

With the takeover of Red Ruthenia by the Kingdom of Poland in the mid-fourteenth century, there was a chance to develop the sparsely populated, Polish-Ruthenian border covered with forests. As a result, new towns and villages began to arise there from the 1340s and some settlers came from German-speaking areas. In this way, a community called the Forest Germans (German: *Walddutsche*, *Taubdutsche*; Polish: *Głuchoniemcy*) was created between roughly Dunajec and San rivers. They did not create a permanent and spatially compact settlement structure that would result in the next centuries either by creating there a German-speaking group of people (a national minority) or by separating an independent ethnographic group. Despite the rapid polonisation of settlers, the name referring to the origin of the settlers remained until the 1st half of the 20th century, and then it was completely eliminated by the new Polish names of ethnographic groups: Pogórzans and Rzeszowiaks, which blurred the former settlement separateness of this region. In this way, the Forest Germans eventually succumbed to the Polish-German conflict in the 19th and 20th centuries in international politics and science. In the 20th and 21st century Polish science did not show much interest in that "lost tribe", while the history of the Forest Germans has a universal dimension because it allows to see clearly many key pan-European problems and processes from the Middle Ages to the 20th century in the local mirror.

The research project assumes not only the interdisciplinary reconstruction of the Forest German settlement in space, time and culture in relation to the past, but also answering if its relics still exist in the contemporary cultural and social landscape of the Carpathian Foothills. There are four main goals of the project: 1) determining the borders of the region of their residence and its internal divisions; 2) examining selected key threads of settlement, social and political history of the analyzed communities; 3) indicating the currently preserved relics of the analyzed territorial communities in the form of geographical names and surnames, their relics in language, and material and intangible culture; 4) showing the present-day distinctiveness (distinctive features) of areas inhabited in the past by the Forest Germans or the lack of it against the background of neighboring areas. Research to achieve these goals will be conducted by a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary team of scientists.

Such an extensive project will contribute to a deeper knowledge of the past and present of the Polish Carpathians, especially settlement processes and social reality in the area between Dunajec and San rivers.