

Environmental discrimination occurs where conservation “practices or policies ... disparately impact on the living conditions of people in low-income groups” (Dunion, 2003, p. 12). With environmental discrimination taking place worldwide, Natura 2000 Ecological Network is an example of a European environmental policy that has discriminated local communities in two ways. First, it excludes communities from decision-making concerning conservation practices within Natura 2000. Second it denies residents the right to continue traditional local economic activities

Arguably, ecotourism is seen as the best way to compensate for the limitations resulting from Natura 2000, and is promoted as a benefit from Natura 2000 within the post-communist European rural communities. Indeed research found ecotourism can profit rural residents because it is an alternative source of income for those communities that are challenged by Natura 2000. In addition to economic benefits from ecotourism, scholars argue that equally if not more important are non-economic benefits such as preservation historical, cultural, and natural assets within host communities , as well as psychological or social benefits such as self-efficacy or community cohesion .

A holistic framework to consider both economic and non-economic benefits from ecotourism is Max Weber’s theory of formal and substantive rationality. This theory was developed as a means to explain a person’s motives behind engaging in different forms of economic activity.

Weber proposed that rationality is inherent in all and is comprised of means-end rational action (formal rationality) as well as value-rational action (substantive rationality). The theory provides justification for exploring emotional aspects such as emotional engagement in nature. With Poland’s communist past and traditions of nature conservation, it is of interest to understand which rationality (formal or substantive) is more present within post-communist communities and which one dominates within the context of nature conservation tourism. This broad goal will be achieved through the following research questions:

- Research Question 1: Which form of empowerment from ecotourism dominates within post-communist communities? Are formal and substantive rationalities - manifested as economic, psychological, social, political empowerment - coexisting or excluding?’
- Research Question 2: Does ecotourism empower communities challenged by Natura 2000? How does empowerment (economic, psychological, political, social) affect residents’ perceptions of environmental discrimination?

Environmental psychologists tend to agree that a individuals’ view of nature conservation processes and policies could be influenced by his/her emotional engagement in nature (e.g. Roszak, 1995). The perceived residents’ discrimination and exclusion from decision-making concerning local nature is therefore also likely to be affected by the strength of this engagement. The applicant intends to learn how residents’ emotional engagement in nature influences perceptions of nature conservation policies.

- Research Question 3: Does individuals’ emotional engagement in nature influence perceptions of environmental discrimination of Nature 2000?

The applicant asks about the potential relationships between empowerment in tourism, residents’ emotional engagement in nature and the perceptions of environmental justice. However, as only limited evidence exists in support of this hypothesized relationship, this study explores its character (moderation/mediation) instead of engaging in testing specific hypotheses.

Finally also other demographic (sex, age, employment, length of residency) and non-demographic characteristics are likely to affect residents perceptions of Nature 2000 within a post-communist communities such as trust in governments or officials (citation), or individual self-efficacy, among other, that are not related to ecotourism development. While the focal point of this project is on benefits from ecotourism, it will also consider some of those factors.

Dunion K. (2003). *Troublemakers: The Struggle for Environmental Justice in Scotland*. Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh.