

PIENINY NATIONAL PARK

EXPLORING PEOPLE'S VIEWS AND SOCIAL
OUTCOMES OF THE NATIONAL PARK

2022



FULL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

Pieniny National Park, located in the northern part of Slovakia, is a natural gem renowned for its breathtaking landscapes and rich biodiversity. Established in 1967, the park covers an area of 37.5 square kilometers and is part of the larger Pieniny range, which extends into Poland. The park's most iconic feature is the Dunajec River, which carves a stunning gorge through limestone cliffs, offering spectacular views and a unique opportunity for rafting and canoeing. The Trzy Korony (Three Crowns) massif, reaching 982 meters, is another highlight, providing visitors with panoramic vistas of the surrounding countryside. The diverse flora and fauna include rare species such as the Tatra chamois, lynx, and the golden eagle, making it a haven for nature enthusiasts and wildlife photographers.

The cultural and historical significance of Pieniny National Park adds to its allure. The park is home to the medieval Červený Kláštor (Red Monastery), a historic site that dates back to the 14th century and offers insight into the region's monastic life. Additionally, the park's traditional wooden architecture and well-preserved rural settlements reflect the rich cultural heritage of the Slovak and Polish highlanders. Various hiking and cycling trails traverse the park, allowing visitors to explore its natural beauty and historical sites intimately. Pieniny National Park stands as a testament to Slovakia's commitment to preserving its natural and cultural treasures, offering a serene escape for travelers seeking both adventure and tranquility.

METHODS



In order to explore people's views on Pieniny National Park, we used the Social Impact Assessment Tool for Protected Areas (SOCIAT) which has been developed by researchers at the University of Warwick and the University of Cambridge in collaboration with several park authorities across Europe. This consists of a structured questionnaire including 19 questions covering a variety of topics. Further information on SOCIAT can be found here: www.warwick.ac.uk/fidelio/tools.

The questionnaire was distributed during 2022 to local communities living near the national park. The distribution of the questionnaires was conducted by colleagues from Matej Bel University, Slovakia, who are familiar with the research area. The questionnaire was mainly distributed face to face and the questionnaires were uploaded directly on the online software qualtrics where the questionnaire was hosted.

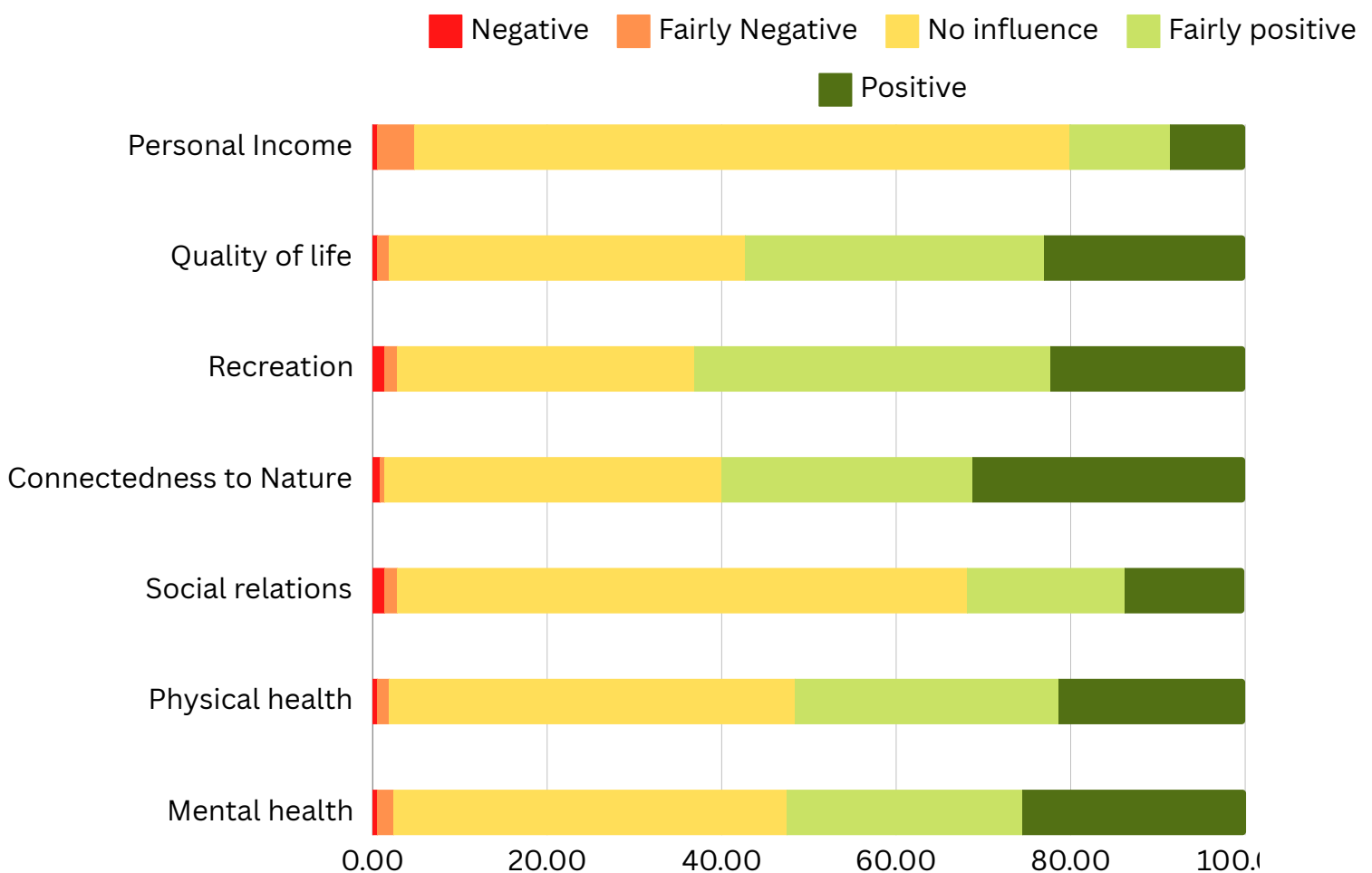
In total, 223 responses were received. 79.8% of respondents were permanent residents and 17.5% owned a second home or rented a property in the area and visited regularly. Approximately 80% of respondents live in the area for more than 10 years. 41.3% of respondents were female and 57.8% male. 12.6% had completed primary education, 58.1% had finished secondary school and 29.3% had finished higher education. The age groups breakdown is: 7% (18-24), 13.6% (25-34), 20.4% (35-44), 21.3% (45-54) and 10.4% (55-64), 8.1% 65-74 and 1.4% was over 85. The income breakdown was as follows: 2.3% have a monthly income below 500 euro, 31.5% have a monthly income between 500-1000 euro, 20.7% had an income between 1001-2000 euro and 7.2% had an income of over 2000 euro. 25.2% of participants mentioned that they work in the tourist sector.

RESULTS

SOCIAL OUTCOMES

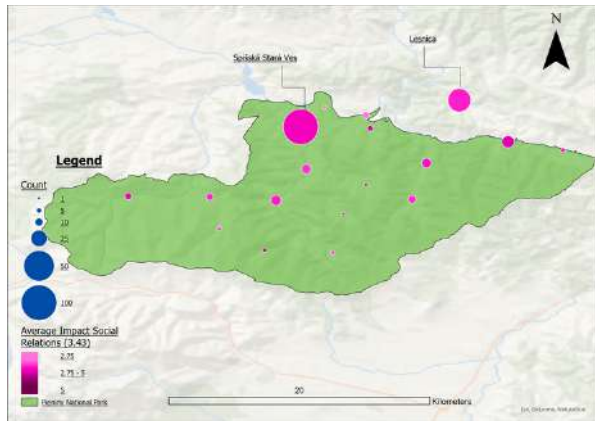


Several outcomes from the national park were deemed significant by the participants. Notably, recreation, connection to nature, and quality of life were highlighted, with around 50% of the sample indicating a positive or fairly positive influence from the park on these aspects. The responses also underscored the park's positive effects on both mental and physical well-being. In contrast, personal income was considered the least important benefit, as 75% of the sample mentioned that it had no impact on their income.

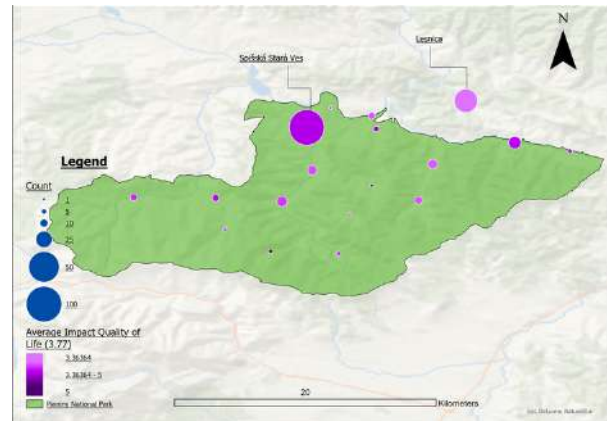


DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL OUTCOMES

The spatial distribution of five social outcomes was also captured through dedicated spatial analysis and a detailed mapping process. These maps reveal differences between communities on how they perceived social impacts. The maps reveal the distribution of social impacts across different communities (average score with darker colours revealing higher perceived benefit and larger circle revealing larger sample size).

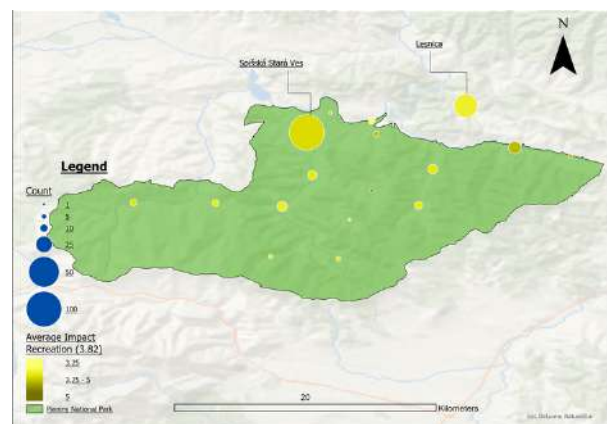


Spatial distribution of impact on social relations

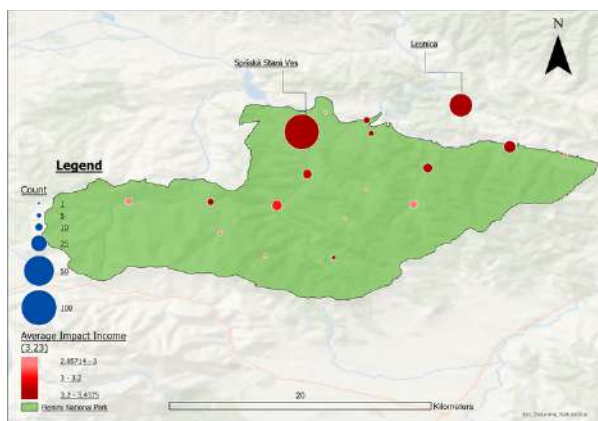


Spatial distribution of impact on quality of life

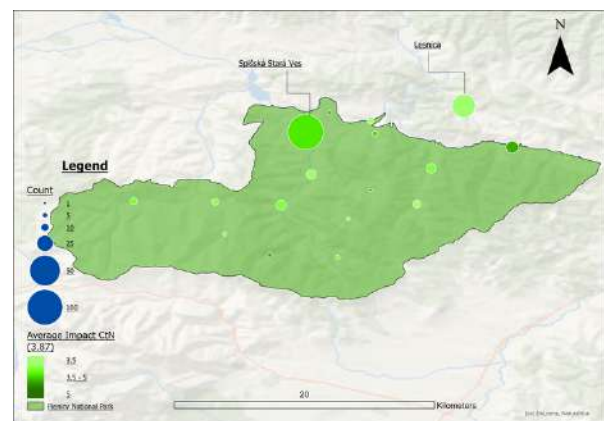
Differences were noted between local communities on perceived impacts especially regarding recreation, income and quality of life



Spatial distribution of impact on recreation



Spatial distribution of impact on income

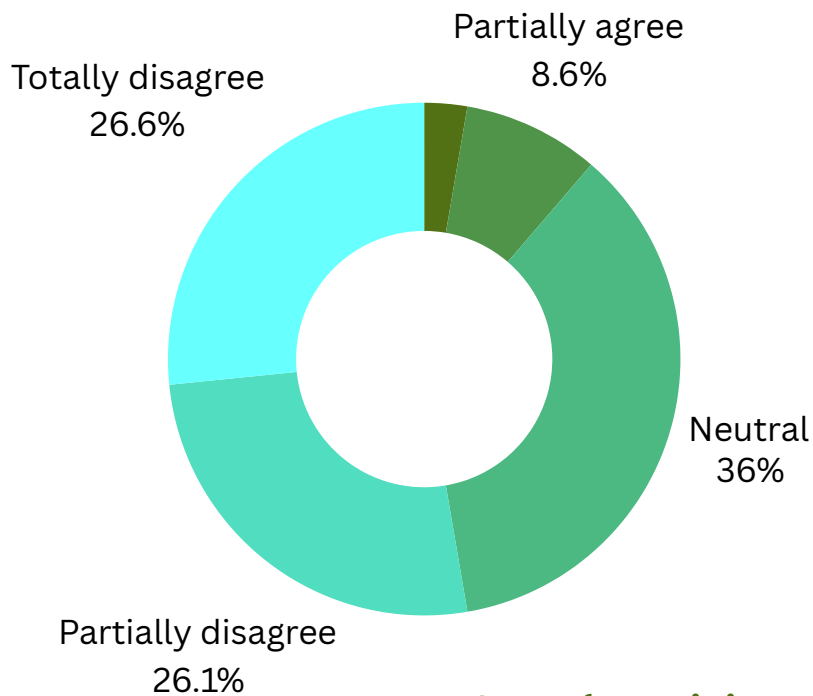


Spatial distribution of impact on Connectedness to Nature

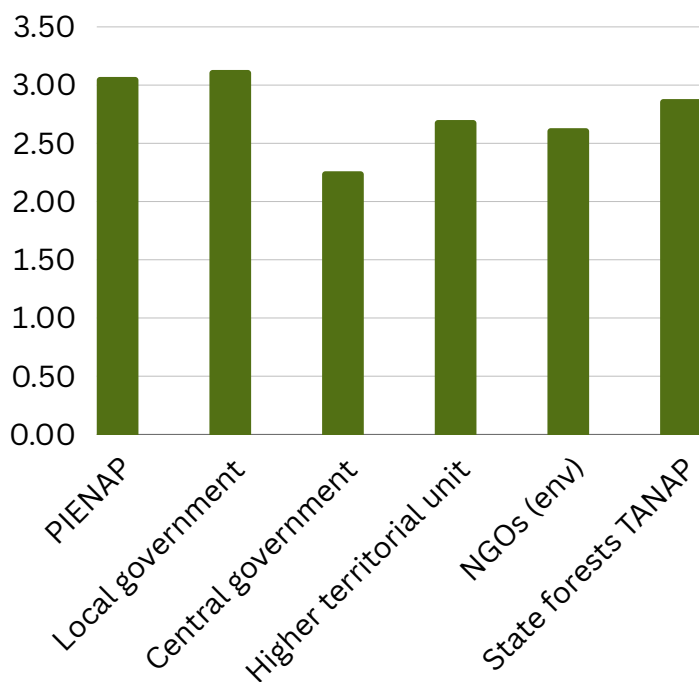
GOVERNANCE & TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Around 17.3% of respondents mentioned volunteering for Pieniny National Park in the last five years, which included activities like litter picking. Participants were also asked about their availability of time, financial resources, and opportunities to participate in park-related initiatives. About 50% expressed disagreement (fully or partially) with having sufficient resources to engage in these activities.

Level of agreement: I have enough time, money and opportunities to support the nature reserve



27% of participants stated that they totally agree or agree that the park authority does a good job protecting the national park.



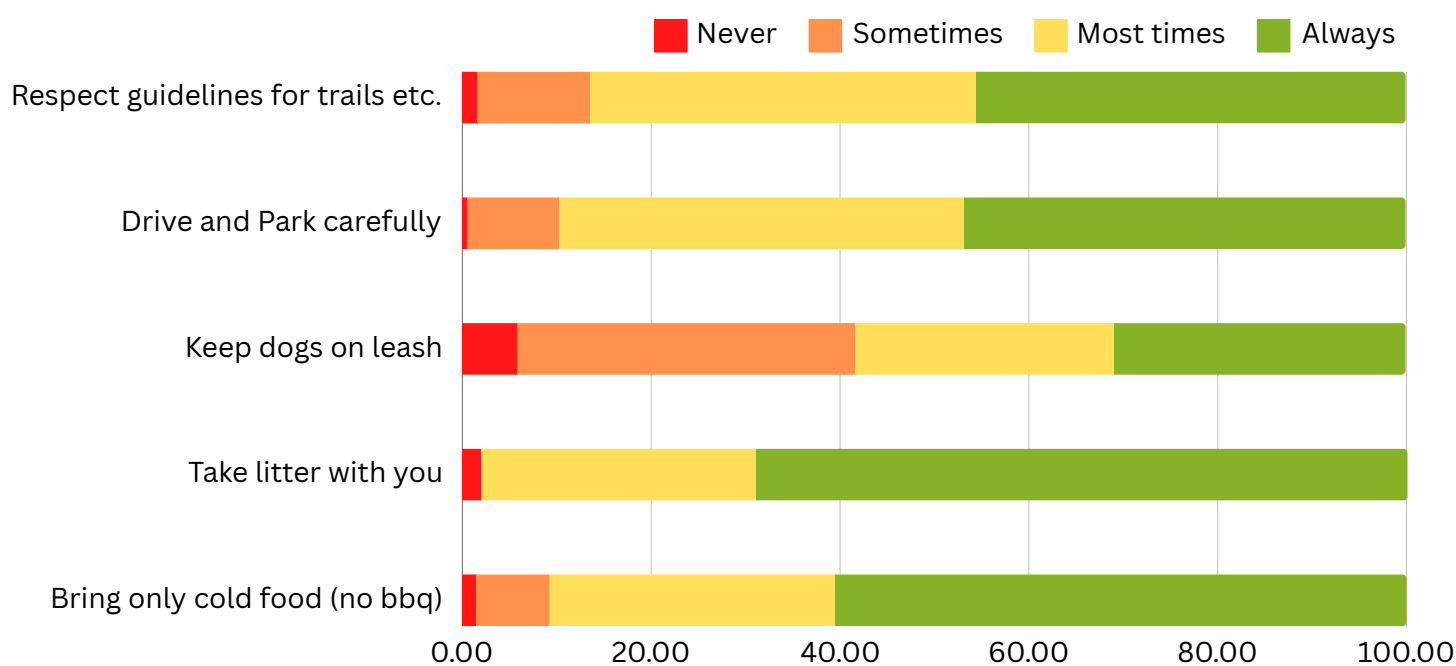
Participants were also asked about their level of trust in six institutions linked to the management of the national park. They rated their trust on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 indicating the lowest and 5 the highest level of trust. Central government received relatively lower trust ratings, while PIENAP and TANAP were noted for higher levels of trust compared to other institutions.

ENVIRONMENTAL BEHAVIOUR



Participants were also asked about their ease of responsibly using the park. 62% fully agreed or agreed with this notion, while 34.2% neither agreed nor disagreed. Additionally, 51% of respondents expressed their expectation for other national park users to act responsibly, with 33% mentioning that they believe others expect responsible behavior from them.

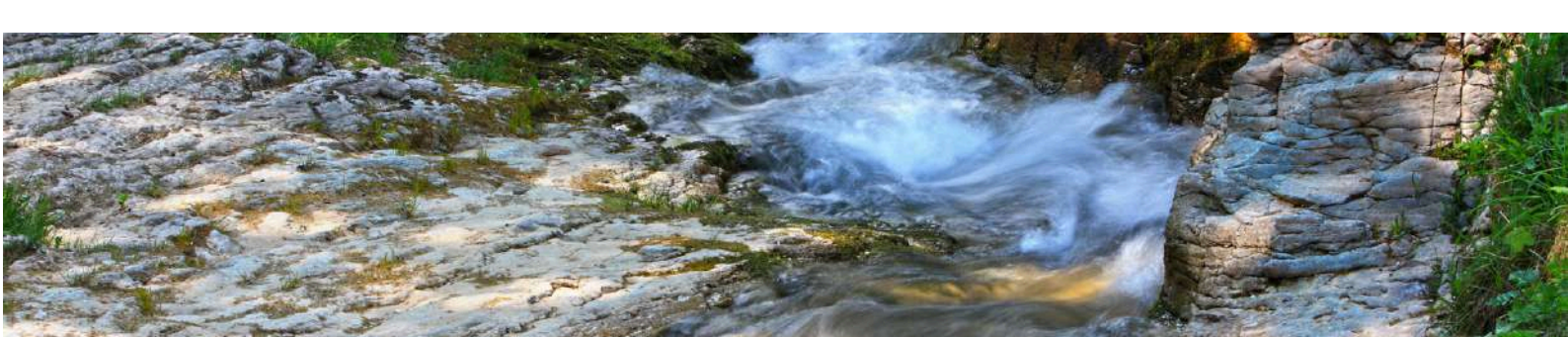
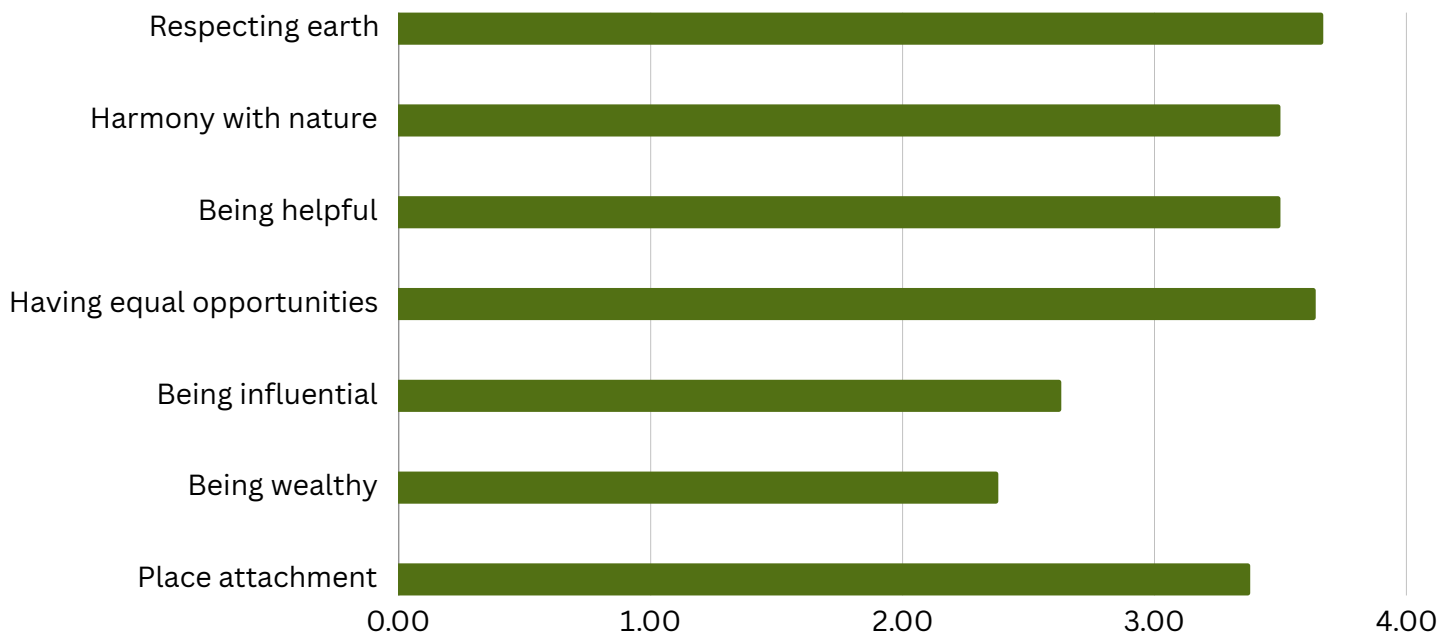
In terms of their own conduct in the national park, most participants adhere to the primary usage guidelines most of the time. Nearly all respondents confirmed that they consistently take their litter with them, always or most of the time. The guideline that was least adhered to by participants was keeping dogs on a leash.



SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL & PLACE VALUES

34% of respondents stated a strong place attachment with the area of Pieniny National Park

A set of questions explored social, environmental and place values of local communities in Pieniny National prk. These questions were measured on a 5 point Likert Scale with 5 representing highest agreement. Relatively high environmental values were recorded with the mean score for the importance of respecting earth being 3.67 and living in harmony with nature being 3.50. Being helpful and having equal opportunities had similar scores with environmental values (3.50 and 3.64 respectively). Egoistic values, such as being influential and being wealthy were considered as less important by respondents.

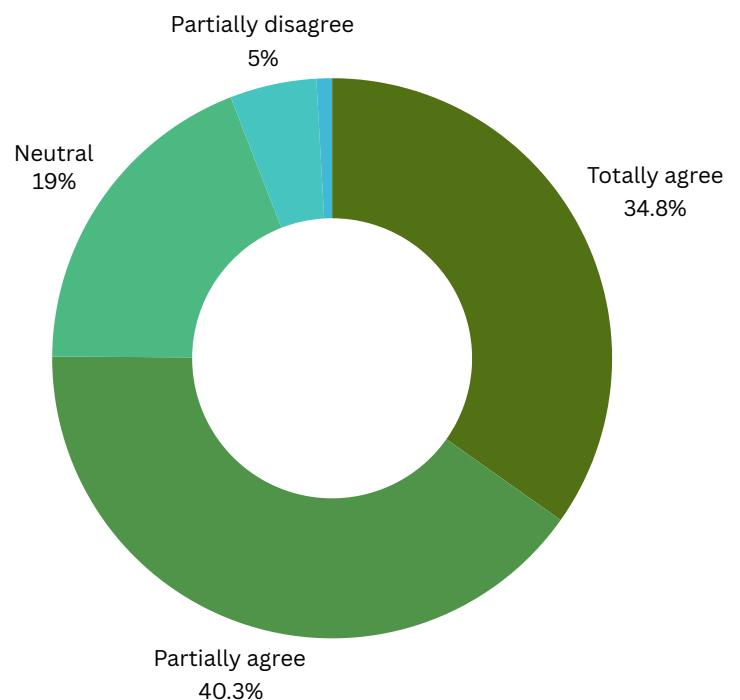


PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE NATIONAL PARK

Respondents were asked how much they agree with the existence of the national park. 34.8% totally agreed with the existence of the national park and 40.3% partially agreed. Only, 1% of respondents stated that they fully disagree with the existence of the National Park .



**approximately 75% of
participants support
the existence of the
nature reserve**



CONCLUSIONS

This report presented the results of a survey regarding people's perceptions for the social outcomes of Pieniny National Park in Slovenia. Social outcomes were explored through a survey conducted with local residents. The survey, which gathered 223 responses, assessed various aspects which may explain the level of social outcomes perceived by locals such as trust in institutions, environmental behavior, social and environmental, place attachment and public support for the park.

A number of social outcomes were identified through the surveys. These were particularly linked with wellbeing aspects such as connectedness to nature and quality of life. Our findings also indicate that a high percentage of respondents were supportive of the park and this was accompanied by a high level of trust in PIENAP and TANAP. Residents generally agreed that the park management does a good job in protecting the park. Most respondents practice responsible environmental behavior, such as taking litter with them and respecting guidelines for trail use. The survey revealed that the local community places high importance on environmental values and shows strong place attachment to the area, with significant support for its existence and conservation.

In terms of potential future actions that may improve human-nature relations in the national park, a first suggestion would be to strengthen community engagement fostering a sense of ownership and shared responsibility in conservation efforts. This may include more opportunities for volunteering activities supporting conservation efforts and also public engagement events feeding into decision-making processes. Such efforts could also increase the level of trust towards certain institutions, towards which trust at the moment remains relatively low.

Another potential consideration is increasing the benefits for personal income through sustainable tourism practices. Integrate conservation efforts with local economic development, particularly by supporting sustainable tourism-related businesses that benefit the community economically while promoting conservation. Several parks in Europe face significant issues due to overtourism and overcrowding. This, it is important that any future planning to increase eco-tourism in the area is done considering the local characteristics, local communities and also the 'capacity' of the area in terms of visitors.

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