

DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC (IN ENGLISH) *(State the objective of the project, describe the research to be carried out, and present reasons for choosing the research topic - max. 1 standard type-written page)*

Nature conservation in Europe and other parts of the world is traditionally realised within designated protected areas. Rules of operation of protected areas - specified in formal regulations - impose various restrictions on different groups of interest, depending on the specific form of nature protection. Frequent consequences of such restrictions are social conflicts, which negatively influence nature conservation and often make it ineffective. Still, there is a lack of comprehensive information to fully understand these complex issues. There is a need for extensive research addressing social conflicts within the entire socio-ecological system of a protected area, i.e. the space of mutual interaction of 1) the nature in a protected area and 2) the society of nearby local communities residents. To date, the influence of the institutional factor (the form of nature protection) on the characteristics of conflicts which can be objectively described (that is: conflict determinants, substance, duration, intensity and the networks of the interest groups) has not been recognized. Likewise, no investigation has been done to determine whether different forms of nature protection affect the attitudes of local inhabitants to protected areas differently. **The main goal of the project is therefore to capture the relation between the territorial form of nature protection and structural and spatial conflict characteristics within socio-ecological systems of protected areas, based on the example of Małopolska Region (Poland).**

The project consists of three parts – each aimed at investigating the goal of the study at a different spatial scale: 1) regional, 2) local and 3) topographical one. In a first stage, we will determine general regularities by using surveys and content analysis of selected documents (e.g. press articles or official documents). In the second stage, we will use public statistical data to categorize protected areas, along with their respective socio-ecological systems, according to the characteristics frequently leading to social conflicts. Furthermore, we aim to propose the types of social conflicts related to the protected areas distinguishing between their determinants (social, environmental, institutional, economic) and their dimensions (substance, changes in time and networks between factors). Having this knowledge, we will choose four protected areas in Małopolska for more in-depth examination of the research problem. We will interview selected individuals who act differently within particular socio-ecological systems. The interviews results will be used for preparation of a set of categories (the attributes) that will be suitable to be localized on a map. Thus, we will enter the last stage of the study where we intend to employ a novel method of research – public participation geographic information system (PPGIS); a methodology that has been never before used for such a purpose in Central and Eastern Europe. During individual meetings we will ask our respondents to mark on a map the sources of factors that, in their opinion, trigger a conflict, as well as places towards which that they have specific interests. This will allow us to identify actual hotspot conflict areas. At last, all the interviewees will be invited to a summarizing group interviews during which they will perform similar mapping tasks. However, this time their mapping decisions will be collectively made. Participants will be also asked to assess the maps resulting from the individual interviews. In this way, we will ascertain if the PPGIS concept, already applied in the U.S.A. or Australia for assessment of the conflict potentials, can be effectively used in a Central and Eastern European context.

The studied issue is important because, despite a steady growth in protected areas, the biodiversity of both Europe and the world is declining. The low social acceptance of protected areas is viewed to be one of the main causes of this unfavourable trend. Without research that 1) applies approaches and methods of many scientific disciplines and 2) is conducted in different spatial scales, the academics will not be able to accurately diagnose the problem with its entire complexity.