

## Tourism and recreation as areas of collaboration between local governments and Gorce National Park

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**Abstract.** The objective of this study was to indicate the actions undertaken by the authorities of the Gorce National Park to boost the development of tourism and recreation, highlight fields for cooperation with local government bodies, and evaluate this cooperation as well as identifying problems, and to develop a strategy for developing tourism and recreation in the study area.

The result of the survey indicated that both local government officials and the national park authorities generally view positively, the joint actions undertaken. The majority of gmina and powiat representatives work, together with park employees, on the implementation of tasks aimed at developing tourism and recreational activities. In the survey, numerous advantages of having a national park in the given local government area were listed, including the increased attractiveness of the area to tourists. The disadvantages mentioned included, primarily, restrictions on investments. In the Gorce National Park hiking, biking, equestrian, and ski tourism are promoted. In the surrounding areas the model of tourism should be developed in line with the principle of sustainable development, taking into account the opinions and needs of local residents. A regional partnership for tourism and creation of tourist products should be formed, centred on the national park. To date, an integrated offer to tourists and joint promotion activities of the gminas situated around the Gorce National Park are lacking. Also necessary are investments in recreational facilities in the nearby villages.

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1. Introduction	68
2. Material and research methods	68
3. Gorce National Park – location, general characteristics, tourism	68
4. Gorce National Park – location, general characteristics, tourism, local governments	70
5. Local government collaboration with Gorce National Park	71
6. Assessment of the level of collaboration between local governments and Gorce National Park with special focus on tourism and recreation issues	72
7. Discussion	72
8. Conclusions	74
References	74

## 1. Introduction

National parks are very attractive to tourists. At the same time, national parks are protected areas and are run by gminas (administrative region of the 3<sup>rd</sup> order), poviats (administrative region of the 2<sup>nd</sup> order) and voivodships (administrative region of the 1<sup>st</sup> order). Local governments are often interested in the development of tourism and recreation, which help local residents earn additional income.

The purpose of the paper is to describe actions taken by the Gorce National Park Authority and designed to help tourism and recreation develop in the area, identify areas of collaboration with local governments, assess the collaboration efforts, identify problem areas, and identify development directions in the region.

The paper is divided into three distinct sections: (a) discussion of the study area of Gorce National Park and its surrounding gminas and poviats called its fringe zone; (b) assessment of the degree of collaboration between the Park and local governments on issues related to the development of tourism; (c) final discussion of relevant issues.

## 2. Material and research methods

The research was based on paper survey data. The survey contained a series of question sequences designed to help attain established survey goals. Research goals were translated into a list of pertinent questions. The choice of sample was determined using criteria deemed appropriate in this type of research. The survey forms were delivered to gminas and poviats offices in the Gorce National Park region. In order to better understand the issues relevant to the Park, the Director of the Park was interviewed several times. Tourist traffic data were also analysed. Primary source materials including planning documents were used as well. The documents offered a glimpse of the social, economic and spatial issues affecting the region of interest.

## 3. Gorce National Park – location, general characteristics, tourism

Gorce National Park encompasses the central and northeastern part of the Gorce Mountains. It is located in Limanowa powiat and Nowy Targ powiat in Małopolskie voivodship. The Park includes parts of

**Table 1.** Area of Gorce National Park by gminas (in hectares) as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010

Gmina	A	B
Niedźwiedź	2,994	42
Kamienica	1,314	19
Mszana Dolna	1,161	16
Ochotnica Dolna	963	14
Nowy Targ	598	9

Explanation: A – area; b – percentage

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Gorce National Park

five gminas: Niedźwiedź, Kamienica, Mszana Dolna, Ochotnica Dolna, Nowy Targ (Fig. 1, Table 1).

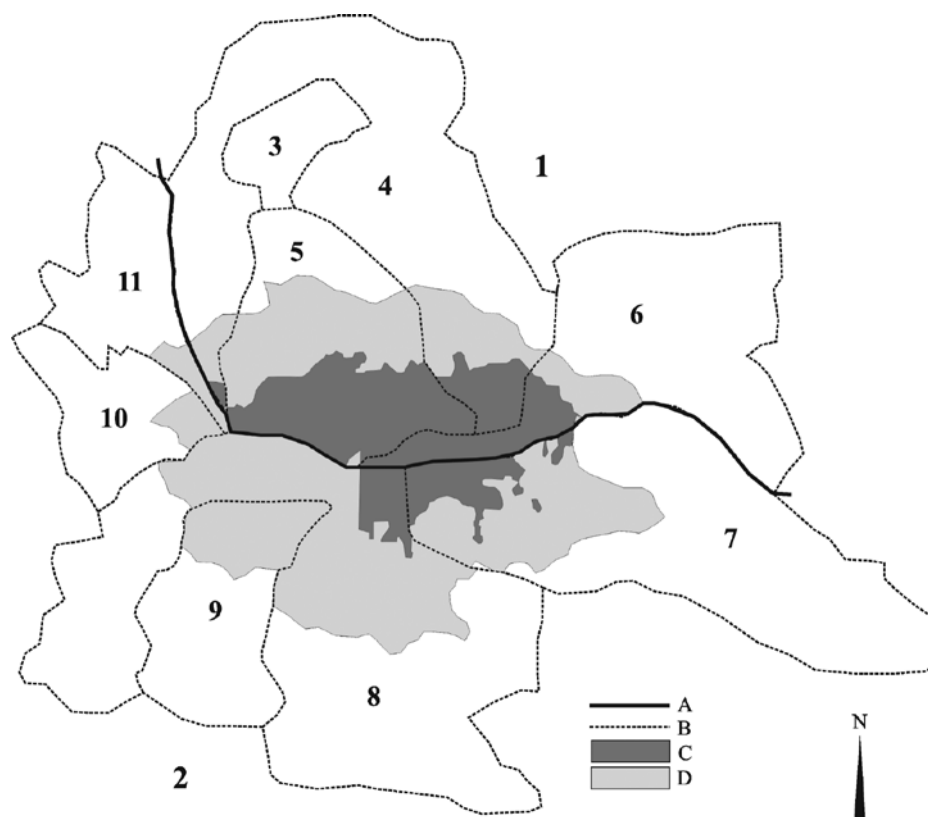
The Park was established in 1981. It later became a part of Natura 2000 – a government conservation programme. Table 2 lists key information about the Park.

The fundamental purpose of a national park is to protect the natural environment. Gorce National Park aims to protect the remnants of Carpathian virgin forests, high mountain meadows, local flora and fauna as well as local natural environmental processes. The Park also aims to protect the natural mountain landscape and local cultural heritage. It offers a network of foot trails, bike trails, horse trails, and educational paths. All of the Park's tourist offers are governed by Directive No. 11 issued by the Minister of the Environment on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2010. The Directive instructs that certain locations in the Park be set aside for scientific, educational, cultural,

**Table 2.** Basic information about Gorce National Park as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010

Year established	1981
Total area	7,030 ha (97% in main section, 3% in 15 enclaves)
Including:	
Full protection	3,611.07 ha
Active protection	2,882.51 ha
Landscape protection	536.27 ha
Fringe zone	16,647.00 ha – with the largest section found in Nowy Targ gmina (5,818.64 ha)
Land ownership	6,560 ha – Department of the Treasury (Park Management) 6.1 ha – Department of the Treasury (other) 464.7 ha – Private property and other

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Gorce National Park



**Fig. 1.** Gorce National Park

Explanation: A – powiat’s boundary; B – gmina’s boundary; C – Gorce National Park area; D – Gorce National Park fringe zone; 1 – Limanowa powiat; 2 – Nowy Targ powiat; 3 – Mszana Dolna town; 4 – Mszana Dolna rural area; 5 – Niedźwiedź gmina; 6 – Kamienica gmina; 7 – Ochotnica Dolna gmina; 8 – Nowy Targ rural area; 9 – Nowy Targ town; 10 – Rabka rural area; 11 – Rabka town

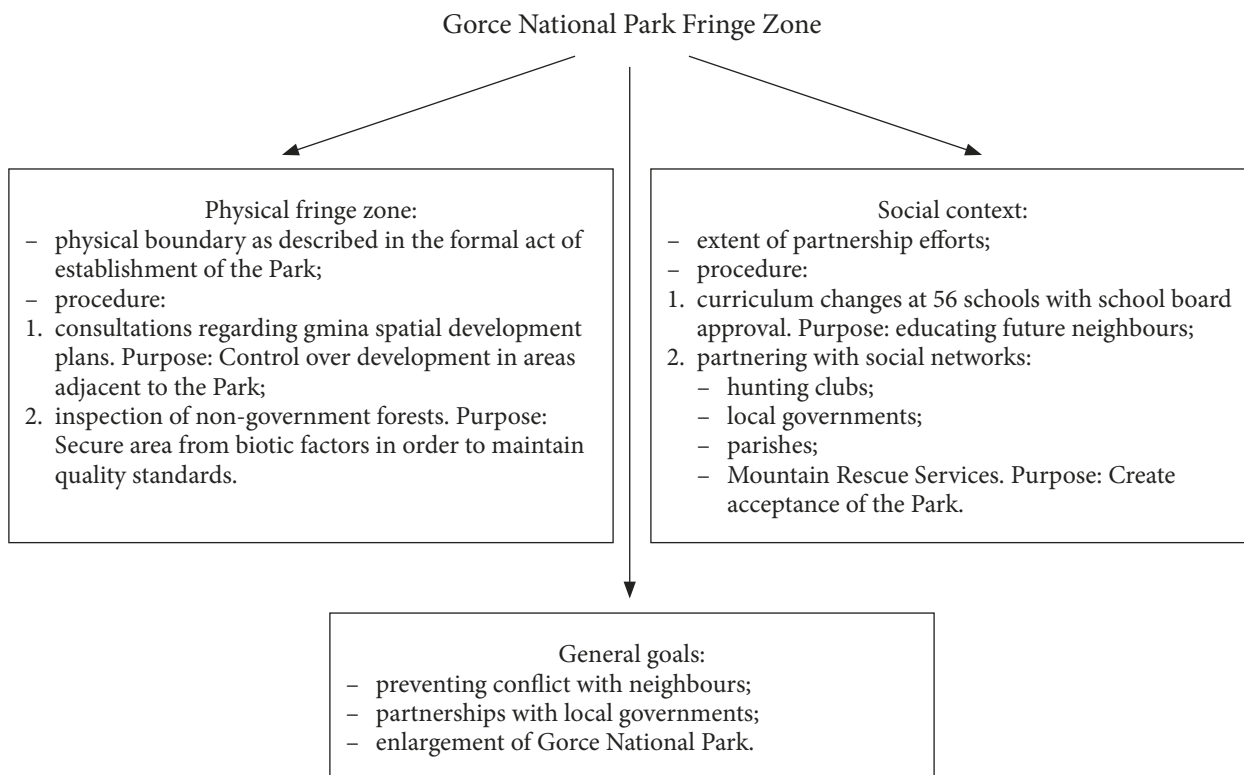
Source: Own elaboration based on [www.gorcanskipark.pl/page,art,id,16,kategoria,GPN\\_w\\_liczbach.html](http://www.gorcanskipark.pl/page,art,id,16,kategoria,GPN_w_liczbach.html)

tourist, and recreational purposes. Each site is assigned a maximum number of visitors per day and its terms of use are defined in the Appendix to Directive No. 77 issued by the Minister of the Environment on 17<sup>th</sup> December 2010 for the protection period from 2011 to 2012.

Another key issue is the concept of a social context the accepts the Park as an important part of society (Fig. 2). This context evolves via environmental education geared towards the local population. Special educational programmes are created for young people who live next to the Park. According to Tomaszewicz and Gruszczyk (2001: 86), ‘Adults learn that the Park is a positive element of local society. The Park makes an effort to help local residents protect the natural environment as well as develop tourist and recreational attractions. The Park also works with local governments, local civic associations and private individuals involved in any way with Park-related activities’. The Park also serves as a workplace for local residents.

Fifty local residents were employed by the Park as of 1<sup>st</sup> January 2011.

The Environmental Protection Act of 16<sup>th</sup> April 2004 (Ustawa z dnia 16 kwietnia 2004 r. o ochronie przyrody. Dz. U. 2004 nr 92 poz. 880.) states the following: ‘The Park is to serve scientific, educational, cultural, tourist, recreational, and sports-related purposes in a manner that does not exert a negative impact on the natural environment in the Park’. Walking, biking, horse-riding, and skiing are permitted in the Park, which offers a number of marked tourist trails, bike trails, educational paths, horse trails, and ski trails. National parks are areas that may be properly used for recreational purposes characterised by a set of behaviours associated with time away from work as well as time dedicated to rest and social and cultural purposes (Różycki, 2009: 18). It is important to note that – unlike tourism – recreation is something that may be done at home. Tables 3 describes the tourist infrastructure in Gorce National Park.



**Fig. 2.** Gorce National Park Fringe Zone

Source: Tomaszewicz, Gruszczyk, 2001: 81

**Table 3.** Tourist volume, infrastructure and tourist trails (in km) in Gorce National Park as of 31<sup>st</sup> December 2010

A	B	C	D	E
2	3	1.5	155.3	80,000
I	II	III	IV	V
63.5	38.7	62.9	55.4	53.1

Explanation: A – campsites; B – rain shelters; C – ski routes (in km); D – tourist, walking and educational trails (km); E – tourist volume; I – tourist trails; II – walking trails; III – horse trails; IV – bike trails; V – educational trails

Source: Own elaboration based on data from Gorce National Park

The maximum number of visitors at each designated site in Gorce National Park has been established. In the case of tourist trails, it is an average of 35 visitors per one kilometre of trail. In the case of bike trails, it is 3 individuals per one kilometre of trail. In the case of horse trails, it is 3 individuals per 2 kilometres of trail. About 80,000 tourists visit the Park every year. The maximum capacity of all the tourist trails and roads in Gorce National Park is 2,380 individuals per day. At this time, tourist volume peaks at about 50% of capacity (Popko-Tomasiewicz, 2000: 48). Almost 50% of tourists start their excursion through the Park

in the town of Koninki. Other key characteristics include: (a) almost 68% of Park visitors are individual tourists coming for a one-day excursion; (b) 45% of Park visitors indicated that being close to nature was a reason for visiting; (c) most tourists walk across the Park (96–98%) while a few ride bikes (2–4%); (d) most Park visitors came from the following three voivodships: Małopolskie (61%), Mazowieckie (13%), Śląskie (8%) (Popko-Tomasiewicz, 2007: 15–17).

Research has shown that it is necessary to reduce tourist traffic in the Koninki area and to improve the quality of several sections of trail. Tourists have indicated that more rest areas are needed as well as more educational and informational features (Popko-Tomasiewicz, 2007: 17).

#### **4. Gorce National Park – location, general characteristics, tourism, local governments**

Gorce National Park is located in five gminas and two poviats. The total population of the five gminas is 62,075. Table 4 shows selected demographic and economic data for the five gminas.

**Table 4.** Selected demographic and economic data (2009) for the five gminas where Gorce National Park is located

Gmina	Powiat	A	B	C	D	E
Niedźwiedz	Limanowa	74	6,996	94	11.7	374
Kamienica	Limanowa	95	7,496	79	6.1	438
Mszana Dolna (rural gmina)	Limanowa	170	16,816	99	4.9	1,007
Ochotnica Dolna	Nowy Targ	141	8,108	57	10.3	438
Nowy Targ (rural gmina)	Nowy Targ	208	22,659	109	5.3	1,244

Explanation: A – area (km<sup>2</sup>); B – population; C – population density per km<sup>2</sup>; D – population growth rate; E – number of entities of national economy

Source: Own elaboration based on data available at [www.stat.gov.pl](http://www.stat.gov.pl)

While areas surrounding the Park are rural in nature, they are also very attractive to tourists. The reasons for this include attractive natural spaces, interesting manmade features and easily accessible accommodation. The five gminas feature 21 hotels and bed and breakfast establishments, which yields a total of 1,297 hotel beds. Mszana Dolna gmina and Nowy Targ gmina feature the largest number of facilities. So-called agro-tourist establishments are an important part of the tourist infrastructure in the region. On the other hand, there are not very many eating establishments in the area and little effort is made to advertise regional dishes – although there are some unique dishes in the area. Other attractions include a large number of tourist trails and ski lifts that help the region attract visitors. Some tourists come to the region simply to relax while others wish to learn more about the local culture and landscape. Regional folklore plays an important role in the tourist offer of the five Park-area gminas.

According to the Central Statistical Office, the five gminas of interest provided a total of 67,125 hotel stays in 2009. This was equivalent to over 13,600 visitors including almost 700 foreign visitors.

## 5. Local government collaboration with Gorce National Park

Park authorities work with local governments on a number of levels in order to meet the primary goal of environmental protection. Local environmental studies and local spatial management studies that in some way affect the Park and its fringe zone must include consultations with the Park's director. The purpose of the consultations is to make sure that plans based on such studies do not adversely affect the Park's ability to protect the natural environment (Ustawa z dnia 16 kwietnia 2004 r. o ochronie przyrody. Dz. U. 2004 nr 92 poz. 880).

Other forms of collaboration are also possible. For example, 1.25 ha of land was sold to a developer who plans to build a geothermal pool complex in Poręba Wielka. Geological work is now being done at the site. The Park has also been working with local governments in a joint effort to obtain funds for a new wastewater treatment plant.

One mission of a national park is to educate the general public. This mission is accomplished via a joint effort with local governments and local residents. Educational programmes target both tourists and local residents including teachers and students at local schools. The Park's educational mission is accomplished using existing educational trails. Educational events, workshops, contests, and exhibitions are also organised. In some cases, gmina authorities participate in these types of events. Other activities include training programmes for individuals running so-called agro-tourist farms as well as bed and breakfast establishments. There is also a library with about 3,000 books. In addition, the Park issues a number of publications including a magazine called 'Salamandra', which is co-financed by the Powiat Government of Limanowa.

Other publications include brochures on educational trails and other promotional materials. The Park often provides free content for tourist guides published by local gminas. Various types of promotional activities are coordinated with gmina officials. This includes a tourist fair attended by Park officials and local government officials. As a result of various collaborative efforts, tourist information is available on the Park website, gmina websites and powiat websites. The Park is available for use both by tourists and local residents.

A key issue that the Park has to deal with is the conflict between tourist and recreational goals and environmental protection goals. One problem area is the incursion of individuals driving snowmobiles and four-wheel-drive vehicles. Neither types of vehicles is



permitted in the Park. A number of steps are being taken to eliminate this problem. The next problematic issue is ski lifts in the region. Lift operators want to refurbish existing lifts and build new ones. The Park does not necessarily object to modernisation efforts. Some of these efforts are co-financed by the European Union. This includes a project called 'Protecting the environment in Gorce National Park by modernising its tourist infrastructure – Stage One – 2009–2012'. The project is now underway and so far it has produced a 'Plan for a comprehensive visual information system and small tourist infrastructure in Gorce National Park'.

## 6. Assessment of the level of collaboration between local governments and Gorce National Park with special focus on tourism and recreation issues

Local governments are generally pleased with the level of collaboration offered by Gorce National Park. Niedźwiedź gmina (42% of the Park) and one other gmina ranked collaboration with the Park as average. According to a survey of local government officials, the principal areas of collaboration are: local spatial management plans, environmental protection, fringe zone issues, promotional events, educational events, projects such as geothermal pools and forest management in areas that do not belong to the national

government. All the gminas studied possess local spatial management plans created and amended together with Gorce National Park. Each gmina also has a local social and economic development strategy. Most of these documents involve various issues associated with the Park including tourism and recreation.

All of the gminas studied possess a common tourism development strategy. In most cases, local government officials work with Park officials to create tourism and recreational development materials and strategies including folders, guidebooks, ads, events, contests, and exhibitions. Kamienica gmina and Nowy Targ gmina do not participate in this type of collaborative work. Two other gminas work together on fire prevention and other issues in the fringe zone. All of the gminas studied have representatives in the Gorce National Park Council. On the other hand, Park officials often participate in Gminas Council meetings. Only Niedźwiedź gmina has expressed concerns about the presence of the Park in the region. The gmina's officials identified a number of benefits of having the Park in the region but also some downsides (Table 5).

## 7. Discussion

National parks are found within the jurisdiction of local governments, which creates the need for collaboration. According to M. Baranowska-Janota and D. Ptaszycka-Jackowska (1987), national parks work

**Table 5.** Advantages and disadvantages of the presence of Gorce National Park – views of local government officials

Gmina/Powiat	A	B
Ochotnica	Environmental protection	Limits on development
Kamienica	Ease of access to funds for ecological development	Tougher regulations in forest management and the construction industry – especially in the fringe zone
Mszana Dolna	Easy access to a wider range of environmental education programmes for young people	Tougher development laws in the Park and near the Park
Niedźwiedź	Greater tourist attractiveness of the gmina	Difficulties in the real estate planning and development process
Nowy Targ	The Park attracts a larger number of tourists to the area	–
Nowy Targ (powiat)	The protection of attractive tourist areas helps in their preservation	A very large fringe zone that makes development difficult
Limanowa (powiat)	Promotional efforts	Limits on development

Explanation: A – advantages; B – disadvantages

Source: Own elaboration based on survey research

with local communities on a variety of issues including administration, land ownership, overall function, and ecology (Baranowska-Janota, Ptaszycka-Jackowska, 1987: 62). In a nationwide research study, national park administrators rated collaboration with local governments at 3.47 on a scale from 1 to 5 (where 1 = no collaboration, 5 = very good collaboration) (Ginalski, 2009). Gorce National Park also rated collaboration with local governments rather well.

However, the gmina where most of the Park is located rated its collaboration with the Park lower. Nevertheless, gmina governments did identify a number of tangible benefits resulting from the presence of the Park including increased tourist attractiveness, increased tourist traffic, environmental protection, and its direct effect – a reduction in the environmental degradation of attractive tourist areas. Research has also shown that local governments perceive certain intangible benefits from the presence of the Park. This includes general social and economic benefits (Zielińska, 2007) such as job creation as well as the development of a sustainable tourist industry and an environment-related service sector (Zielińska, 2007: 167). Social benefits include weekend rest and relaxation outdoors, the promotion of healthy lifestyles and the idea that individuals are responsible for their own health (Zielińska, 2007: 171).

Research has shown that tourists who visit national parks in Poland believe that tourism strongly affects the way national parks and their surrounding areas do business, which in turn affects their rate of economic development (Gałązka, 2009: 126). The same tourist survey indicated that only 16% of tourists at national parks did not take advantage of any services offered by local residents (Gałązka, 2009: 128). The same survey also indicated that tourists believe that national park officials and local governments are responsible for tourism development in areas with national parks (Gałązka, 2009: 129–130).

Surveys of national park area residents (Drożdż-Korbyła, Górecki, 2002) indicate that the most common benefits of having a national park in the area are as follows: a clean environment, peace and quiet, a place to relax, and economic benefits in some cases as well (Drożdż-Korbyła, Górecki, 2002: 56). The last point is also true of Gorce National Park.

Tourism is appreciated by Park authorities, local governments, area residents, and tourists themselves. Each group of stakeholders has the opportunity to collaborate with other groups of stakeholders at a number of levels. This may include managing tourist traffic, spatial management and collaborative planning

for future tourist traffic (Radziejowski, 2002: 66–67). Environmental education and promotional efforts are also most successful when planned by a variety of stakeholders. Perhaps the most important issue is that of tourist traffic management.

Close to 80,000 tourists visit Gorce National Park every year. The intensity of tourist traffic varies substantially over time and in spatial terms, which leads to excess traffic at certain locations. Changes are being proposed to reduce tourist traffic in the most heavily visited areas. These include offering alternative sites and routes as well as changes in the fee structure. The construction of a new recreational complex in Wielka Poręba should alter tourist traffic patterns in the next few years. This type of new infrastructure should be accompanied by a local or regional strategy of sustainable tourism development. The Park should either initiate the creation of such a strategy or at least be a partner in the strategy creation process.

Sensible spatial planning is also very important. There is a large array of spatial planning models suitable for areas in need of environmental protection and includes the concentration-dispersion model for tourist traffic, the model of permissible changes, the sustainable tourism model and the regional recreational system model. The last model includes subsystems such as local government institutions that actually run the system. This model not only covers events inside the system but also 'zones of contact' with other subsystems such as neighbouring areas. Another assumption behind this model is that tourism-related infrastructure can coexist with the natural environment (Warszyńska, Jackowski, 1978: 294; Domin et al., 2009).

In addition to the practical models mentioned above, environmental ethics is a key part of tourism management and includes the following points: (a) the current level of human pressure on the natural environment is too high; (b) in light of the above, human activity must change, and these changes ought to affect the economy, technology and mindset of human society; (c) changes in mindset ought to reflect the quality of life and not merely the standard of living; (d) both human and non-human development on Earth possesses intrinsic value, the value of non-human forms of life is independent of their utility to humans; (e) the diversity and richness of different forms of life possess their own value and contribute to human and non-human development on Earth; (f) humans do not have the right to reduce the richness of non-human life except when necessary to meet basic human needs (Pociask-Karteczka, 2010: 6–7).

## 8. Conclusions

In order to meet tourist and recreational needs, Gorce National Park offers a variety of carefully managed foot trails, bike trails, horse trails, ski trails, and educational trails. Areas adjacent to the Park need a strategy for tourist development that does not harm the natural environment or the cultural heritage of the region, while meeting the needs of local residents. The nature of the region suggests that rural-type tourism should be able to flourish – this includes so-called agro-tourism, cultural tourism and sports-oriented tourism.

Gorce National Park and local governments are working together to help recreational tourism develop in the region. Both sides generally agree that this process is going well. The minor conflicts that do exist tend to focus on local spatial management. Nevertheless, the extent of collaboration between the Park and local governments could be even greater, especially in the realm of tourist traffic management in the Park and agro-tourism in the Park's fringe zone. Tourism development ought to follow the principles of sustainable growth based on the input of local residents. It is desirable to create a regional partnership for tourism development based on the Park as a chief attraction in the area. The gminas where the Park is located still need a comprehensive marketing strategy that would promote the tourist offer of the region. Local villages also need to develop their own recreational areas. Finally, it is important to note that the development of tourism and recreation can be consistent with a balanced approach to meeting the needs of local communities while protecting the natural environment. This includes changes in land management in areas adjacent to national parks.

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