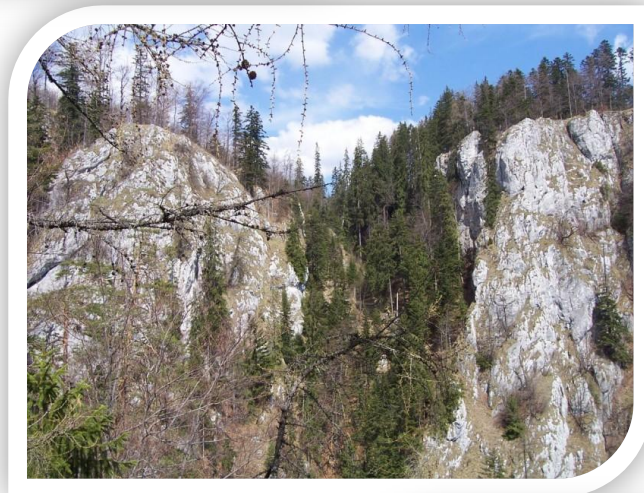


UNIVERSITETET FOR MILJØ- OG BIOVITENSKAP







*“As the evolution exists, I hope once the evolution of ecological thinking will happen. Every human being has to gain the feeling of unity with the nature...”*

Jerguš Tesák, zoologist

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This thesis is based on my original research work. All other sources of information than my own have been acknowledged. This work has not been submitted to any other university than UMB for any type of academic degree.

Norwegian University of Life Sciences, Ås, 14. May 2012

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Peter Macuľa

## **Abstract**

The Conservation of the biodiversity has become an important topic. The established protected areas bring alongside positive and negative objects to achieve this aim. This thesis aims to clarify the similarities and differences in the perception of the Muránska planina national park among the different groups living or doing business nearby. It also tries to determine the level of knowledge of citizens, their views on the desired development and the willingness of residents to be involved in conservation and decision-making processes.

Under quantitative research, three hypotheses were formulated and the questionnaire was completed by 193 respondents in nine focused municipalities. Within the frame of qualitative research face-to-face interview with open-ended questions was used to reach the goals of this work. In-depth analysis of 11 conducted interviews has also served to the supplement knowledge.

The findings indicated low level of awareness and low quality of the knowledge of the national park. On the other hand, residents expressed the desire for information and surprisingly high willingness to participate in nature conservation and decisions concerning the study area. In addition, the survey results indicated the desired directions of development in terms of tourism and the possible complications of such development.

Key words: National park, local population, awareness, public preferences.

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## 1. Introduction

Growing demands on natural capital increase pressure on ecosystems, economies and social cohesion in Europe. Well-designed environmental policies contribute to the improvement of Europe's environment without undermining its growth potential. Biodiversity provides us with food, fresh water and clean air, it mitigates natural disasters, destruction caused by pests and diseases and also helps to the climate regulation. A fully integrated access to the process of transforming Europe into green economy with efficient use of resources can bring (among other things) environmental health, but also may promote to prosperity and social cohesion. Nowadays, not only Europe but also the entire world faces a crisis of biodiversity and looks for various political and practical answers and solutions to this issue. In connection with this topic we can point out several shortcomings in the approach to environmental protection. Different actions taken in order to prevent loss of biodiversity have missing effects. Within the scope of European Union, only 17 % of biotopes and species have a favorable condition (EEA, 2010).

In the last three decades the conservation of biodiversity has become an important topic at global, national and regional level. In response to the loss of various species, defragmentation of the environment and loss of habitats the individual governments still declare new protected areas. The creations of protected areas have also a lot of different influences on the people living directly within the area or nearby. Their inclusion in this process may promote the sustainable management of such areas (Dimitrakopoulos et al., 2010).

National parks and other protected landscapes are increasing in numbers and total area throughout the whole Slovak republic. The first national park in Slovakia, then as a part of Czechoslovakia, was declared in 1949. The last two national parks in the territory of the independent Slovak Republic was proclaimed in 2002 (MK SR, 2002a, MK SR, 2002b). This gradual expansion of protected areas is on the one hand important for the fulfillment of the debt of society to the environment; on the other hand it causes certain problems in the form of conflict with the local population. Knowledge of these relationships and local attitudes in relationship to the natural values is important especially for the management of the region, but also for the managers of protected areas and local governments.

The National park Muránska planina was established in 1997 (MK SR, 1997) and since that time it had experienced various kinds of problems. But it does not happen only in this national park. The main mission of national parks in Slovak republic is primarily aimed at the process of conservation, which is unfortunately usually incompatible with human exploitation. The main problem is social turmoil which is still realized in protected areas of Slovak republic and prevents the successful functional and long-term conservation in practice.



Our conservation was conceived at the time when it was not the problem to define the extensive national parks. Those were created at the huge tracts of “state” land of socialist Czechoslovakia. Five out of nine national parks have been launched before 1989; the remaining four had the status of protected landscape area (PLA) in this period. The status of national park was granted later but their concept carried all the characteristics of the previous era of conservation (Lacika and Ondrejka, 2009).

This approach was bound with many problems, for example in relation to ownership, which in conjunction with the introduction of return and restitution of private property after 1989 had dramatic impact on nature conservation and protected areas.

In principle, both extensive and united common areas were parted into the mosaic of plots and the serious conflict of interest comes in question. Conflicts are between nature conservation (which represents the public interest) and the demands of private owners which logically require the benefits from their properties. The problem arises also in the case when application of above mentioned interests is mutually excluded.

The need to find a replacement for traditional industries, which previously formed the basis of the rural economy of communities, has also led to the diversification of their economies (Allen L. et al., 1993, Andereck et al., 2005, Brown and Reeder, 2005). One of such alternative approaches that has the potential to strengthen the economy of rural communities, is tourism (Davis and Morais, 2004, McGehee and Andereck, 2004). Besides the unquestionable advantages, tourist industry has also the potential to create negative impacts (Haralambopoulos and Pizam, 1996, Haukeland, 1984, Belisle and Hoy, 1980).

Regarding to Zube (1986) we can classify the interest in protected areas to local and extra-local. The local interests tend to focus on the potential direct consequences of a protected area. For instance, local population may have problems with understanding of preservation of a unique ecosystem, relict species or the protection of beautiful natural scenes. Inside a local population we may also find some individuals who notice the possible establishment of protected areas as an opportunity to improve their own economical situation by providing some services directly to tourists, or as subcontractors for organizations and companies providing such services. Overlooking the local values and concerns happens especially when we consider only the extra-local interest that represents broader regional or national perspective. Thereupon the recognition of the relationships between the people and resources within the concrete areas always needs to be increased.

Designing the protected areas and their follow-up management, it is important to avoid the conflicts with local communities by involving these people into management approaches. In addition, this step is important in obtaining public support in certain management actions.

Different surveys among the local population may also provide some valuable information that solve certain kind of problems, such as the main issues to be studied and identifications of public goals and preferences that are important to consider.

### **1.1 Research questions and hypotheses**

We may find several examples (Byrd et al., 2009, Bauer, 2003, Suman et al., 1999, McFarlane et al., 2006, Tomićević et al., 2010) of articles which are focused on the public perception of different types of protected areas or such processes. On the other hand, works like these are in Slovakia insufficient and in this field research have not been written any until now. Although a variety of media, especially regional ones, deals commonly with the issues of national park, this is particularly in relation to events that are organized within the social life in the region. It should be noted that the studied area is not also in the spotlight of a regional or national view. The only published survey that I managed to find was made in 2003 and was made out in connection with the integration process of Slovak Republic to the European Union. This survey (Verejno-súkromné partnerstvo Muránska planina, 2009, [www.muranskaplanina.com](http://www.muranskaplanina.com), 2011) was carrying out on a sample of 500 respondents in the time from 15. March to 30. March 2003. It was focused on answering the questions which dealt with the access to the EU and the expectations or concerns of people about the accession process and next development. The survey was aimed only at the residents of The Muránska planina micro region. One part of the questionnaire was concerned about the question, to which area of micro region's life should be given the main priority. The responses indicated that local people considered as important the development of facilities and services of tourism, reconstruction of transport networks, such as roads, railways, protection of the environment and improvement of the level and quality of education. Within the responses we may also find the interesting fact that perceptions of certain areas among the residents of the town Tisovec differ from the residents in nearby villages significantly. Although the town Tisovec with 4 064 inhabitants could be seen as a provincial town, these differences in opinions might be assigned to the fact of different lifestyles.

In my opinion it is very sad that there is not enough knowledge based on a detailed examination about such beautiful part of nature, which certain part can be still labeled as a wilderness in the true sense of word. Of course, I am not talking about flora and fauna nor the inanimate part of this area, but about opinions, mutual relations and interactions between groups that are connected with this area whether by their lives or business themselves. I would like to see the contribution of this paper in expanding certain knowledge about this area, to clarify the relationships between different subjects and possibly also to serve others possibly in the future interested on similar topic. I am familiar with this area of study, because I have been living here for many years, although I have lived last three years abroad. On the base of knowledge

gathered in this work, I would like also to propose some recommendations that would hopefully lead to the improvement of present situation.

The method I have been working with was to apply the results of the above mentioned questionnaire to formulate the research questions and on that base to derive hypotheses from them. The particular questions can be summarized as follows:

- What are the similarities and differences in the perception of the Muránska planina national park, as currently used, among the different groups living or doing business nearby?
- Whether and in what way the closeness of the national park affects life and business of selected groups?
- What kind of process of region's development is preferred by residents?
- Whether and in which areas are they willing to contribute to the management processes in the above mentioned area?
- Are there any significant differences in the opinions between inhabitants of town and villages or between different age groups?

Based on research questions I can summarize the purpose of the work to the main question, which is: Clarification of the differences of opinion in the perception of the National park Muránska planina between actors in the area.

Depending on the research questions were chosen the research methodology and research tools. To understand some of the research questions, following hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: The level of awareness among the residents about the national park is low;
- H2: The residents prefer the economic development of the region in relation to the development of tourism;
- H3: The willingness of residents to be involved in conservation and decision-making processes is low.

Part of the data was obtained through interviews as a qualitative research tool. This method is aimed to explore the issues and contexts that are not clear and require an examination. The combination of questionnaires prepared the way for deeper understanding of the choices of respondents and completed the picture of the differences of opinions and contradictions between the residents, local entrepreneurs and representatives of the municipalities.

## 1.2 Terms explanation

This master thesis is focused on problems within particular national park situated in Slovak Republic. For better understanding of this paper is necessary to distinguish some basic concepts and definitions such as region, national park, forest, the levels of protection, as well as the modes of operation of the system as a whole, but also the processes which lead to decision-making. Clarification of these terms is described in the following sub-chapter.

The Slovak Republic (formerly part of Czechoslovakia) is a relatively new country since its independence was declared on the 1st January 1993. It has a population of more than five millions and the area of 49,000 square kilometers approximately. Mainly in the 90's was the economical development very spontaneous and often hampered also by wrong political decisions. The problems associated with the transformation of the economy after the “Velvet Revolution” and the absence of significant mineral resources led to the orientation on service economy and tourism, which is a key component of such type of economy (Cali et al., 2008).

Slovak Republic became a member of NATO on 29<sup>th</sup> March 2004 and of the European Union on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 2004. On the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2009, Slovakia adopted the Euro as its national currency.

### 1.2.1 Nature protected areas in the Slovak republic

Fundamental source of law that concerns the nature and landscape protection in the Slovak Republic as a whole is the Act No.543/2002 (2002) on Nature and Landscape Protection (hereinafter referred to as the "Act 543/2002"), which has come in force on the 1st January 2003.

The Act 543/2002 regulates the competencies of state administration bodies and municipalities and rights, as well as obligations of legal persons and natural persons in nature and landscape protection, with the separate aim to support preservation of diverse living conditions and life forms on the Earth; to create conditions for sustainability; restoration and rational use of natural resources; preservation of natural heritage, characteristic landscape features and to reach and maintain the ecological stability.

One of the suitable ways to achieve the aim of the Act 543/2002 is the territorial nature and landscape protection. According to this Act 543/2002 concerns right the areas of nature and landscape protection in the territory of the Slovak Republic (Fig. 1). The territorial protection specifies **five levels of protection**. The extent of restrictions increases in dependence on the increase of the level of protection. If several kinds of protected areas with different levels of protection overlap in certain territory the valid level presents the highest of them.

As protected areas may be labeled the locations which host the natural habitats of European interest and natural habitats of national interest, habitats of species of European interest, habitats of species of national interest and habitats of birds including migratory species for protection of protected areas; important landscape elements or areas of international interest are labeled too.

### 1.2.2 Selected categories of protected areas

*Protected landscape area (PLA)* – presents a larger area, usually consisting on more than 1 000 hectare, with fragmented ecosystems significant for conservation of biological diversity and ecological stability, with characteristic landscape features or with specific forms of historical settlements. In the territory of a PLA the 2<sup>nd</sup> level of protection is valid, unless it is not ordained otherwise.

*National park (NP)* – presents a larger area, usually consisting of more than 1 000 hectare, predominantly with ecosystems substantially unaffected by human activities, or with unique and natural landscape structures that form national bio centers and the most significant natural heritage in which the nature protection is of higher priority. In the territory of a NP the 3<sup>rd</sup> level of protection is valid unless it is not ordained otherwise.

*Nature reservation (NR)* and *national nature reservation (NNR)* – represents a locality, usually consisting more than 1 000 ha representing predominantly original or natural habitats of European or national interest; or habitats of species of European or national interest which have not been generally affected by human activities. The 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> levels of protection are valid in the territory of a NR and NNR.

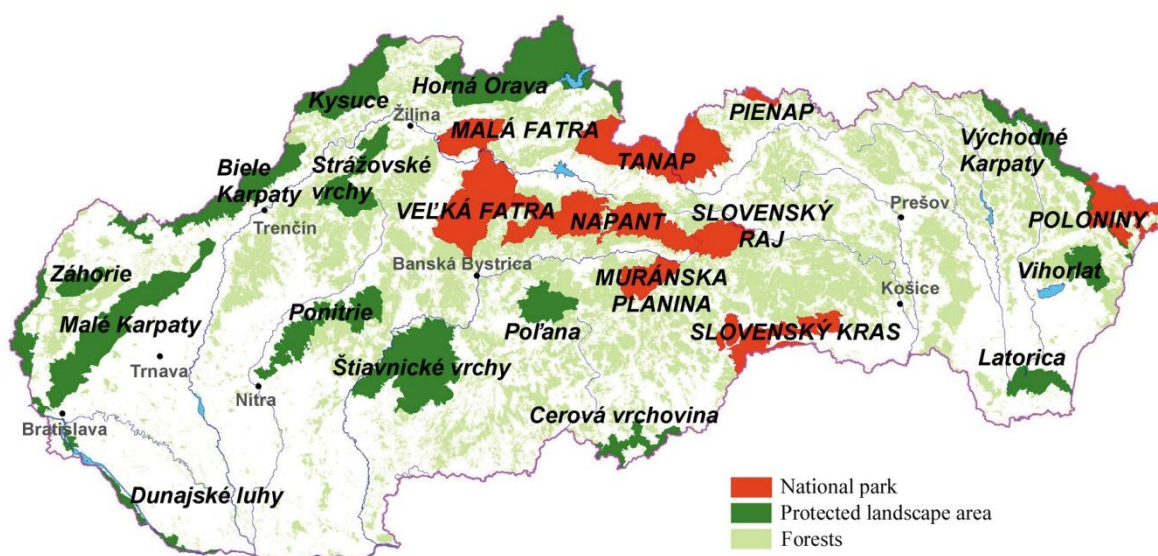


Figure 1: Protected areas in the Slovak republic

### 1.2.3 The Forest

According to Act No. 326/2005 (2005) the term “forest” means the ecosystem which consists of forest land with forest cover and environmental factors, air, plant species, animal species and soil with its hydrological and air modes.

A forest is very important, often dominant component of the landscape in the country which fulfills the natural, economic, as well as society-wide features. Forests in relation to human society perform different functions. According to Act No. 326/2005, the statutory functions of forests are the benefits, effects and impacts that forests provide as an element of the natural environment and object of economic exploitation. To achieve the forest cover would be able to fulfill the demanded function it must be cultivated in appropriate manner (Fig. 2). In certain cases it may be desirable that some parts of a forest could remain uncultivated. In Central

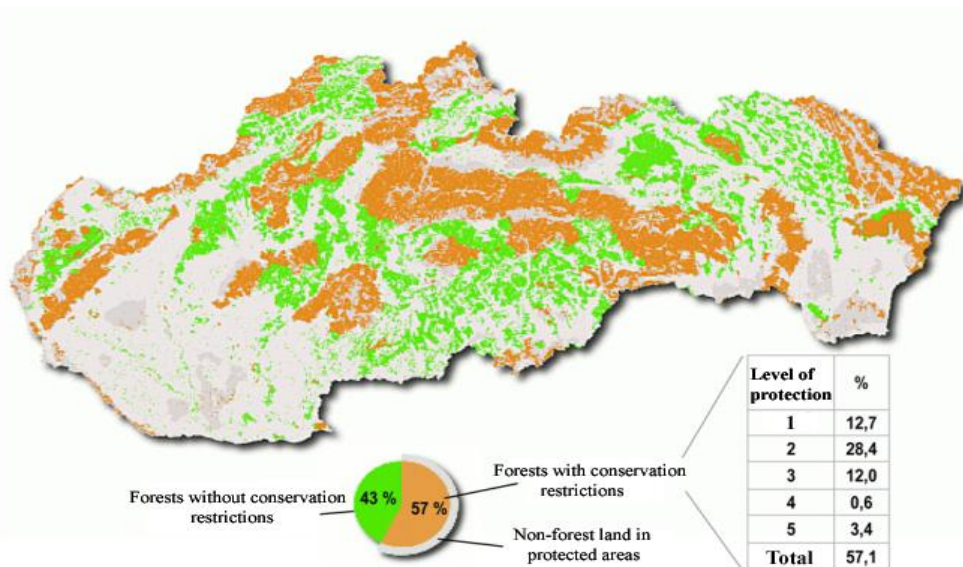


Figure 2: Forests and protection areas

European conditions this happened rarely in the past. Maintenance of vegetation according to their function may be provided by the segmentation of forests in several categories and sub-categories. For the purposes of this paper is most appropriate to divide the forests in three particular categories:

- *Farming forests* are forests that are intended to produce timber and other forest products, while ensuring the non-production functions, but their importance should not exceed the importance of the main features. In the future we can expect increases of the importance of its non-productive functions.
- *Special purpose forests* perform the specific tasks and needs. These forests are declared to protect water resources, natural medicinal resources; these forests are also

important for nature conservation, recreation, hunting, research and educational activities and possibly defense of a country.

- *Protective forests* are forests where the protective function represents the highest priority. We intend the forests on extremely unfavorable sites, forests above the upper limit of the forest zone, alpine forests and forests with prevalent soil-protective function.

#### 1.2.4 The region

The term **region** can be defined as "the basic unit that can be divided into certain areas, that represents spatially bound system consisting of the elements in stronger interaction than other components" (Tvrdoň et al., 1995). According to Act No. 503/2001 (2001) on regional development, the region is geographically defined as an area for the formation and implementation of regional and structural policy.

#### 1.2.5 The autonomous region

According to Act No. 302/2001 (2001) on the self-government of autonomous regions, the **autonomous region** represents separate local authority and the administrative unit of the Slovak Republic. The autonomous region is responsible for overall development of relevant territory and the needs of its residents, ensures the fulfillment of social, economical and cultural needs arising from the development of area; it also performs planning activities, approves territorial planning documents and utilizes local human, natural and other resources. As a corporate body (CB), carries its own capital and business activities in order to ensure the needs of residents.

Autonomous region founds and establishes its fiscal and contributory organizations, involves in formation and protection of the environment, sets up the conditions for the optimal arrangement of mutual relations and sets up the conditions for development of education. It also coordinates the development of tourism, cooperates with municipalities on the development of programs of social and economical development of municipal communities, and contributes to the development of cooperation with other territorial units and authorities of other states. The authorities of the autonomous region are the chairman and the council that composed of representatives elected in direct elections. The council shall meet at least once every two months.

#### 1.2.6 The municipality

**The municipality** is a separate local authority and the administrative unit of the Slovak Republic that unites together permanent residents of relevant territory (Zákon 369/1990, 1990).

The main task of the municipality is overall the development of its territory and the needs of residents. The village has the right to associate with other municipalities in order to achieve mutual benefit. The authorities of the municipality are the mayor and local board, which is the highest executive authority of the village. The municipality legislates for its territory the mandatory administrative orders and decisions.

### 1.2.7 Micro region

Under the term **micro region** we understand the voluntary association of municipalities in order to solve common problems and seek common development ways of the particular area. Such an association is also referred to the concept of micro-regional associations of municipalities. Often the word "micro region" appears in the name of the association in order to highlight the allegiance of the involved municipalities to relevant geographically defined territory.

According to Act No. 83/1990 (1990) the object of such association is usually an area of social affairs, environmental management (especially the collection, transportation and processing of municipal solid waste, drainage and waste water treatment), local transport, the area of educational, cultural and local tourism; with its activity micro region helps to create the conditions for the fulfillment in tasks of municipalities and autonomous region's tasks. Rural micro-regional associations are formed also to provide efficient preparation of development programs to enhance the quality of rural life.

Within the area of study we operate with two micro-regional associations of municipalities - The Horehronie micro region associating municipalities in the north and The Muránska planina micro region in the southern part of the area. In this paper we use the term micro region in relation to the LEADER program which is the only program that promotes integrated rural development. Funds for this program are allocated within the European Agricultural Guarantee Fund and may serve as an example for creating an integrated system of support for the development of entire regions.

### 1.3 Study area

The main object of this paper is the National park Muránska planina (NP MP) and the perception of its value by inhabitants neighboring the villages. The National Park of Muránska planina (Fig. 3: NP number 6) is one of the youngest national parks in Slovakia. In 1970 began the process for the project Protected Landscape Area (PLA) Muránska planina, which was launched six years later in 1976. Project of the National Park was prepared in 1988, but due to the changes in social system was declared by almost 10 years later in 1997. The constitution of the National Park is administered by the Decree of the Government No. 259/1997



(MK SR, 1997). According to this regulation, the territory of the National park Muránska planina is situated in the cadastral area of municipalities Heľpa, Muránska Huta, Muráň, Pohorelá, Pohronská Polhora, Polomka, Šumiac, Tisovec, Vaľkovňa and Závadka nad Hronom (Fig. 4); it rolls on the area of 20 317 hectares and the buffer zone represents another 21 698 hectares.

The Muránska planina is in terms of preservation of natural values and the concentration one of the most valuable territories in Slovakia. Due to the remoteness and inaccessibility of this area there are still preserved natural ecosystems (or ecosystems very close to the original nature) with extremely high geological and ecological diversity of all natural elements (Brandos, 2003).

With its wild mountain karstic landscape and minimum human interventions is located between the central and eastern parts of Slovakia, in the districts of Brezno, Rimavská Sobota and Revúca. The administration of the National Park Muránska planina resides in Revúca. The access for hiking offers the points referring to the villages Tisovec, Muráň and Červená Skala. Attractive places for hiking also include Závadka nad Hronom and saddle-back called Zbojská.

In continuity with the description of the studied area is necessary to highlight one important part of the territory, which is often the subject of disputes and differences in opinions. This is the area of the Fabova hoľa (1 439 meters above sea level) which is the highest point of the National park Muránska planina. The top is covered by the original mountain spruce and represents the part of the nature of fifth protection level. The reason for this protection is appearance of many protected species of flora and fauna. Apart from that fact, the area is the refuge for all large carnivores (brown bear (*Ursus arctos*), gray wolf (*Canis lupus*), European lynx (*Lynx lynx*)) and capercaillie (*Tetrao urogallus*) (Molnár and Teren, 1984).

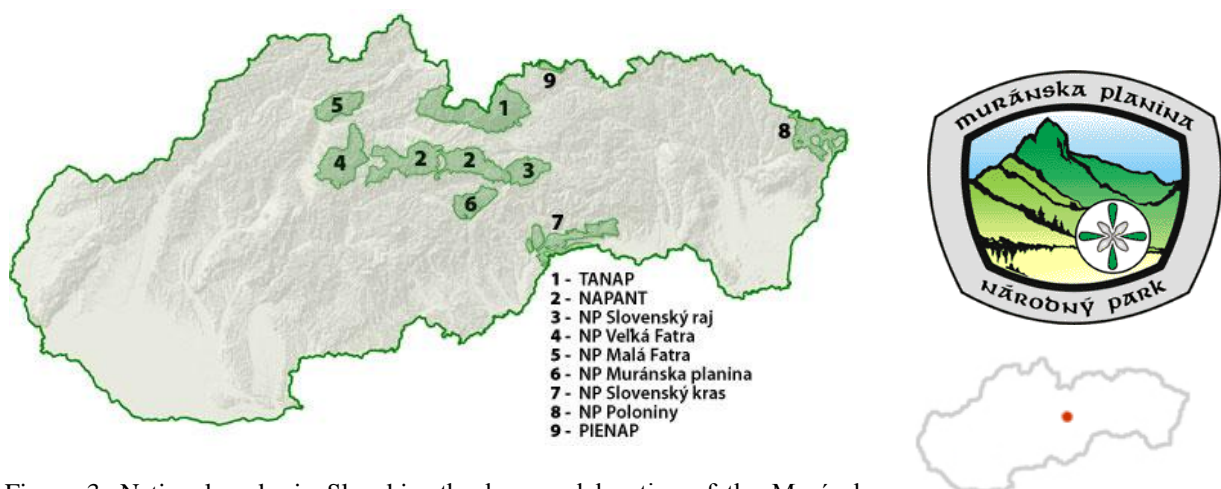


Figure 3: National parks in Slovakia; the logo and location of the Muránska planina national park (number 6 and red dot)

The region around the National Park Muránska planina is one of the poorest regions in Slovakia. Two of three districts in which the national park is located are on the first and second place in the Slovakian unemployment rate (Tab. 1). Over past 20 years the region was greatly affected by the changing socio-economical conditions, especially when the collapse of the key employers in the form of large mining and chemical companies has led to a spiral of deteriorating economical situation of the population and the consequent demographic problems. The abandonment mainly in the productive part of the population and young people has led in some areas almost to depopulation and on the other hand to the concentration of the local gypsy minority groups in the settlements and to the superannuated population.

Table 1: Unemployment rates

#	District	Municipalities	Unemployment rate (%) for district
1	Rimavská Sobota	Tisovec	34,59
2	Revúca	Muránska Huta, Muráň	30,79
14	Brezno	Polomka, Závadka nad Hronom, Heľpa, Pohorelá Val'kovňa, Šumiac, Pohronská Polhora	18,41

Municipalities in the area are organized in different associations; those on the southern part of the park were formed in 1997 as a partnership in the form of the Muránska planina micro region. The aim of the association of municipalities is especially mutual cooperation, coordination of their activities and the preparation and implementation of common projects. The municipalities in the northern part of the park are associated in the Horehronie micro region. These municipalities tend to focus on the National park Low Tatras (Fig. 3: NP number 2), which is more important in Slovakian conditions. Their orientation to another national park can also be caused by its natural conditions. The river Hron on the one hand forms the border of the park buffer zone, on the other hand it also separates the villages from the park area and due to lack of infrastructure it makes the accessibility from the northern part more difficult.

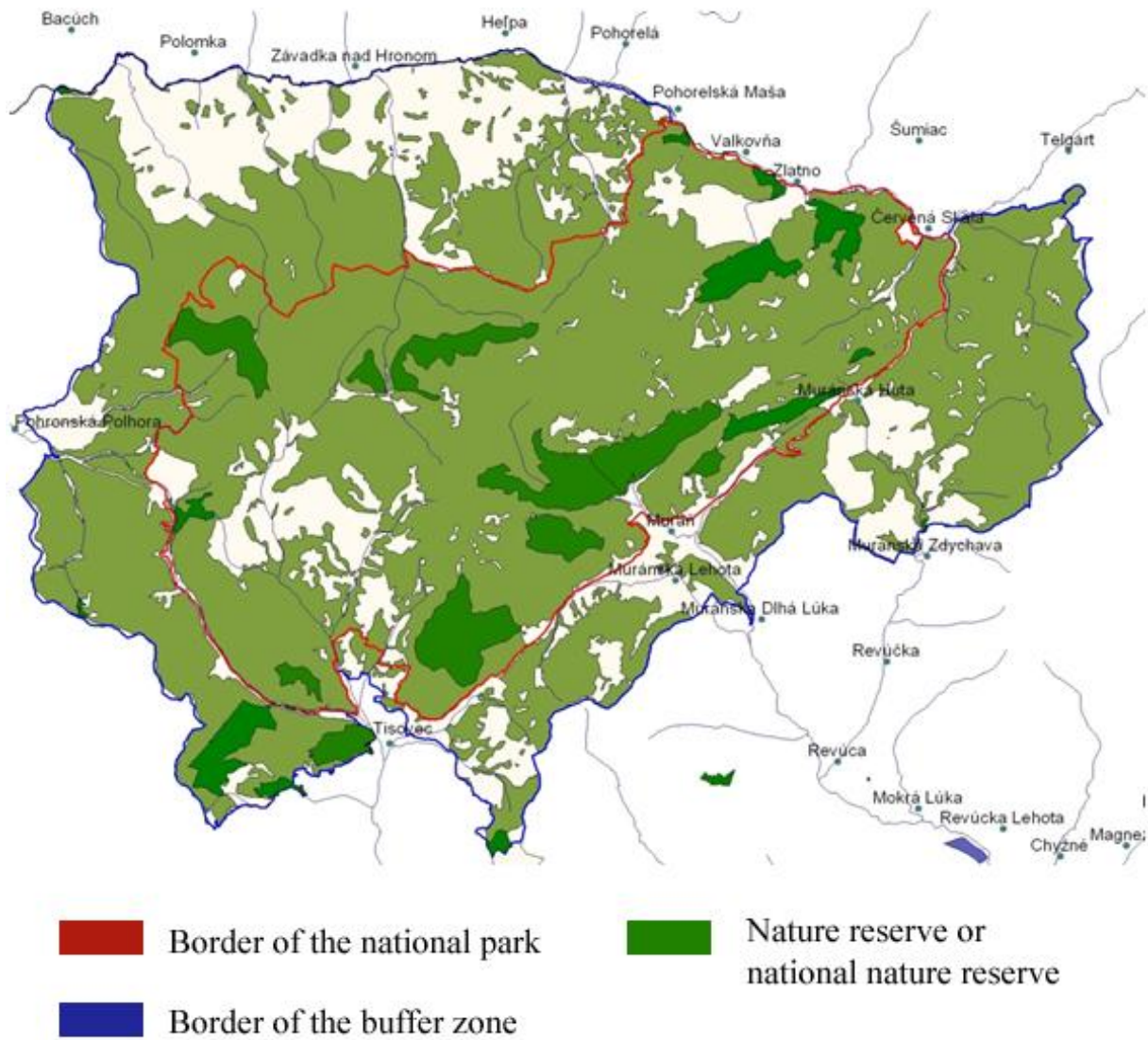


Figure 4: The map of the Muránska planina national park (Source: [www.npmp.sk/mapa](http://www.npmp.sk/mapa))

## 2. Methods

The methods used in any research depend on the objective and the basic scientific questions that we would like to answer. In this master thesis I decided to use a combination of qualitative and quantitative methods to obtain sufficient primary data for further analysis. Bryman (2004) uses in his book the term “multi-strategic research” to specify the combination of two above mentioned approaches. The application of this approach in practice has gradually increased because the qualitative research may support the quantitative research and vice versa (Bryman, 2006). Benefits exist mainly in providing hypotheses, aiding measurement and preparing the ground for the selection of people to be interviewed. In addition of the benefits Bryman (2004) uses as the main arguments against multi-strategic research consideration the quantitative and qualitative research are separate paradigms and research methods carry specific commitments – epistemological and ontological.

In the next section of this chapter I would like to provide details of survey design, primary and secondary data, and the classification of subject into particular groups, according to the method, data collection and following processing.

Simultaneous applications of the quantitative and qualitative methods require different approaches. Bryman (2006) in the analysis of 232 scientific articles, which were combined both quantitative and qualitative methods, notes that while in the case of qualitative methods dominates semi-structured interview, in case of quantitative methods is more appropriate to use the structured interview and questionnaire research.

I have decided to divide the possible candidates in two separate groups to which I would like to apply different methods of data collection. A self completion questionnaire and open-ended face-to-face interview were chosen as predominant data collection instruments. I have compiled a questionnaire with simple questions according to the demographic characteristics of respondents considering the fact, that good questionnaire design is crucial (Creswell, 2003, De Vaus, 2002, Bird, 2009, Sarantakos, 1998) in order to generate the acquired data. The use of questionnaire to capture the opinions of respondents may be susceptible to various biases (Bateman and Turner, 1993). According to Choi and Pak (2005) biases can be divided into several groups such as problems with stylization of words, missing or inadequate data for intended purpose, faulty scale, leading questions, intrusiveness and inconsistency which may be followed by biases in questionnaire design and administration of questionnaire.

Regarding all previous principles, I have designed the questionnaire to answer research questions related to awareness of the national park, their activities in the park area, the desired development of the region's population of surrounding villages and willingness of people to participate in the protection and decision-making processes. The majority of all questions in

this part of survey were prepared in the form of closed questions with a multiple choice format, or questions with a ranking scale and values from 1 to 5. I have included only two questions that were open-ended. In these questions I expected that respondents express their opinions by pointing out some geographical areas or the subjectively most important issue. Such answers varied according to the place where the respondent was interviewed. As main advantage of open-ended questions Fink and Kosecoff (Fink and Kosecoff, 1998) highlights the capability of such answers that describe “*the world as the respondent really sees it rather than how the researcher does*”.

Generally, my survey concentrates on the insights, opinions and perceptions of chosen groups of interest. Hard copies of questionnaires were used for this research. On the top of them was clearly stated: the research topic “The public perceptions of the value of Muránska planina National park”; then continued the name of the university, national park, as well as logo and phrase “All data are treated strictly confidential and will be used only for research purposes”. Anonymity is defined as “*condictio sine qua non*” to preserve no one would be able to determine the responding subject, whether by the researchers or anybody else (Epperson and Peck, 1977).

To complete the amount of collected primary data, I have used semi-structured interview with open-ended questions. These were in line with the research question to complete stakeholder opinions, interpretation and understanding of different views. The reason lies in fact, that open-ended question are the best to find the background of certain range of questions. I have divided questions into particular groups to cover the whole area of my interest and made it relevant to all interviewees. Questions that I have compiled were directed to obtain the detailed information on the advantages and disadvantages relating to national park, on the conditions provided for the development of the region, on the opinions on common life in region and on the attitudes towards the environment.

Although semi-structured interviews are bound with a lot of advantages in obtaining information, they are also associated with many disadvantages. That is to say, semi-structured interviews are less invasive as structured interviews. The interviewee can question interviewer and is not forced to answer directly. Even the interviewee is focused on the key topic; but there is still enough space to discuss the details. Using such a method of interview may lead to better understanding of the problem, interviewer may find out more about the partial problems, because the response is provided immediately with the context of the topic. In addition, these types of interviews facilitate the answers to sensitive questions. Among the disadvantages somebody states (Opdenakker, 2006) the facts of obtaining amount of useless information, respondent honesty is not guaranteed, open-ended questions are difficult to analyze

and compare. In addition, there is also a time pressure on the interviewer, who is supposed to have a practice with similar situations.

In addition to primary data, I have used in this paper secondary data. According to quoted authors (Malhotra and Birks, 2007) we may agree to their characteristic “*the data that was collected for some purpose other than the problem at hand*”. Such data formed the basis for the theoretical part of the paper and covered the need for reports and tables to which I used mainly the data obtained from the databases of the Slovak Statistical Bureau.

## 2.1 The sample and stakeholders

The population of interviewees for the questionnaire survey consisted of residents of the municipalities which cadastral territory lies in the national park (Tab. 2), with equal representation of men and women respondents. The definition of a sample according to Bryman (2004) is “*the segment of the population that is selected for investigation*”. Because of the lack of time I have decided to deliver personally approximately 200 questionnaires to random respondents. Based on the relationship of expression sampling fraction which is formulated as

$$\frac{n}{N}, \text{ that implies } \frac{200}{19\ 558}$$

I came to value of 1 in 100. Then I used the method of non-probability sampling to divide the data collection from municipalities of relevant respondents. As a place to reach potential candidates I picked assembly of local residents, bus stations, municipal offices, post offices, groceries stores and service providers in the area. The fundamental problem of such surveys lies in generalization (Woodside, 2010) of gained information. For my paper it is sufficient to draw the conclusions related to the study area.

Table 2: Distribution of population by municipalities

Nr.	Name	Population	Note
1	Heľpa	2809	The Horehronie micro region
2	Pohorelá	2371	
3	Polomka	3075	
4	Šumiac	1345	
5	Val'kovňa	375	
6	Závadka nad Hronom	2423	
7	Muránska Huta	200	The Muránska planina micro region
8	Muráň	1255	
9	Pohronská Polhora	1641	
10	Tisovec	4064	
	<b>In total</b>	<b>19558</b>	

During the months of January and February 2012 I was conducting data collection through questionnaires in selected municipalities. I have distributed the questionnaires by myself. I have decided to gain enough respondents in order to collect the summary of 193 (n = 193) completed questionnaires. Filling out a questionnaire took between 10 to 15 minutes, depending on the nature of the respondent and precision approached to its filling.

I matched each questionnaire with the number to distinguish the order and place of filling. The figures were mainly used to illustrate the quantity and the process of the allocation and the numbering was fully consistent with the principle of. I have always checked every questionnaire; in some cases it was necessary to obtain the additional explanation of the respondent, or to make a successive comment. Some respondents were not familiar with all the terms used in the questionnaire, such as ecotourism, agro tourism, so I had explained it to them during the process of filling. In the case of opened questions I have noticed the problems with the formulation of certain answers.

I was trying to achieve the required number of questionnaires by re-visiting the above mentioned places. By doing this, I could provide a wider range of respondents. In addition, it was also necessary to use this method because of short length of days in winter months.

There are many definitions of the exact meaning of the “stakeholders” concept. According to Starik (1995) the stakeholders represents „*any naturally occurring entity that is affected by organizational performance*“. Reed and colleagues (2009) in their article examine closely the different types of stakeholders and offer the different methods for their proper identification and selection. The above mentioned collective refer also to certain method to obtain potential respondents labeling it as the Snow-ball sampling. This method was partially used in my work as well. During the interviews with chosen candidates they also proposed me other candidates for possible application of the interview.

The respondents (Tab. 3) for the collecting of data by face-to-face interview were selected mainly from the business representatives and organizations in the study area with particular emphasis on the providers of accommodation and catering services for tourists. I have also received the opinions of representatives of the Muránska planina micro region and mayors of the municipalities in the above mentioned area. I have completed also two interviews with the owners of forests, with the members of organizations responsible for the maintenance of forests and one with the employee of tourist information center. Respondents in this group differed significantly in their attitudes and preferences; it could be assumed almost as contrary opinions. This is certainly the appropriate situation which may contribute to wide spectrum of opinions across the views of various actors. It was also necessary to consider a consistent formulation of questions, depending on the organization or subject. For instance, questions for

the forest organizations and mayors had to be formulated in slightly different way than to other respondents.

Table 3 Overview of interviewed subjects

#	Subject / Representatives	No. of interview
1.	Mayor of municipality	4
2.	Forest organization	2
3.	Hotel, Pension	2
4.	The Muránska planina micro region	1
5.	Directorate of NP Muránska planina	1
6.	Tourist information centre	1

As shown in Table 3, I have managed to find 11 respondents for the following interview. In fact, I recorded only 9 interviews using the voice recorder. Representative of the town Tisovec refused to record the interview, but she provided me the responses in written form. The same procedure was chosen by the organization responsible for the management of forests in the study area. State-owned enterprise “Lesy SR, š. p.” justified its decision to answer questions in written form by the fact that it is a state organization which has to follow certain rules in communication and providing the information.

First of all, I have contacted all potential candidates for interview by e-mail. In this e-mail I have mentioned the request for the interview, provided necessary information about the research topic and how I would like to obtain it, and at the same time clarified the main topics I would like to get answered. After the positive response I arranged the meeting by the phone and visited all respondents during their working hours. The recorded interviews have duration between 25 minutes and one hour 35 minutes. During the interviewing process I made some notes, for example of body language or highlighted terms.

Because I was using various methods of data collection, I had also used different methods of classification. I sorted the data from the numbered questionnaires in Excel using as main parameter the indicator of village where they were acquired. To write the answers I have used the system of variables with values 1 and 0. Number 1 represented "yes" answer or response within a selected number of possible choices. Number 0 represented the answer "no", or situation that occurred when left unchecked answers. Answers to questions when it was necessary to use the evaluation on a scale from 1 to 5, I recorded using the same values as the respondents used. I used as the basis for the development for dataset in R data processed in Excel. All statistics operations were conducted in the statistical program R version 2.15.0 with extension R Studio, version 2.11.1.

Bryman (2004) in his book mentions two possible methods of analysis of qualitative data - analytic induction and grounded theory. Patricia Yancey Martin & Barry A. Turner say



*"Grounded Theory and Organizational Research defines grounded theory method as a systematic methodology in the social sciences involving the discovery of theory through the analysis of data"*. I transcribed obtained interviews as soon as possible. During the transcript process I have edited them by removing unnecessary passages that occurred in interviews, but were not related to the topic of interest. After the transcribing process I analyzed obtained text, sorted it and divided it on the base of required criteria.

### 3. Results

This chapter includes the results, evaluation of the questionnaires, charts and tables. Three hypotheses were addressed through following items on the questionnaire.

- Questions 1 and 2 addressed the first hypothesis - The level of awareness among the residents about the national park is low.
- Questions 3 and 9 addressed the second hypothesis - The residents prefer the economic development of the region in relation to the development of tourism.
- Questions 12 and 13 addressed the third hypothesis - The willingness of residents to be involved in conservation and decision-making processes is low.

One hundred and ninety-three people took part in the survey. The respondents were divided into groups based on the standards of age, region and place of the residence. 193 respondents were divided into three age groups (Tab. 4). Each of the group was named with one of three letters – Y, A and O. The letter “Y” stands for the group which contains the youngest respondents from the age of 18 to 35 years; the letter “A” stands for the group “Adults” that includes respondents from the age of 36 to 54 years and the letter “O” stands for the group of respondents older than 55 years.

Table 4: The sample distribution by the criteria of age

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>The northern region</b>	<b>The southern region</b>	<b>Total</b>
Y - "young"	40	23	<b>63</b>
A - "adult"	52	30	<b>82</b>
O - "old"	31	17	<b>48</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>193</b>

By the distribution of respondents on the criteria of region I got two test units - *the northern region*, represented by the municipalities lying in the northern part of the Muránska planina national park and associated with the other villages in the Horehronie Micro region; and *the southern region*, which represents the assemblage of the southern municipalities incorporated in the Muránska planina micro region (Tab. 5). The main object achieved by the distribution of respondents according to the place of residence was to distinguish two groups of people – the first one contains the people living in the city and the second one consists of the people living in the villages.

Table 5: The sample distribution by the region and place of residence

Nr.	Name	Place of residence	No. of respondents	Region
1	Polomka	Village	30	The northern region / The Horehronie micro region
2	Závodka nad Hronom	Village	24	
3	Heľpa	Village	28	
4	Pohorelá	Village	24	
5	Val'kovňa	Village	4	
6	Šumiac	Village	13	
7	Tisovec	Town	40	The southern region / The Muránska planina micro region
8	Muráň	Village	12	
9	Muránska Huta	Village	2	
10	Pohronská Polhora	Village	16	
	<b>Total</b>		<b>193</b>	

### 3.1 Characteristics of the sample

One part of the questionnaire encompassed the demographical information of the respondents such as gender, age, education, occupation and monthly household income (Tab. 6). The data indicate the results indicating the fact, that despite the effort to maintain the equal ratio between men and women, the most of the respondents were female ( $n = 113$ ). In particular, women in the villages showed greater willingness to devote their time and participate in the survey; from the total number of 153 respondents from the above mentioned villages were 92 (60,13%) women and 61 (39,87%) men, whilst in the town Tisovec this ratio was nearly balanced - 21 (52,50%) women and 19 (47,50%) men. Considering the age of the respondents, the largest group of people was in category "A" that means the category of the people from 36 to 54 years old, followed by the younger age group consisting of the people from 18 to 35 years old. These two categories are generally included in the economically active population groups.

The comparison of education levels among the residents of town and villages shows the difference in the number of graduates of educational establishment (which takes in Slovakia 3 years of school education) and the secondary school (lasting 4 years). The number of graduates of high school education (55.56%) is lower in communities contrary to the graduates of educational establishment/professional education (23.53%). We may label as antipodal the situation in the town Tisovec, where live the larger amount of the graduates of high school (62.50%) in comparison to the graduates of educational establishment/professional education (15,00%). Among the respondents of the city or village are the other types of the education level almost equal. This may be explained especially by the trend of moving of the higher educated people to the cities. The information obtained in connection with the occupation showed the most respondents were manual workers (33.16 %) and 14.50 % are unemployed.

The most of the respondents (81.34%) have stated their monthly net income on the individual household to 1.000€.

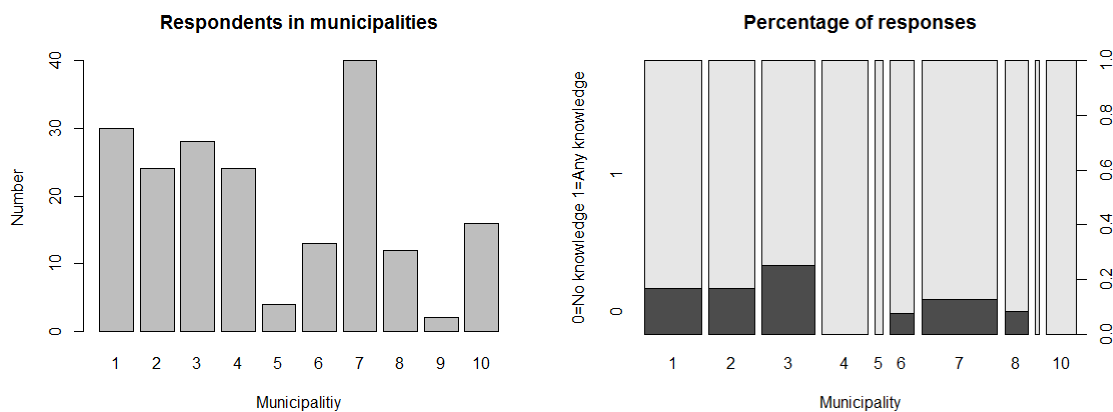
As it may be seen from the Table 6, the selected sample for this survey had a wide spread of age, education and occupation and made possible to obtain the reliable information.

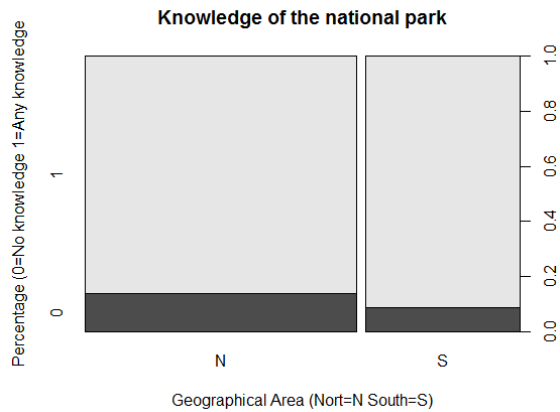
Table 6: Characteristics of the sample (sample size, N = 193)

Residence area	%	Gender	%	Age (years)	%	Education	%	Occupation	%	Monthly household income	%
Village	79,28	Male	41,45	18 - 34	32,64	Primary school	7,77	Student	10,88	<500	32,64
Town	20,72	Female	58,55	35 - 54	42,49	Educational establishment	21,76	Housewife/man	3,11	500-750	28,5
				>65	24,87	High school	57	Looking for job	14,51	750-1000	20,21
						College/university	13,47	Retired	15,54	1000-1250	11,4
								Manual worker	33,16	1250-1500	4,66
								Civil servant	13,47	>1500	2,59
								Self-employed	9,33		
<b>Total</b>	<b>100</b>		<b>100</b>		<b>100</b>		<b>100</b>		<b>100</b>		<b>100</b>

### 3.2 Presentation of findings based on questionnaire

- The knowledge of the Muránska planina national park



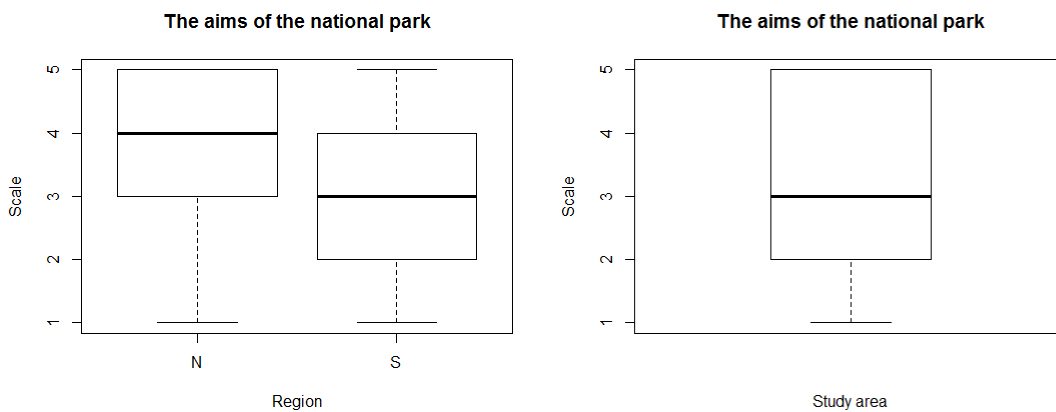


The number of respondents according to the municipality (Tab. 5) and the review of the positive and negative responses to the question designed to find out relevant information of the national park, sorted according to criteria of municipalities and region.

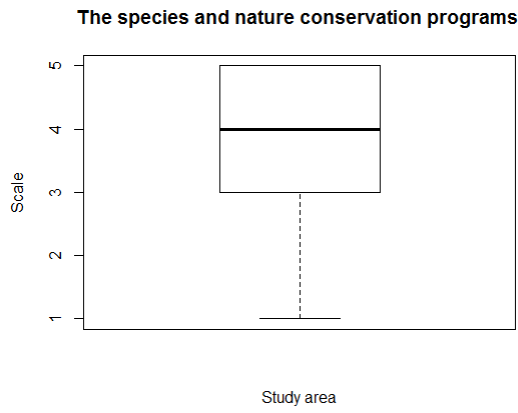
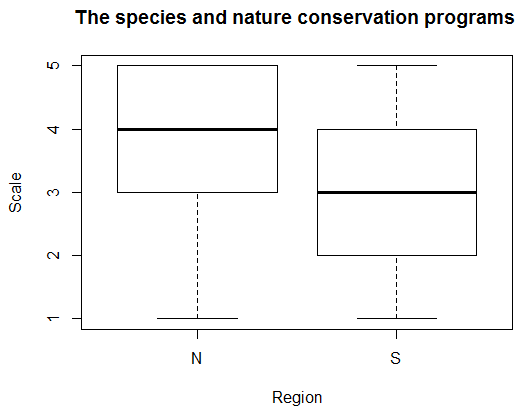
- The level of awareness of the residents

The level of awareness on the different topics, sorted according to the region and overall review.

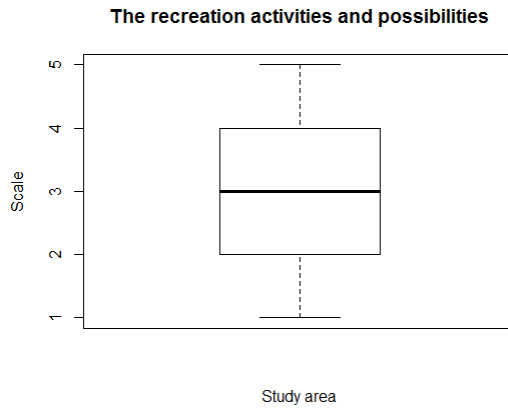
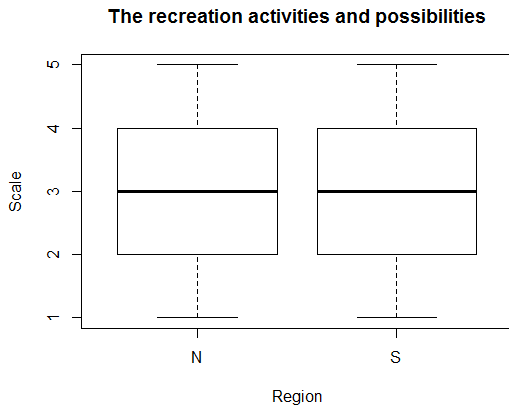
- The level of awareness on the aims of the national park



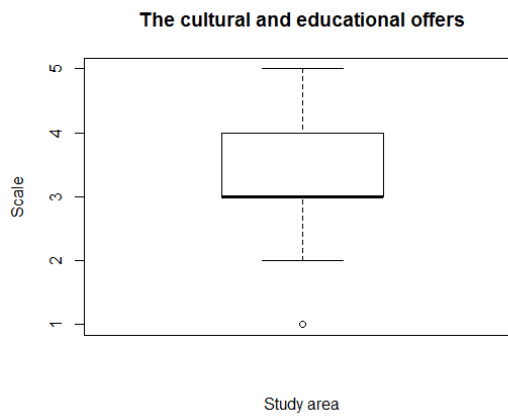
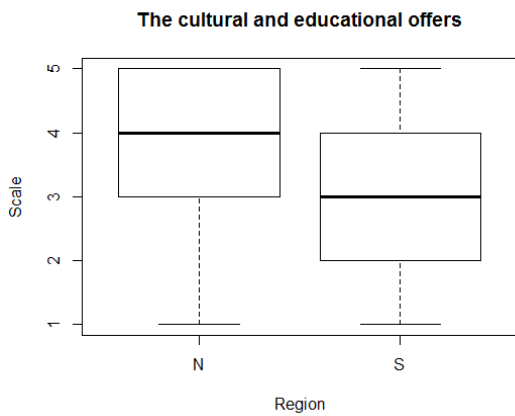
- The level of awareness on the species and nature conservation programs of the national park



- The level of awareness on the recreation activities and other possibilities

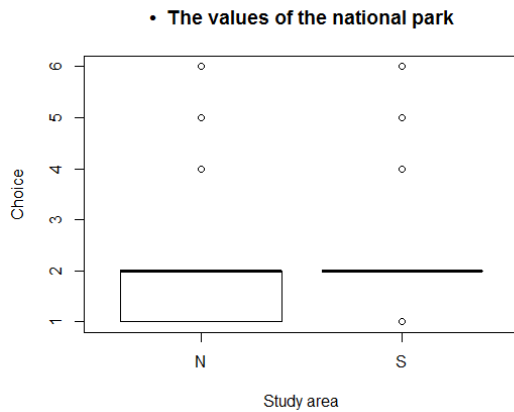


- The level of awareness on the cultural and educational offers of the national park

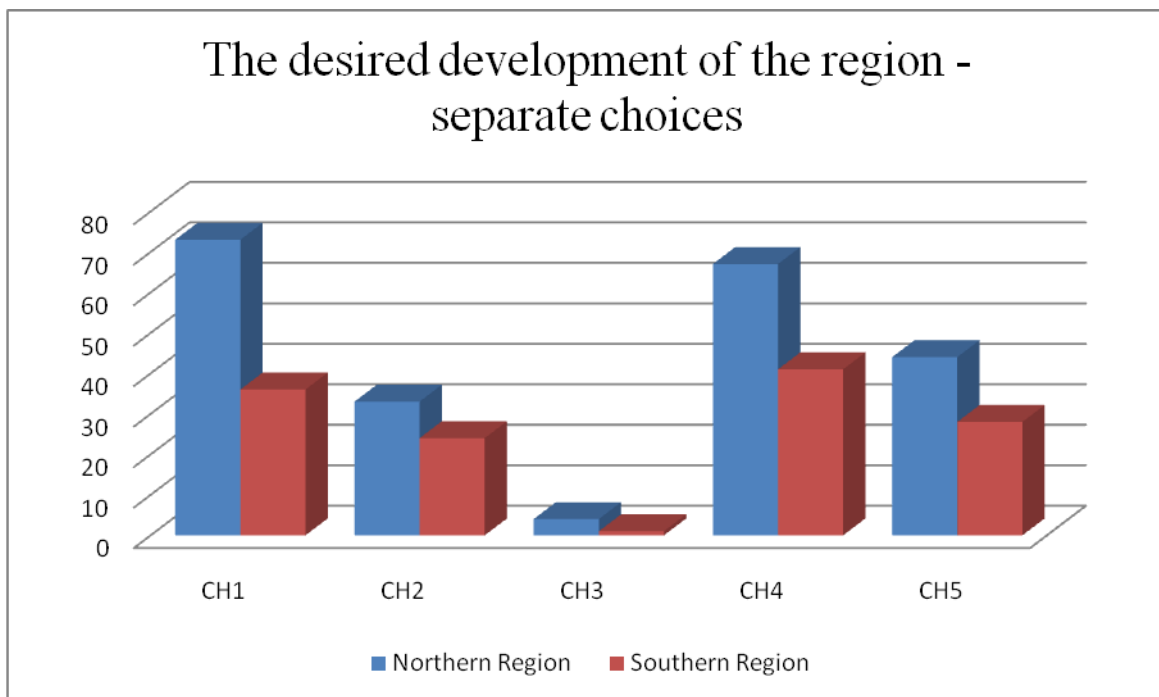


- The most important values related to the park area (p-value 0,017)

The differences in the choice between residents of northern and southern region on the following criteria: 1 - Tourist development; 2 - Flora and fauna; 3 - Aesthetics; 4 - History; 5 - Scientific value; 6 - Hunting.



- The desired development of the region



Choice 1: Development of facilities and services for tourism – p-value 0,288

Choice 2: Development of small family business – p-value 0,277

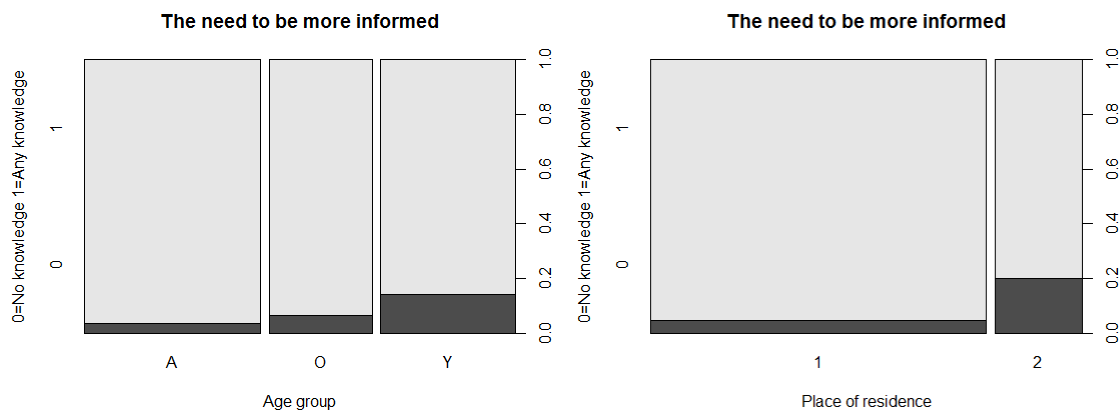
Choice 3: Construction of medium and large businesses – p-value 0,446

Choice 4: Protection of natural environment – p-value 0,584

Choice 5: Building of infrastructure and improving the accessibility of region – p-value 0,562

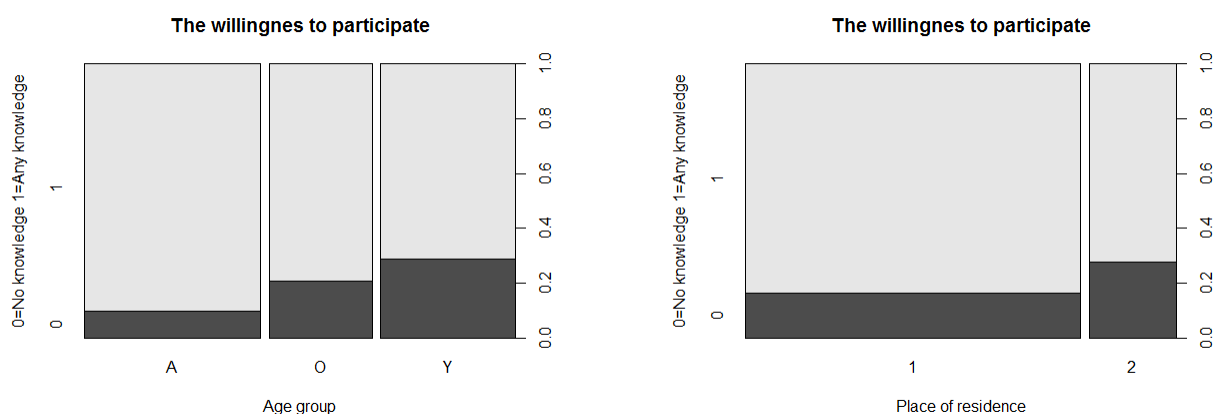
- The needs to be more informed about the national park and its protection

The summary of responses to the question about the needs of bigger awareness among the various age groups and the inhabitants of town and villages (p-value 0,001).



- The desire to be involved in active environmental protection and decision-making processes in the region with the cooperation of the municipalities

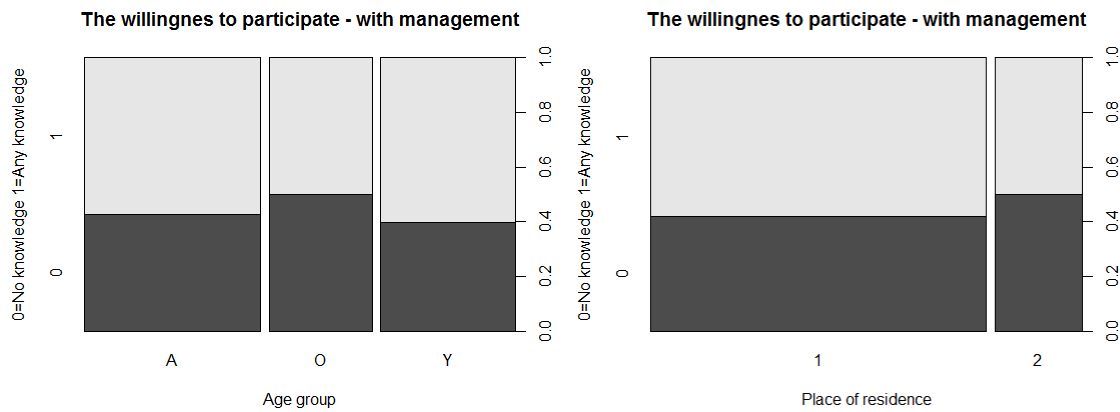
The comparison of the needs to be more involved for the age group “O” (p-value 0,114) and the age group “Y” (p-value 0,004). In case of the distribution of respondents by place of residence was p-value 0,108.



- The desire to be involved in active environmental protection and decision-making processes in the region with the cooperation of management of the Muránska planina national park



The comparison of the need to be more involved for age group “O” (p-value 0,42) and age group “Y” (p-value 0,72). In case of the distribution of respondents by place of residence was p-value 0,356.



### 3.3 Results from the interviews

This chapter presents the results of analysis of interviews that I have obtained during the data collection in January and February 2012. My main goal is to analyze it intimately and then to produce a comprehensive and interconnected series of views of stakeholders, which are influenced in certain ways by the events in the region of the Muránska planina national park. The main advantage of such an analysis of open-ended interviews is a range of areas that can be captured. It is possible to explain or understand the interconnectedness of problems which were hidden before the start of analysis. On this place I want to highlight how wide range of activities and interests of the actors under consideration is. The aim of this chapter is to bring the analysis of opinions which will be together with the results of the questionnaires used in the discussion part. Preparing documents for discussion is fully consistent with the main research question of this paper which is: Clarification of the differences of opinion in the perception of the Muránska planina national park between actors in the area.

Before I start with the cross-section views of various interviewed actors, I would like to pay attention to one key issue. Slovakia, like other countries of Eastern Europe, has undergone over the past two decades a series of socio-economic changes. Despite the enormous efforts, there are still the areas of life, still grappling with very basic problems. Especially these kinds of problems absorb the energy and human potential that could be used in other areas.

At the outset I have to say that the common problem mentioned somehow by all of the respondents are the finances. Whether it is management in enterprises, activities that must be carried out by the ordination of law or by the choice of local communities or forests organizations in achieving their goals, activities of micro-regional associations and management of the

national park – all of these fields are to some extent affected by money, and especially their shortcomings. I would like to present the following summary also from this perspective. Of course, in this chapter I deal with all aspects that are necessary to consider the situation, but I am especially considering the fact that presented views and opinions are always affected to a considerable extent by finance, although it is sometimes not obvious at the first sight.

### 3.3.1 The perception of the Muránska planina national park

The national Park is among the actors in the area perceived positively or neutrally. The term "Muránska planina" is understood in two ways: one is the concept of pure nature and the landscape. The second is the concept in relation to the institution and authority of the national park.

Fine main differences in opinion may be seen in connection to the function or role of a particular entity. Municipalities included in the national park area since 1997, taking this process as a fact and adjusted their administrative procedures to the situation created by the change when the protected landscape area was modified into national park. Their views are not completely identical, and the mayors themselves notify this too.

*"In my opinion many mayors do not see it very positively, but me. Certainly there are some limitations, but I have never had bad relations with the authorities of the national park. Overall, I take it positively. We should be glad there is the national park, because nature is very important for everyone."*

The indicator of the different opinions is the ratio between the national park area and the total area of cadastral territory of a municipality and restrictions which are related to it. We may see the move from clearly positive opinion above to the different opinion obtained in the municipality Závadka nad Hronom:

*"The whole urban zone of the municipality is in the buffer zone of the national park. I take it as a fact. But I am little bit angry at such things like the entrance to the park buffer zone. There was a prohibition sign that was probably removed by someone. But people still go there to take a walk, especially the elder ones, and some of them had to pay a fine. In my opinion they really do not harm the nature."*

Other situation may be found in the municipality Muráň, which territory is considerably affected by the level of protection and restrictions. There is a certain contradiction in the opinion:

*"Basically, national park may be bound with the positive matters only. Just the simple fact that Muránska planina represents qualified national park is more than positive. The nature in this territory is very nice too. And that is the whole thing; moreover it would be great to reach an increased interest of tourists. On the other hand, there are stricter criteria for protection."*

*From my point of view, it is also limiting factor for our development. There are areas with the fourth of the fifth level of protection and we can not do anything there."*

All of these opinions are summarized by the representative of the Muránska planina micro region. It is clear that opinions of a community board are transferred to residents and vice versa. All municipalities in the study area represent essentially the closed communities with a few thousand people, where everyone knows each other.

*"There are limitations in a level of protection. Especially municipality Muráň and surroundings is most concerned about that. Residents perceive this situation as a burden too."*

According to the authority of the national park, its attitude is clear and largely based on the protectionist attitudes.

*"People must realize this park is simply unique; such a wild nature is difficult to see anywhere. It is the last piece of wilderness far and wide. Something similar is maybe in Ukraine, which is the neighboring state of ours, but there is low biodiversity because of the poaching. Our national park is not so much fitting for "consumer tourists", but rather for those of them looking for wildlife".*

Although the opinions on the existence of the national park are slightly different; the opinion on the abolition of the Muránska planina national park is unanimous – it is not recommended. Even the state enterprise "Lesy SR, š. p." does not agree with such a possibility. In particular, the opinions of the representatives directs against the matters of national park, which have a confining impact on certain economic activities in the farming forest. I consider as very interesting the position of another tree farmer. The difference between the above mentioned positions lies in the fact that he is responsible for the forest owned by the municipality Pohronská Polhora, while the representatives of "Lesy SR, š. p." are responsible for all of the forests in the property of Slovak Republic.

*"We live side by side without any problems. I do not feel the national park have inhibited my business. I am rather hampered by the organizations such as the railways and roads because of the buffer zones, but surely not the national park. Here is a nature which should be protected. Especially at this time, because various interest groups would suddenly try to enrich themselves with the game, wood, or anything else".*

The national Park has certainly its supporters not only among the community leaders and entrepreneurs who may benefit on it, but surprisingly also among the organizations doing their business in a forest and their activities are influenced by its existence. But the support for the national park with its buffer zone and areas with different levels of protection scattered throughout is not so well accepted among the interviewed actors. Reassessment of the park areas with different levels of protection has wide support among them. For instance, tree farmers:

*"The idea of reassessment is already anachronism; it would be better to focus on different zones. That means to specify the zones precisely without any encroachment; I mean the zones where only management will have a permission to ride on the horse only. At the present day the levels of protection are confusing. There are many activities which are either allowed or prohibited. There are some exceptions too and when somebody knows how stuff works, it is no problem avoiding it".*

Or here is the statement of the representative of the Muránska planina micro region:

*"It would not have been right to reassess the national park as a unit. Part of that nature deserves to remain protected as it is nowadays. But it will be surely necessary to reassess certain areas too; either after the windstorm and the outbreak of the spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*). Reassessment of some parts of the national park would be certainly very helpful for us; mainly because of the bicycle paths".*

The authority of the national park has a very similar view:

*"The zones are necessary of source, but the five levels of protection are redundant; except the fifth level, the others contain almost any differences at all. It would be great if such a proposal should be included in the new law containing three zones only. The third would be completely without any encroachment and most valuable sites would be included in it too. The second zone would be similar to Natura 2000 system, which requires the management of the area with recommendation of the suitable type of tourism ... And the rest of the country would represent free landscape. It does not make sense to forbid everything. "*

And experts in the field of environment says:

*"As a representative of the town Tisovec responsible for the environment I have a positive opinion on the reassessment of the levels of protection. Of course it has to be done very sensitively. Areas which are really special considering flora or fauna mainly may remain at the highest level. I would be certainly recommended to re-evaluate the protected area and buffer zones as well."*

Notwithstanding these suggestions, a lawful standard in the Slovak Republic that governs the protection of the nature is still the Act No. 543. This Act includes basic rules for the protection regime in the national nature reservation Fabova hoľa. It is a relatively young reservation that is declared to protect especially spruce forest communities. In 2004 was the area was affected by windstorms which led to significant violation of the original forest and the outbreak of the spruce bark beetle (*Ips typographus*).

Bark beetle population has found in the affected forest perfect conditions and has started to spread into the surroundings unprotected sites. The problem of Fabova hoľa is very sensitive; not only from the point of view of tree farmers and conservationists. It concerns the entire region because of bringing the elements of conflict and disharmony into the stable environ-

ment. It is also an excellent example to illustrate the differences of opinion between the actors in the matter of reassessment of levels of protection. They are usually able to reach the consensus in opinions and cooperate with each other. This particular case may be labeled as an exception.

*"But everything may be seen as controversy. If we would sit 40 tree farmers here, probably each of them would have different point of view. At least, what should be done? Bark from the affected trees should have been decorticate and burned afterwards. But there is no money for anything. It would be worth of spending money to decorticate, at least in order to keep the social value of the ecosystem and the landscape. But no one had the good will to do something like this. It is easier to put the blame on each other and give it all up."*

*"... mainly the secondary impacts, such as the prohibition of wood processing and the subsequent outbreak of bark beetle like in the case of Fabova hoľa, where the three hundred years old forest covers went to hell. The decreasing of the attractiveness of the landscape means unfortunately the next step. I do care, but my opinion is not relevant at all. In my opinion, game will leave this area soon; it will not remain in the dead country."*

*Maybe it would help, but that site would certainly get more value if the falling trees would be normally harvested, afterwards the plant trees were planted and then this area would be administered as a farmer forest."*

*"Withering of the forest covers on Fabova hoľa does not happen suddenly, but will be done gradually and will create a beautiful mosaic. There would be a disposition for the old growth forest in 50 years. But the tree farmers do not want to understand it because they long for cubic meters of wood. The wood has no longer value there, because of their stupid pride. Harvest would have done much more damage. Finally there are some evidences about the forest regeneration. The species dependent on the dead wood are critically endangered across the Europe. Since we have farmer forests, dead wood is not found in the forest anymore. Because of the existence of this wind disaster, these endangered species started to benefit from these conditions. And not only beetles, but also birds, for instance woodpeckers, which also thrive because they have enough food. This development is welcomed for us, because in the terms of species diversity it is a very positive phenomenon."*

As it may be seen from above mentioned, the most far away are the views of the foresters and conservationists, which are understandable. The problem of the Fabova hoľa solution lying in activity or inactivity indicates the possible risks for the future. The loss of valuable sites mainly caused by the absence of clarification of the different competences and attitudes, does not contribute to the attractiveness of the region as a unit.

### 3.3.2 The potential of the region

The analysis of interviews shows the differences between the attitudes of the people living in the region, as well as the questionnaires do. There is a general agreement among the actors about the importance of tourism for the regional development. But the tourism is not perceived as the main priority by everyone. The southern part of the region is more prone to see the tourist industry as the only way to deal with all of their problems.

*"There is nothing else to do, just put the emphasis on the tourism. But we need to offer more and make our offerings more attractive too. Walking in the nature is not enough for visitors."*

To a certain extent, it is also due to the geographical location of these municipalities, which does not offer any other options. The municipalities in the north of the region are situated in the valley which is on both sides surrounded by two national parks – The Muránska planina national park in the south and the Nízke Tatry national park (NAPANT) in the north (Fig. 3). Development opportunities are much wider and this is reflected in opinions too.

*"Taking it literally, we belong to the Low Tatras region as a community and residents; we focus more on NAPANT. I can not imagine we would consider building a hotel or some resort in area of the Muránska planina national park. It is a shame, because the Muránska planina national park has real potential and it seems to me that we are not able to understand it in certain way. The best thing that should be done is to connect two parks together. The feeling of extreme patriotism is deeply embedded in us."*

Similar views prevail in the Horehronie region. The Muránska planina national park is perceived through the view of nice nature and countryside that has to be protected. The development of the region by the developing of tourist industry is associated with the national park marginally. The knowledge of the area is limited to the repetition of beautiful nature, without specifying the concrete areas or other future visions. To certain extent, their views are influenced by the history of region. In the past medium-sized factories and agricultural production were being established in order to provide the job offers for local residents.

*"As far as I know, they have never been forced to think in this way. Because their employment was based on the factories, the services were perceived as something additional and never took the first place."*

Here and now, the Muránska planina region is affected by unemployment and problems with the Gipsy minority. The combination of these factors consequently hinders and make the development of the initiative harder, whether at the municipality level or among the private companies.

*"It would lead to a serious boom of tourism in this area after solving the problem of unemployment. Unemployment could be rather solved by the factories, if their production would*

*increase in order to hire employees again. There is a big Gipsy minority; they have not to work since the Velvet revolution, which was 20 years ago. Firstly, it is quite difficult for them to find any job today, and secondly their work habits are really appalling."*

*"I take notice about this problem in the skill of people, because the long-term unemployed have simply lost their work habits. Not all of them of course, but some of them. There is also a problem with the Gipsy minority. "*

The instant development is not conceptual at all and it is based on the initiative of local enthusiasts.

*"Everything has to be done systematically and we all must participate on it. In addition, the Act No. 91/2010 on the promotion of tourism and Act No. 543 are not well designed, because everything is ordained from higher hierarchical structures and anybody does not look at consequences at all. And it also affects the whole continuity of life and local communities."*

*"It was the meeting of the Banská Bystrica Autonomous region and they decided that our region Revúca will be dependent on the tourism development. But I do not see any evidence that the Banská Bystrica Autonomous region really do something for the helping us to achieve that aim. We must help ourselves; municipality and few enthusiasts. It is difficult to talk about the development."*

*"In my opinion they are talking a lot but I am missing any concrete actions. Municipalities do not have required capacity to deal with all of these problems. Firstly we have to encourage the interest of local people, help them to find a job and then gradually develop this region, partially on the base of their own activities, such as providing private accommodation."*

It is not possible that one or two enthusiastic entrepreneurs would be able to solve problems in the whole region, or even the problems within the municipality.

*"But one is not enough at all; many of such people are required. In addition, we have to focus on social projects, because we have a lot of Gypsies."*

Even those who are willing to participate on solving these problems have to confront with different obstacles; whether in the form of misunderstanding within the community, the lack of support, or they are hampered by ordinary matters such as legislation restrictions or property fragmentation.

*"We had a camp in Pohorelská Maša, but it went under, because the owner died. He was native from our village and he had tried to develop some activities profitable for our municipality."*

*Of course, we are trying to promote the tourist industry. For instance, we try to restore the ski tow, which was the largest in the Horehronie region. It fails on property relations caused by the collapse of the company Strojsmalt (previously a major employer in the region). While it had existed the firm was supporting the ski tow significantly, but now it all fell apart."*

*“We founded the company Gemer-Invest and we wanted to build a winter resort. In the summer season we wanted to use it for breeding horses. It ended in failure because the requirements of property owners were unreasonable. Another thing was the lack of infrastructure and the overall uncertainty of the project.*

*We tried another project, training for women who had the potential to provide the tourism services such as catering, accommodation and other activities. We chose approximately 20 women from the surrounding municipalities. Only few of them held on. On the other hand, they were missing suitable property or initial capital. A few of them, who met these requirements, were afraid to start a business. So it also failed.”*

*„Last but not least there is a lack of personal potential. There are many people who are envious of success of others who are trying to do the business in the region. Simply said, recent people cogitation does not allow many possibilities for the further cooperation.”*

### 3.3.3 Interactions between actors in the region

In such a situation it is important to generate the pressure from below, to improve the cooperation across the whole spectrum of actors that have their interests in the region. But the responses do not suggest such things. Activities are restricted to the level of what it is not forbidden by law or other regulations; endeavor to do something extra is really occasional.

*„Everyone organizes everything by himself. Previously we had had certain co-operative activities within the Horehronie micro region, for instance joint scrapyards, but it all failed. Each of interested people went his own way.*

*Cooperation is really bad; we have some contacts in our micro region only. We cooperate with the authority of the Muránska planina national park in the area of trees clearance because now it is in our competences. Or we have addressed them the requirements for the assessment of our projects. Maybe they have some lectures in schools, but I am not sure about it. The residents showed their interest in the cooperation until they were asked to contribute; then their interest was continually fallen.”*

In this context one fact seems interesting to me; I mean that even the municipalities which have the agreements with each other do not know about such information at all.

*“We also have a place which was former parking place near Zbojská. Currently it is abandoned, but there is always a mess. It is a controversial situation, because it is cadastral area of Tisovec, but the estate belongs to Pohronská Polhora, because of the forest. So we have an agreement with Tisovec that once a year they have to clean this spot and next year it is our turn. But I do not know whose turn is now.”*

In written answer to the question of cooperation the representatives of the town of Tisovec said: *“No, we do not have.”*



From the point of view of the institution has the National Park many shortcomings in self-promotion, in the promotion of the territory, but also in the essence of its activities. Without positive view of the national park among the residents it is hard to find the public support for the conservation or development projects.

*“When we do marketing, we use to support our offers by using the keywords like “Tatry” and “Muránska planina”. We also use the term “Muránska planina” in the context of agro tourism. And that is the point. There is nothing more that we can link to our products and services. We cannot promise something we do not know if it is there. We have some knowledge of the national park but we miss more detailed information.”*

The problem is also in insufficient personnel and financial management of the national park. Staff has the problems to handle with the basic functions under the relevant laws, combined with research and protection activities.

*“We are basically just playing on the protection of nature; we have some knowledge of species, residential characteristics and so on. But we do not have money for further research. So, all we can do is monitoring, but nothing else. Everything is in the doldrums; we focus only on urgent cases – of course, only if we get money for that. We are especially missing a concept and long-term strategy.”*

Individuals who believe in this area and had connected their lives to it are often disappointed when their activities meet with such an amount of incomprehension. There is nothing to be surprised that they are frustrated in this environment and their interest deteriorates.

*“About five years ago I have organized the cleaning of the stream Rohozná under the Earth Day. I tried to pay attention to young people, for example I had organized riding school for them basically for free. Anyway, I am perceived as a bad guy, because I am allegedly trying to enrich on small children.”*

Planning any activity in a similar atmosphere is very difficult. In addition, there are some good projects halted by decision-making processes, like in the case of the program LEADER: “We had applied for the LEADER twice, but we have failed.” Even the projects which have been successfully completed do not serve entirely to the original purpose.

*“And besides that we need to provide information, for example in tourist information offices. There is one tourist office in Muráň, but it is completely empty and that is really strange.”*

## **4. Discussion**

The discussion is an essential part of every paper because of combining the existing knowledge with the information obtained by the accomplished research. In the beginning of first chapter I deal with the quality and relevance of my data. In second part I focus on the interpretation of data obtained from the questionnaire, supplemented by a broader context of the analysis of interviews.

### **4.1 Quality evaluation of the data set**

Both qualitative and quantitative research methods are widely used in variety of research areas. None of the used methods can not completely cover all of the needs of researchers and give the answer to every question. It is often recommended to combine both of them. I have decided to use this principle also in this master thesis.

The major lack of quantitative data collection is the fact that we cannot use the method of quantification on everything. In particular, the emotions, feelings, insights, motives, intents, views and opinions of the subject are difficult to measure by using this method, despite the effort to design the various questions and scales. That is the reason why I have tried to support the results of questionnaires with the successive analysis of the interviews. Such connections helped to explain what lies behind the decisions of the respondents and points out the environment where the responses were formed.

Another problem of this method represents the biases (Bateman and Turner, 1993). In designing the questionnaire, I have used all of my acquired knowledge and experiences in order to avoid any redundancy in wording, leading questions, double barreled questions, etc. In addition of the obtaining data by using the questionnaires response biases may also occur (Schriesheim and Hill, 1991). In this type of bias is the attempt of respondent to be perceived in a positive light. That is the reason why they often give the answers contrary to their true beliefs.

Particularly, questions with scales to assess the knowledge of national park among the respondents could be affected by this type of bias. But this phenomenon is unavoidable; it should be taken into account especially in the process of interpretation of data. In this context, the information about education level in municipality Šumiac seems interesting to me. One half of 12 respondents stated as their highest education the level college or university. On the base of acquired information, this number seems highly unlikely. This fact should not affect the results, because the data containing the education component was the part of the characteristics of the sample. It is possible that some respondents stated misleading data in the demographic questions, for instance the question about the net monthly household income. Alt-

though neither of these facts do not enter the evaluation process. I have divided respondents into relevant groups according to their age and place of residence.

The selection of samples for research is related to the problem of generalization (Miles, 1979). It is a process of classification of certain findings obtained from the observations of one or more events, related to the large number of phenomena or to all events of same or similar file. For the reason I have chosen to use the method of the non-probability sampling selection of the respondents the results were not completely random. The sample could be affected by the chosen time of data collection. Because of the winter months it was carried out from 10:00 AM to 3:00 PM it is possible that some groups of people were not at this time on the selected places, for instance due to work.

In my opinion, for the purpose of this paper, the selected sample is sufficient and allows the deduction of the conclusions valid for the entire Muránska planina region.

As in the case of questionnaires, qualitative methods have also its pros and cons. The main advantage of qualitative methods is giving enough knowledge about the problem and its deeper and more complex understanding. On the other hand, this method is real time consuming process, because of the amount of data. For instance the open-ended questions provide lot of data which are difficult either to transcribe or analyze. Qualitative research brings also the problem with the terms of generalization of findings, creation of any type of solid statistic and the subjectivity of the interviewer.

Of course, my attitude is also influenced by my views and by my education partly. I have obtained the interviews from various actors that were often on the opposite end of the spectrum of opinions. The area and its specific problems are well known too. I have tried to guide the interviews in the right of direction to avoid unnecessary controversy about the non-essential issues. If necessary, I have provided the position of the other party in order to get major plurality of opinions. My main aim lied in the use of knowledge gained from the interviews for the Muránska planina region and did not deduce the conclusions for all of the protected areas in Slovakia. But it is possible that some observations may serve also for these purposes. These facts result especially from the nature of the chosen method.

Another thing that could affect the quality of the data is the translation. The survey was conducted in the Slovak Republic. After the consultations questionnaire was translated from English into Slovak. Similarly, the interviews were recorded in Slovak and some of their parts were translated into English, as listed in the Results chapter. This fact does not automatically reduce the quality of the data. On the other side it is likely that some nuances were lost in translation.

## **4.2 Interpretation of the results**

### **4.2.1 Awareness and knowledge quality of the national park**

Only 11.92 % respondents stated they had no knowledge of the national park Muránska planina. The number as such looks positive and can be also interpreted in a way that nine of ten of the respondents had some information about the national park. It should be also noted the question was worded in terms of "any information". The fact that the respondent was aware about the national park was enough for the positive answer. A closer examination of the knowledge means no reason to be unsatisfied. In particular, the authority of the national park should increase its efforts in order to raise the level of awareness among the local residents.

A careful examination of the quality of knowledge and general awareness of the national park reveal that knowledge of the participants is averagely very low. This trend is less apparent in the knowledge of the activities and recreation possibilities. This type of information is more accessible and more discussed among the population. Information about the aims of the national park, nature and species conservation programs assume a greater degree of the involvement and competence on the part of the residents.

The results may be influenced also by certain response biases, but in such cases people are prone to show themselves in a positive light. These results indicate the clear trend of low quality of knowledge among the survey participants.

The results of the study indicate there were a lot of differences between the regions. Based on these indicators, the southern region seems to be on the better position. This may be legitimated due to the fact the authority of the national park is located in Revúca, which is historically linked to the communities in the southern part of the study area. The administration of the national park holds the same opinion, because the staffer noted in the interview that he also feels the differences in the perception of their work among the population of individual municipality. Frequent contact between the residents and staffer of the authority of the national park contributes to the fact as well. Moreover, in Muráň municipality is located another office of the authority, which provides the information with volunteers from the Association of Friends of Muránska planina during the summer season.

Slightly better level of knowledge among the residents of the southern region is influenced also by the nature trails which have recently risen with the assistance of grants from the Muránska planina micro region. Four of the five nature trails are located in the cadastral areas of southern municipalities and are orientated into the area of national park (Feinsinger et al., 1997). 72.02 % of respondents stated they were minimally last year ago at least one time in

the national park, where they have the opportunity to learn certain details on the information panels.

On the other hand, the residents and representatives of the communities affected by the increased level of protection came into contact with the authority of the nation park more often due to the different expert opinions, certificates, or dispensations.

In the context of the awareness of the national park it is important to increase the quality of knowledge among the local residents. Better-informed people may also help in the development of the management plan, in participating in discussion groups or in such prosaic things like informing potential visitors. For example, Job (1996) founds that knowledge of national parks may increase the positive attitudes towards them.

#### 4.2.2 The most important value and potential of the region

The respondents generally assigned high ratings to the recreational activities in the national park. It was mainly for hiking, biking and watching the animate and inanimate biota. This implies that the national park is important visiting place of the inhabitants living in its closeness. These preferences are reflected also in the assessment of values of the study area. Within the region had been achieved the consensus the flora and fauna is the most important value of the area that should be taken into account in decisions relating to the national park. Because of the p-value 0.0177 there is significant difference in opinions between the northern and southern region. The respondents from the northern communities see also the value of the territory as a base for tourism development. This finding well corresponds with the opinions on the desired development of the region.

The International Union for the Conservation of Nature (IUCN) recommends in its guidelines two basic directions for the development of national parks: the protection of the ecological integrity of ecosystems and the opportunities for recreation and tourism (IUCN (World Conservation Union), 2008). As it may be seen in the analysis of questionnaires the desired development of the region in relation of the tourism development has to be consistent with the protection of the area and keeps its character. The tourism development must be supported by appropriate infrastructure projects that facilitate the overall accessibility of the region. The acquired opinions about the region were homogeneous and the differences between northern and southern part were not discovered. According to Bushel and Eagles (2007) the national park is a unique tourist attraction. Because of this potential it is almost their obligation to promote the sustainable rural development through tourism and outdoor recreation (Jarvis, 2000).

The exclusive focus on the tourist industry does not have support among the mayors in all of the municipalities. None of the representatives had although rejected this way. They are aware of other problems that will not solve the tourism development in the area, for instance a structure of the residents and skills of the unemployed. In addition, they have practical experiences of supporting tourism from upper hierarchical level that often represents only the paper declaration and are not involved into concrete actions. According to Weaver and Lawton (2006) the development of tourism is also related with certain risks in the future, because by the gradual development of tourist industry within the local stakeholders becomes its perception more negative.

Tourism in the form which is currently developed does not affect the environment. There is a consensus in this opinion among the foresters and conservationists. The differences in the value of the area result from different perceptions and views on its management. This contradiction is noticeable for national natural reservation Fabova hoľa and is sensitively perceived among the people. Multiple responses to one of the open-ended questions in the questionnaire referred to NNR Fabova hoľa as the most problematic geographical area. The contradiction between its perception as a farming forest and area without any activity polarizes the opinions of organizations and residents. Although some researches (Jonášová and Prach, 2004, Müller et al., 2010) suggest that the environmentalists could have been right. It is clear that effective conservation management programs must be based on sophisticated mechanisms, including those based on economic incentives and financial compensation (Jones et al., 1995).

#### 4.2.3 The need of cooperation

The research has indicated a low level of awareness among the population. The respondents were aware about this fact and expressed the interest of being more informed about the national park. Increased interest was detected among all of the age categories. The p-value of 0.001 indicates a significant difference between the inhabitants of towns and villages in the need for greater awareness. Residents of the city had a higher education which assumed the needs for more information. This explains also their lower interest in additional information about the national park.

The research has indicated some trends of population that should be taken into account in the service of authority of the national park as well as local boards. Willingness of residents to participate in environmental protection and decision-making processes within the region is highly irrespective on dependence of place or residence. Much higher is the willingness to participate on the municipal level. This creates pressure on the authority of the national park to be more proactive in their activities, particularly in promoting their own activities, as well as a variety of information. The daily contact between the national park staff and residents are

on low level. This implies distrust towards the authority of the national park, its management, decisions and aims.

As it had been already noted, the level of knowledge has a positive impact on increasing attitudes to the national park. Liebeck and colleagues (2008) have also identified other factors that affect attitudes such as age, place of residence, frequency of visits, attitudes towards nature and forest management. Confidence in the local board and thus the willingness to cooperate at this level differs from the general trend in the age group of young people between 18 and 35 years. On this very age group should focus representatives of municipalities, as well as the authority of the national park on their activities related to the national park.

## 5. Conclusion

The identification of the attitudes of local people and actors in the Muránska planina region was very important. The results obtained from the analysis of questionnaire and interviews confirmed two of three of the hypotheses. It had also contributed to the understanding of the environment and its conditions which influence the opinions of the residents according to the research questions. The main conclusions we may summarize as follows:

1. The level of awareness and quality of knowledge about the national park was low as expected. Increasing knowledge of local residents will lead to understanding and better insight of nature conservation management. Likewise, helping to support sustainable conservation strategies for the management of most protected areas.
2. The residents of municipalities, whose territory neighbors the national park, expressed the desire to develop the region in relation to tourism development, which would increase also its accessibility and is fully compatible with the protection of the natural environment. In this respect it is important to take into account the positions of several actors, which vary according to activities they carry out. Sustainable development assumes the involvement of local people in conservation; sustainability as a national park is related to the sustainability of livelihoods of people living on its territory.
3. Contrary to the hypothesis residents have expressed the increased interest in environmental protection, and participation in decision-making processes relating to the region. There is a difference between the support and willingness to sacrifice leisure or other personal resources and especially to act within the same spirit. In this area we may find a space for the municipal authorities, local boards, as well as the authority of the national park to prepare conditions that would integrate the residents to be engaged and to develop their high potential.

Despite of certain problems that occur currently in the region - whether high levels of unemployment or demographic changes, the positive approach of inhabitants and stakeholders to the national park gives hope for a better future.



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# Appendix A: Questionnaire



Current No. of questionnaire: \_\_\_\_\_

## Survey „The public perceptions of the value of “Muránska planina National park” and the regional environmental policy”

I am a student at the Department of Management of Natural Resources on the Norwegian University of Life Sciences and work on the master thesis titled „*The public perceptions of the value of Muránska planina National park and the regional environmental policy*”. I would like to ask you to fill out this questionnaire intended to get the opinions and ideas of the local population on the possible development of the above mentioned area in their point of view. Please, grant me your time and relieve me with your opinion. All data are treated strictly confidential and will be used only for research purposes. To fill out the questionnaire takes only about 10 minutes. THANK YOU!

1 Do you have any knowledge about the Muránska planina National Park?  Yes  No

If yes, what kind of knowledge?

- Permanent residence
- Non-permanent residence
- Regular visiting
- Rare visiting
- Heard about it before

2 What is your opinion on the level of awareness of the residents? (**Please value with 1=very well, 5=not at all**)

...Aims of the national park  1  2  3  4  5

...Species and nature conservation programmes of the national park  1  2  3  4  5

...Recreation activities and possibilities  1  2  3  4  5

...Cultural and education offers of the national park  1  2  3  4  5

3 Which is the most important values of the park area in your opinion? (**Please tick just 1**)

- Tourist development
- Flora and fauna
- Aesthetics
- History
- Scientific value
- Hunting

4 The Muránska planina National Park has according to the international definition of national parks a number of aims. Please tick four (4) aims that you consider most important for a national park:

- Education and information on nature conservation

- Conservation of natural habitats and species (wild plants, wild animals)
- Enlargement of ski resorts in the park
- Scientific research on nature conservation
- Sustainable forestry
- Support of regional economic development (tourism)
- Construction of new roads for tourists
- Provision of visitor facilities (visitor center, hiking trails, information panels)
- Production and marketing of regional products
- Opportunity for sporting activities
- Provision of hunting activities
- Sponsoring of local facilities such as museums

5 How often have you visited The Muránska planina National Park the last year?

- 1x  2x  3x  4x  more than 4 times

6 What are your main activities in the national park? (**Please tick max. 3**)

- Hiking
- Observation of plants, animals and habitats
- Sports, such as mountain biking, jogging
- Visiting of NP facilities and exhibitions
- Cultural activities
- Mountain climbing
- Visiting restaurants and huts
- Others: \_\_\_\_\_

7 Do you think the national park offers good conditions for tourism development? (**Please value with 1=very well, 5=not at all**)  1  2  3  4  5

8 Do you think the area has suitable conditions for the development of special kind of tourism such as

ecotourism, geotourism, agrotourism? (**Please value with 1=very well, 5=not at all**)

- Ecotourism    ① ② ③ ④ ⑤  
Geotourism    ① ② ③ ④ ⑤  
Agrotourism   ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

If so, which areas are the most appropriate in your opinion?

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**9** Select from the following eventualities the best way of development which is the most suitable for the region's future in your opinion. (**Please tick max. 2**)

- Development of facilities and services for tourism
- Development of small family business
- Construction of medium and large businesses
- Protection of natural environment
- Building of infrastructure and improving the accessibility of region

**10** Do you think the quality of life has improved over the last 15 years? (**Value with 1=agree fully; 5=reject completely**)    ① ② ③ ④ ⑤

**11** Are you a member of a nature conservation or environmental organization?     Yes  No

**12** Would you like to be more informed about the above mentioned area and its protection?

- Yes  No

If not, what is the reason?

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**13** Would you like to be involved in active environmental protection and decision-making processes in your region?

a.) With the cooperation of the municipalities  
 Yes  No

b.) With the cooperation of management of National park Muránska planina  Yes  No

**14** Which area do you consider as the most problematic in environmental protection?

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*Please supply finally certain necessary statistical data:*

**15** Gender:     Female  Male

**16** Age: \_\_\_\_\_

**17** How many people live in your household in total?  
\_\_\_\_\_ of which: \_\_\_\_\_ children

**18** What is your highest education?

- Basic school
- Professional education (trade)
- High school
- College/university

**19** What is your profession?

- Student
- Housewife/man
- Looking for a job
- Retired
- Manual worker
- White-collar employee
- Civil servant
- Self-employed

**20** Please tick your class of your monthly household income (net of taxes and social security):

- less than 500 €
- from 500 to 750 €
- from 750 to 1,000€
- from 1,000 to 1,250€
- from 1,250 to 1,500€
- above 1,500 €

All your answers and data are treated completely confidential, and are only used in aggregated and anonymous form!

**Thank you very much for the interview,  
and we wish you all the best.**