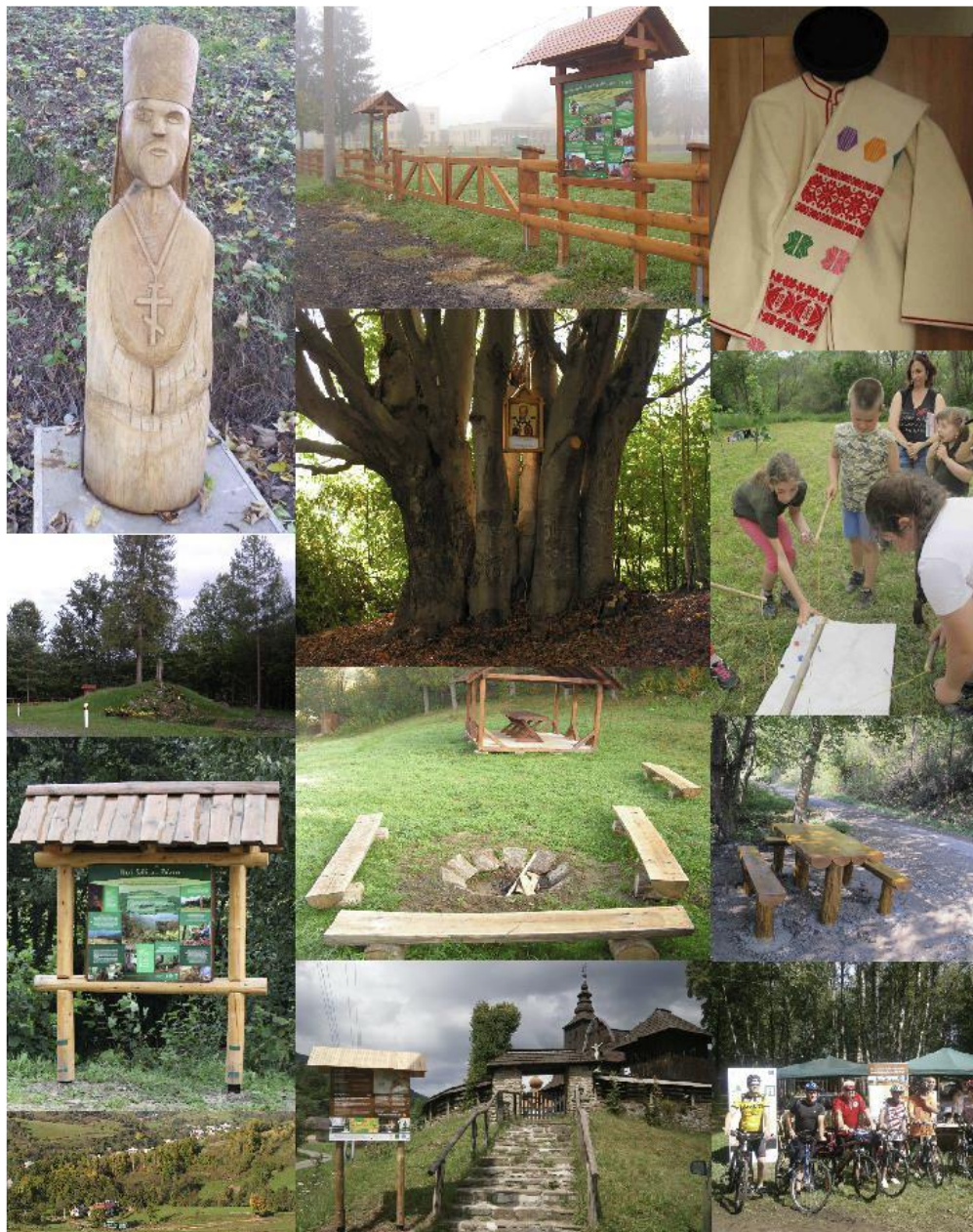


Figure 3a: Examples for Seed Money Actions (SMA) in the fields of local infrastructure (including sustainable tourism) development – in close cooperation of the LPA – administration and local mayors or other stakeholders



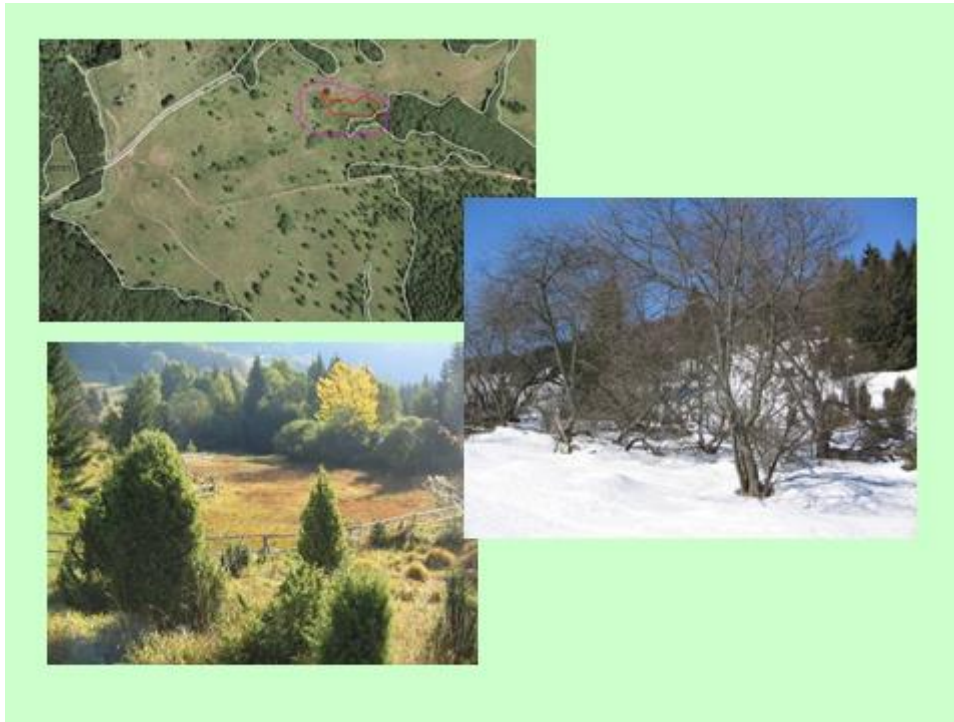


Figure 3 b: Example of SMA in the Pol'ana Biosphere Reserve implemented for landscape conservation in the buffer zone of the Reserve (Joint implementation by the LPA Administration and local farmers)

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## REGION FLAGOWY "BIESPOL"

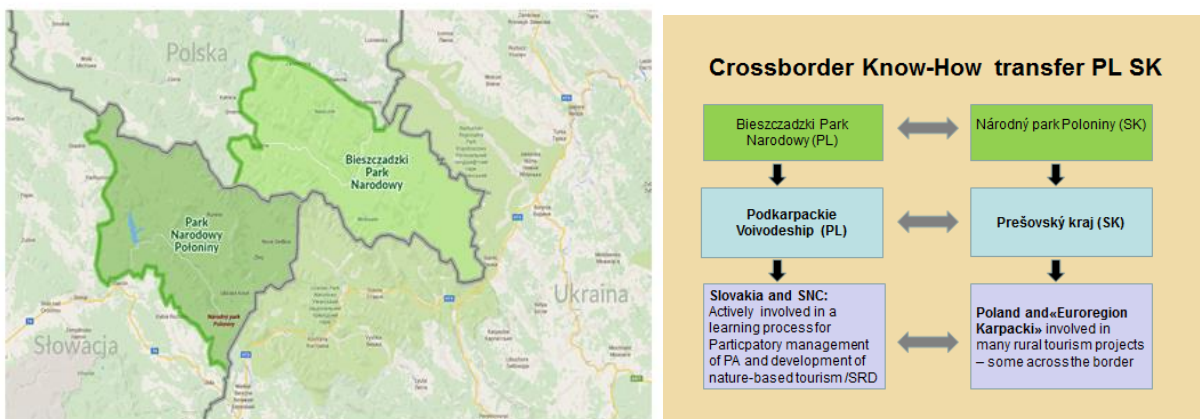


Figure 4: The way forward aiming at transboundary nature conservation in two National Parks in the flagship region of BIESPOL



Figure 5: Polish – Slovakian Bieszpol team on the border of Bieszczady and Poloniny National Parks (May, 5 – 2016) discussing on site how to reconcile nature conservation with local development. Team consists of: Director and experts of Poloniny NP Admin – Project leader of Slovak SNC – NGO local development of Winicki district (PL) – Representatives and director of Euregion - Mayors concerned with concrete project ideas from Slovakia (Obec of Ubl'a, Zboj and Topol'a plus one Ukrainian observing Mayor from Velikij Bereznij)- EU-consultant active in INTERREG as adviser for planned joint proposals SK-PL in this program and CDE /University of Bern

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