

The project "Forests, Society, and Democracy: Disputes Over the Future of Forests in Poland in the Context of Climate Change and the Challenges of the European Green Deal" will investigate the social mechanisms underlying conflicts over forests in Poland. Forest management and policy in Poland have been the subject of intense discussions in recent years, reflected in one of the highest numbers of forest-related conflicts in Europe. Poland is characterized by a specific ownership structure and a unique forest management model in the European Union, with the dominance of public ownership and a strong, hierarchical forest management organization - the State Forests National Forest Holding. The social perception of forest management has deteriorated in recent years, which may be associated with the growing divide between the beliefs and values of foresters and civil society representatives, as well as with the impact of an autocratic political context and the Covid-19 pandemic. Discussions around the management of Polish forests are accompanied by the implementation of the European Green Deal, which includes many detailed guidelines regarding forest management goals and ties Polish forest policy more closely to the European level. As a result, discussions about Polish forests involve a multi-level network of stakeholders, both public and private, who negotiate the ways forests should be used and adapted to the challenges of climate change and the unstable geopolitical situation in the region caused by the war in Ukraine.

The main objective of the proposed interdisciplinary research project is a comprehensive analysis of conflicts over forests in Poland and changes in forest policy in response to these conflicts, as well as developing recommendations to mitigate conflicts and increase the innovativeness of forest policy. Specific research questions address social attitudes towards forests, the development of forest policy over the last 30 years and its determinants, and factors influencing the perception of forest policy and the State Forests National Forest Holding. The project will also examine what factors influence forest conflicts at local and regional levels, both in rural and suburban areas, and determine the developmental conditions of local communities in forest-rich areas. To interpret obtained results a rich theoretical background will be employed including theories describing the formation of governance rules for environmental goods by a diverse set of social actors (institutional theories and governance theory), as well as theories describing environmental social movements.

The realization of the project objectives will be supported by an innovative and comprehensive set of research methods carried out by experienced researchers with complementary research profiles representing two partner organizations: the Institute of Philosophy and Sociology of the Polish Academy of Sciences and the Centre for Civil Rights and Democracy Research. The project methodology includes qualitative methods (document research, interviews, focus groups, sociological interventions, Future Literacy Laboratories), mixed methods (combination of surveys and interviews), and quantitative methods (regional and national surveys). These will address different scales (local, regional, national) in various locations in Poland and involve a diverse group of public and private stakeholders from rural and urban areas. The project will allow for understanding the relationships between social conflicts over forests and the shape of existing legal and organizational regulations, as well as the changing socio-ecological context of forest management. The project's results will enrich international research on the formation of forest policy in response to social demands and the need for climate change adaptation. The project's findings, summarized in at least 9 publications, will also contribute to the development of environmental sociology, environmental politics, and cultural anthropology of forests.