**IMT School for Advanced Studies, Lucca**

Lucca, Italy

# Wilderness Production in the Southern Carpathian Mountains – Towards a Political Ecology of 'Untouched Nature'

Ph.D. Program in Analysis and Management of Cultural Heritage

XXXI Cycle

**By George-Adrian Iordăchescu**

**2019**

**The dissertation of George-Adrian Iordăchescu is approved.**

Program Coordinator: Emanuele Pellegrini,
IMT School of Advanced Studies Lucca, IT

Supervisor: Linda Bertelli,
IMT School of Advanced Studies Lucca, IT

Co-Supervisor: Bram Büscher,
Wageningen University, NL

**The dissertation of George-Adrian Iordăchescu has been reviewed by:**

Eunice Blavascunas,
Whitman College, US

Mihnea Tănăsescu,
Vrije Universiteit Brussel, BE

**IMT School for Advanced Studies Lucca**

**2019**

To Lucian,

... for  all the time I was too far.

# Table of Contents

# List of Figures

# Vita

## Education

**PhD Candidate**
Analysis and Management of Cultural Heritage,
IMT School for Advanced Studies Lucca, Italy (since November 2015)

**MA in Social Anthropology**, Specialization in Urban and Global Studies
Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology,
Central European University, Budapest, Hungary (2014)

**BA in History**, Specialization in Modern and Contemporary History
Department of History and Philosopy,
Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania (2013)

**BA in Sociology**
Department of Sociology and Social Work,
Babes-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania (2012)

## International Exchange

**Visiting Researcher** (April 2017 – July 2017)
Department of Social Sciences, Subdivision Sociology of Development and Change
Wageningen University, Wageningen, The Netherlands

## Professional Experience

**Post-Doctoral Research Fellow** (August 2019 - )
BIOSEC Project, Department of Politics and International Relations
The University of Sheffield, UK

**Doctoral Researcher** (June 2016 – September 2017)
Associative Environmentality Project, Institute of Sociology
Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania

**Researcher** (July 2015 – December 2016)
ECOSS Project, Fundation Conservation Carpathia
Brasov, Romania

# Abstract

This dissertation addresses a current interest in wild nature protection in Romania.
As the phenomenon is spreading within the European periphery, this research aims to understand the discursive and material production of wilderness by examining the development of a legal framework for 'virgin forest'[1] protection, and by scrutinizing the creation of a private wilderness reserve. Building on recent political ecology scholarship, and adopting a critical realist position it asks: which are the most important societal and political dynamics championing wilderness protection? How does a strict protection regime change rural livelihoods? And, how do local people mobilize against conservation projects aiming to strictly preserve an 'untouched nature'?

Critical discourse analysis is used to investigate the emergence of 'virgin forests' as a political object. The creation of an iconic wilderness reserve is approached with the extended case method and investigated through ethnographic research in the municipalities around the Făgăraș Mountains (Transylvanian Alps), Romania.
I argue that virgin forests receive legal protection as an abstracted object detached from its historical co-created nature. Further, I show that access regulation and exclusive ownership are the main techniques for securing wilderness reserves.

By drawing comparisons with other Eastern European projects, I conclude that at least for the Romanian case, the current ways of protecting wilderness not only disrupt local livelihoods but also erase a rich environmental history. The dissertation closes with a few recommendations for a more convivial type of conservation based on already existing historical environmental governance institutions.

[1] I will use the term 'virgin forests' to refer to old growth forests throughout this dissertation since this is the preferred term under the Romanian law (*Ministerial Order 3.397 of 10/09/2012, Ministerial Order 2.525 of 30/12/2016)* and international legal framework (*The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians)*. I will engage critically with this term in Chapters 3 and 4 and I will show throughout the dissertation that what has been introduced as 'virgin' or 'untouched' nature is understood by law as the absence of forestry management, while the conservation and public discourse extended this understanding to a complete absence of human use, present or historical.

# Chapter 1 Introduction

## 1.1 What is the Problem?

### *Problem Statement*

This dissertation investigates the rising environmentalism in Eastern Europe and the construction of the Romanian Carpathian Mountains into a new wilderness frontier of Europe. The analysis examines the political and societal dynamics that augment this interest and it explores its consequences.

This year (2019), Europe celebrates a decade since wilderness protection became officially an issue of political concern. The European Parliament's Resolution of 2009 set on the public agenda strategies such as rewilding, species reintroduction and a whole new conservation ethic for the European continent. My research examines some of the most notable developments of this process. While the progresses achieved by wilderness protection have been widely discussed by natural scientists, its societal impacts have remained mostly under-explored. I believe this not to be by chance. Using a political ecology approach this dissertation aims to explore the proposed separation between wild nature and its human use and history, as it has been envisioned and practised throughout recent conservation policies and initiatives on the ground. It uses critical discourse analysis to expose the power dynamics involved in the assessment of wild nature in Romania. It also uses qualitative methods to explore the creation of the largest wilderness conservancy on the continent situated in the Southern Carpathians – the Carpathia Project proposed and implemented by the Foundation Conservation Carpathia. Eventually, it deploys an undisciplined methodology to inquire into the changing relations between local communities and their co-produced environment.

As the European Union will launch in 2020 a decade centred on ecosystem restoration, the thesis hopes to offer valuable insights to make the process a fairer one.

### *Wilderness and the return of wildlife*

On June 19, 2019, the administration of Gelderland Province posted on its Twitter account footage of the first wolf cubs born in the Netherlands after more than 150 years. The internet was taken by storm. The public has been waiting for this moment since scientists from Wageningen University announced in early April that DNA samples certify the presence of wolves around Hoge Veluwe National Park. The event was celebrated in the international media as another successful episode of a series of charismatic species' returns in different parts of Europe (BBC, 2019). Wildlife supporters suggested once again that nature if left to develop freely, can show incredible comebacks. For almost a decade the European conservation debates have been centred on the protection of large tracts of wild nature, further discussed as wilderness. This discussion received the full support of the European Parliament in 2009 and was translated into soft law in 2013 when the European Commission backed operational guidelines for wilderness in the Natura 2000 protected areas. But while in the West wolves and bears are celebrated, genetically examined and given names, Eastern European local communities show less enthusiastic responses. Recently, Eastern Europe took an environmentalist turn: wilderness narratives found here a fertile ground and started being implemented as conservation enterprises, ecotourism and green business projects, sometimes with contested social consequences. Stable or recovering wildlife populations, intact habitats and large tracts of old-growth forests have been just some of the reasons for the development of wilderness protection programs.

At the same time, this spectacular wildlife comeback has inspired the development of rewilding, a self-proclaimed progressive approach to conservation that proposes species reintroduction, ecosystem restoration and passive management of degraded landscapes[2]. Although not entirely new, the European rewilding approach stands out among similar proposals (e.g. American rewilding, British rewilding) for its orientation towards the future, as opposed to nostalgic references to long-gone natures. Currently operating more

[2] Rewilding Europe remains to date the most visible and active organization in the rewilding movement. A brief outline of the vision they promote in various regions of the continent can be consulted here https://rewildingeurope.com/what-is-rewilding/, last accessed 29 July 2019

than a dozen projects, Rewilding Europe, an NGO based in the Netherlands is leading the narrative about an autonomous nature that needs to heal itself. It is still early to appreciate the success of this approach, but it can be surely said that if one wants to investigate rewilding projects, they should search for them in the European periphery, most notably in Eastern Europe. [3]

Words such as *nature's ways*, - *healing*, - *recovering*, - *comeback* or - *return* are not accidentally chosen. They allude to an autonomous, separated and ontologically different nature – from human beings, that could become our ally only if we grant it enough space and strict protection. This topic is not foreign to anyone who has been following recent global conservation debates. 2016 was the year when biologist superstar Edward Wilson launched the proposal to reserve half of the planet for nature if we want to stop ongoing extinction and survive as a human species: *'the only solution to the Sixth Extinction is to increase the area of inviolable natural reserves to half the surface of the Earth, or greater'* (p. 167). His book, *Half-Earth. Our Planet's Fight for Life*, not only became a bestseller, but it also attracted harsh criticism from political ecologists and other scientists concerned about the injustice such an approach would entail (Kopnina, 2016; Büscher et al, 2017; Schleicher et al, 2019). Half-Earth debate, as it is currently referred to, reignited convictions about overpopulation, planetary boundaries and other Malthusian ideas that should become obsolete in a world where social and environmental injustice is rampant. In Europe, Half-Earthers teamed up with scientists supporting *land-sparing*, the idea that land should be set aside for conservation purposes only, against those advocating for *land-sharing* and the celebration of rich biocultural systems (Merckx & Pereira, 2015). As I will show in this dissertation, echoes of this debate reached Romania as well and took various guises from strict protection of virgin forests to a proposed moratorium on logging and the privatization of nature for conservation purposes.

[3] A more detailed account on European rewilding is provided in Chapter 2, section 2.2 dealing with definitions

### *More than abandonment: justice, access, and democratic environmental governance*

When Rewilding Europe and its collaborators announced its vision for a wilder continent, the idea of land abandonment in rural areas was announced as a problem that had to be tackled but also as an opportunity (Wild10, 2015). Every single one of their projects aimed to restore nature in lands where humans supposedly left or about which they don't care anymore. The wilderness movement, on the other hand, celebrates a wild nature that has purportedly never been touched. Public campaigns speak about abandoned places or natures where humans have always been absent, and where wildlife can come back as if it had just been temporarily missing[4]. This kind of simplistic discourse obscures many social and political processes and casts unrealistic expectations regarding the agency of many species (Vasile, 2018).

In the post-socialist Eastern European context, successive murky land restitution and subsequent fragmentation are some of the processes underlining land abandonment. Massive outmigration, poor economic opportunities and the lack of proper infrastructure are other harsh realities currently faced by rural populations and considered opportunities by some conservation projects.

On the other hand, strict wildlife conservation measures have rapidly led to the expansion of wildlife populations such as brown bear and wolf (Rozylowicz et al, 2011; Pop et al, 2012; Pop et al, 2018) While this represents an asset for ecotourism operators and a joy for their predominantly white affluent western audience, for local villagers it mainly represents a security threat. While a country like Slovakia still sets culling quotas for bear management, in Romania there are no active measures to prevent human-wildlife conflict, although it counts around 6,500 brown bears. To put things into perspective, the entire bear population roaming freely between France and Spain amounts to only 15 individuals (European Parliament, 2018). Moreover, the development of mass tourism, sometimes seen as the only prospect for the countryside, pushes problematic bears towards less

[4] This discourse is condensed in marketing campaigns such as the Rewilding Europe presentation video, available here https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xyir6xQsQr0, last accessed 29 July 2019.

touristic and economically underdeveloped areas. It is here that wilderness and rewilding proponents find their revered autonomous nature.

Periodically, locals take matters into their own hands and stop living up to the tourists' expectations of a noble peasant in harmony with nature. Their attitudes regarding bears and forests have not once been considered unfriendly by Western standards. On the other hand, the local communities of the Southern Carpathian Mountains, the focus of this research, are acutely dependent on wood to heat their homes over winter, sometimes even for cooking their meals. For various reasons, among which timber market monopoly and corruption, firewood crises affect parts of the local population every couple of years. In Romania only some families own their own forest, the rest have customary rights to timber or have to buy it on the market. For some groups, none of these alternatives are available, either lacking rights or money, so they have to find a way to survive over the winter, which often means harvesting wood through informal arrangements. In such cases, sometimes they suffer severe sanctions as poachers, other times they become stigmatized as forest wrongdoers in the media, which is eager to depict an endless deforestation spectacle. While many mitigation mechanisms have been adopted to halt this issue, illegal logging also constituted the perfect justification to demand draconian legal protection and stricter conservation.

In Romania, public opinion considers the state to be either a bad administrator of the natural resources with vile interests for extraction or a passive actor, indifferently gazing at the degradation of the environment. In this context, the gap is filled either by strong civil society organizations or by private actors and initiatives. This dissertation follows one such private foundation embarked on a mission to do the state's job – The Foundation Conservation Carpathia (further on FCC). The foundation aims to build Europe's greatest wilderness reserve and vows to keep large areas under private property in order to ensure perpetual conservation, safeguarding it from changing governmental whims. In these areas, access to some resources is restricted for many, and ecotourism is promoted as the only development alternative for local communities.

On the national level, all these developments are backed by expert knowledge or pushed forward by technocratic rule. As some legal frameworks for strict protection evade democratic deliberation, many locally interested parties are absent from the debate. Political scientists appreciate that this is a feature of post-socialist environmental decision making (Vesalon, 2017).

## 1.2 Contribution

This dissertation advances the idea that what we see as a rising interest in protecting wild nature in Europe can be interpreted as a project of creating a green internal periphery. I back this statement by studying recent legal developments, civic activism, and transnational campaigns, all scrutinized with a mixed methodology informed by a political ecology approach. While the analyzed processes are far from coming to an end, I argue that an analysis of regional networks and local experimentations could bring valuable lessons in further shaping conservation towards a convivial future.

On the one hand, this research aims to identify common patterns among apparently disparate wilderness projects currently unfolding or planned to start in the near future. From the *European Green Belt Initiative*[5] to the *Save the Blue Heart of Europe*[6] campaign a constant set of assumptions about the value of an allegedly 'untouched nature' are promoted and reshaped in order to advance a further separation of nature from human use. Although separate Eastern European rewilding programs and strict conservation initiatives have been explored before, this dissertation is the first one that aims to put the puzzle together.

On the other hand, my work offers a first-hand analysis of how the wilderness narrative is translated on the ground. I do this by studying the creation and development of the legal framework for virgin forest protection in Romania, which I interpret as part of a wider

[5] Brief presentation on https://www.euronatur.org/en/what-we-do/campaigns-and-initiatives/green-belt-europe/, last accessed 29 July 2019
[6] More details on https://www.balkanrivers.net/, last accessed 29 July 2019

truth regime about autonomous nature. I also describe and contextualize the Carpathia project - the largest project of its kind in Europe, aiming to set up a private wilderness reserve in the Southern Carpathian Mountains. By bringing forward these two cases I aim to localize what is usually considered an abstract scholarly or political debate – the protection of wild nature as separated from human history.

A strong focus of this research – being at the same time its main empirical contribution – is on how local communities are affected and respond to strict conservation projects. In this sense, I explore ethnographically recent changes in locals' livelihoods, their resistance and negotiation attempts as well as the opportunities they seized when faced with an unexpected foreign conservation initiative. For better or for worse, the private wilderness reserve is here to stay, and locals despite their direct and indirect opposition will have to find the energy and resources to continue asserting their values and visions for the future of their co-produced environment. I argue that this phenomenon is only the first one from a series of green enclosures planned to reshape conservation in Eastern Europe.

However, the dissertation engages cautiously with the current theoretical debates. I do not think that global debates about the financialization of nature, the militarization of conservation and the rise of fictitious natural commodities should be uncritically transferred to the Eastern European context (yet). Rather, I propose to look at recent post-socialist and regional neoliberal transformations such as land restitution and fragmentation, massive outmigration, rural-urban disparities, land abandonment and the cheapening of nature, all processes of which wilderness projects take advantage. Many of the rewilding and wilderness initiatives observed not only fail to address social problems, but they actively contribute to deepen dispossession, land abandonment and the demise of traditional land-use practices.

This being said, I place my dissertation within a scholarly debate investigating frictions between community conservation and private capital investments in the protection of nature. I bring forward an Eastern European case of green grabbing and I believe that

there are many similarities with analogous projects observed in Chile, Argentina and elsewhere, but I also contend that this green securitization happens within a particular historical context which makes it unique. Moreover, I hope to add complexity to the ongoing political debates about the role of local people like farmers, shepherds and small entrepreneurs in doing conservation. These issues are currently debated as the European Commission prepares a new Common Agricultural Policy and a New Green Deal, and as the UN works on a new draft for the future Convention for Biological Diversity and not lastly, as IPBES advocates for more support for indigenous communities in their 2019 General Assessment.

What I finally propose, is a turn from a strict conservation approach to a convivial one. In Eastern Europe and elsewhere on the continent's periphery we already have historical institutions and democratic governance regimes acting as guardians of natural resources such as forests and pastures, fisheries and waterways. Private conservation initiatives often overlap and duplicate their efforts, although wilderness promoters claim to save a people-free nature. Currently, many of these community conserved areas are aligned to the values of other similar institutions under the auspices global initiatives such as the ICCA Consortium. I align my work to others' efforts to advance a convivial conservation model that should recognize and support locals' stewardship, celebrating at the same time the environment as co-produced by local people throughout their history.

## 1.3 Research Questions

The three research questions underlining this dissertation were re-thought during successive fieldwork stages, putting more emphasis on issues identified as being of greater importance. The changing nature of wilderness protection also influenced this rethinking. Eventually, I had to add a fourth question, with a normative character, to propose and respond to a need for change in the way strict conservation is done on the ground.

**1. Which are the most important societal and political dynamics championing wilderness narratives in Eastern Europe?**

Although studied here as a Pan-European project, wilderness protection unfolds differently across geographies and core-periphery relations. I address some of the post-socialist transformations that have influenced the development of wilderness narratives (land restitution and fragmentation, local corruption and patronage, resource privatization). I also look at other more recent neoliberal developments which made Eastern Europe a safe space to land revolutionary projects of wild nature protection (cheapening nature, powerful private actors, and socialization of environmental costs).

**2. How does a strict wilderness protection regime change rural livelihoods in Romania?**

This question is central to the argument of this thesis and it lays at the foundation of this research. In the studied area, different groups depend on various degrees on the surrounding forests and pastures. The ethnography documents both restrictions and opportunities changing locals' livelihoods and their relations with the environment.

**3. How have local communities devised forms of resistance against wilderness protection projects and appropriated the untouched nature narratives**?

Adopting a political ecology approach, I investigate how villagers have worked together and opposed local restrictions instituted by a strict conservation project. Sometimes they managed to negotiate middle grounds, on other occasions we have witnessed violent clashes. Often, old forms of collective action have been revived and mobilized in order to negotiate better conditions for land-use practices.

**4. Which are the lessons to be learned and how would a more just and democratic conservation model look like in the Carpathian context?**

Here, I trespass the boundaries of academic research towards a discussion about a fairer future for conservation in the studied area.

## 1.4 Theoretical framework

This section discusses the theoretical framework informing my analysis. Following the critical realist logic of scientific inquiry, I use different streams of scholarship to propose an explanation mechanism for the research problem. Further steps of this logic, pursued in the next chapters, are the development and evaluation of evidence and finally the interpretation and reporting of the research (Blaikie & Priest 2017). I argue that wilderness protection in Eastern Europe can be confined within a **truth regime** advanced by expert actors and upheld by the state. Within a particular historical context, this truth regime acts towards a **cheapening** of wild nature, meaning imposing restrictions that make nature lose its use-value for the traditional users, which subsequently enters a process of **securitization,** functioning here as a set of **enclosures**. This logic involves exclusive **ownership**, regulation of **access** and further **abstraction** culminating with the creation of green enclosures (i.e. **green grabbing**). One of the solutions to this problem is a radical conservation approach centred on **conviviality**. In short, these are the central concepts of my approach and they will be detailed below.

For practical purposes, I decided to split different bodies of literature in two main clusters. The first one is built around a Foucauldian analysis of power and governmentality and includes scholarship dealing with knowledge production, the role of experts in environmental governance, and the creation of the environmental subjects. The second one tends to include literature conventionally belonging to the field known as political ecology of conservation. Here I engage with works approaching access and enclosures, dispossession and accumulation, securitization of protected areas and the use of technology for conservation purposes. Even though the boundaries between these two clusters are blurry, I incline to analyze the process of protecting virgin forests with the tools offered by the first cluster, and I look at the creation of a wilderness reserve using concepts developed by scholars from the second cluster. Together, these two streams provide appropriate tools to analyze the discursive and material production of a separated wild nature.

### *Wild nature as a regime of truth*

Critical to the creation and development of a legal framework for the protection of wilderness is the national state. The transformations I analyze in relation to state power and discourse have been for the last two decades examined as part of a certain neoliberal governmentality (Luke, 1997; Fletcher, 2014; Prozorov & Rentea 2016). Traditionally, governmentality was proposed by Foucault to understand an assemblage of institutions and practices, procedures of calculation and technologies used to govern a population (Foucault, 2008a:108). Essential for this was an investigation of biopolitics - the modality of circulating and enacting (bio)power to subject individuals through a process of normalization (Foucault, 2008b, 2005). Followers of Foucault have taken these concepts further and applied them to the governing of nature under the banner of environmentality (Luke, 1999; Agrawal, 2005; Fletcher 2017). Agrawal, credited to be one of the first to introduce the term, realized the close relations between power practices shaping human subjectivities and "the emergence of the environment as a domain that requires regulation and protection" (2005: 226). In a similar vein, my analysis of virgin forest protection in Romania follows the institutions and practices of producing knowledge about the untouched character of these complex ecosystems, and the technologies used to enact their protection. Central to this aim is the understanding of the historical conditions of what this dissertation understands as a *wild nature truth regime*. Foucault and others have suggested that truth is historically produced and it should be understood within "a set of rules and constraints divided between true and false discourses and practices" (quoted by Nale & Lawler, 2014:517). As we will see in the case presented by this dissertation, these rules are assessing what is wild (or virgin) and what is not (but still not yet subdued or managed). These rules emerge from a variety of sources: ministerial orders, catalogues, online petitioning, expert studies and technical reports. My task here is to uncover the conditions of this discourse. This is a first step in understanding further the material creation of wilderness through practices of privatization and securitization, also part of a certain type of environmental statehood (Ioris, 2015). As it is investigated within this dissertation the truth regime is not unitary and totally consolidated for the time being. I follow Antonio Ioris in appreciating that the ideological and material attempts by the state to deal with ecological issues are not always coordinated (2015: vii), as explicitly

investigated in the case of virgin forest protection. As the chapters on virgin forests will show, this truth regime is not unitary and constant. Different actors produce and mobilize complementary and even different types of knowledge. For example, we will see that legal norms define virgin forest according to degrees of naturalness and scale, while some powerful conservation organizations refer to them mostly as unique and spectacular ecosystems. Similarly, chapter 3 will show that the way the state sees virgin forests is as rows in an Excel table, but campaigners and NGOs talk about totalizing objects at the landscape or macro-region level. I have chosen to discuss these discourses as being part of the same truth regime because the outcome and expected result of all these power exercises is the same – the strict protection of old-growth forests. In the Romanian case, over the last decade, successive governments have dealt with the protection of these forests differently, from upfront indifference to concrete measures towards strict protection. As for the experts and scientists involved in this process, consensus about a clear definition and indicators is yet hard to achieve (Lund, 2002; Biris & Veen, 2005; Stănciulescu, 2013). Nevertheless, the dissertation analyses all institutional mechanisms, rhetorical devices and scientific production of knowledge about virgin forests as a unique regime of truth producing natures that are valuable and should be saved at all costs, and natures that are not blessed with such fate. Hence the biopolitical character of the process of saving virgin forests.

In line with Turnhout and others, this dissertation argues that knowledge is productive, and it follows how representations about virgin forests impact policy and environmental management (Turnhout, 2018, Turnhout et al, 2019) in nowadays Romania (Vesalon, 2017). This issue has been a constant concern for political ecologists who understood the prevailing role of experts and technocrats in the production of environmental knowledge as a symptom of neoliberal governance (Robbins, 2000; Lave, 2012; Lovbrand, 2015; O'Lear, 2018). As it will be shown in chapter 3, some of the most innovative measures for the assessment and protection of wild nature in Romania were taken by a technocratic government working closely with experts and prominent activists. As the results of this collaboration are in no case non-political (Swyngedow, 2013) the dissertation intends to understand how effective are citizens' forms of participation and which are the adverse

effects of a so-called ‘expertocracy’ (Fischer, 2000). The chapter concludes by saying that a wilderness truth regime operates by further abstracting nature. Further, it proposes that the current conservation frameworks should be in no case left uncontested (Forsyth, 2011; Goldman et al, 2011; Tavares, 2013) both in their local unfolding and in their geopolitical context (Koning et al, 2014; O’Lear, 2018). The development of a legal framework for virgin forest protection in Romania I relevant for the regional tendency of Eastern European governments to engage in strict nature protection as a response to global challenges. The rapid loss of biodiversity, the need to find efficient mechanisms and incentives to promote carbon storage as part of adaptation strategies to climate change are all geopolitical aspects of the Eastern European wilderness momentum. The emerging field of environmental geopolitics proves to be very helpful in offering some analytic tools to make sense of all these developments (O’Lear, 2018). As the analysis will unfold in chapters 3 and 4, the materiality, the embodiment and the practices associated with the wild nature truth regime will be analysed from different angles using sources such as legal documents, social media posts, and artistic interventions.

Without doubt, an important feature of the mentioned truth regime is a narrowing of vision, similar to what Scott described as the emergence of scientific forestry in the 18$^{th}$ century (Scott, 1998). If categories like trees’ age, volume and productivity expressed state’s way of seeing in Scott’s work, here targeted are the size of woodland area, the quantity of deadwood and the lack of any human traces. Expert scientists make these forests legible through a complex set of identification technologies, measurements such as mapping, remote sensing, through field verifications and validations in front of eco-managerial committees. Large tracts of forested lands are thus reterritorialized and assembled as a new valuable resource (Li, 2007; Blavascunas, 2014). Some have termed this type of state intervention as ‘geopower’ (Parenti, 2014), this dissertation follows this view and further fleshes out the political violence and the anti-democratic nature of this process.

To conclude the section, my work proposes to investigate what a wilderness truth regime helps render visible but also what makes invisible. As a new autonomous nature is

imagined, important aspects of environmental history are erased (Franklin, 2002; Manzo, 2009; DeLuca & Demo, 2001) and replaced by spectacular renderings of untouched nature and charismatic wildlife (Igoe, 2013, 2017) which further enter in a process of virtual co-production and circulation (Büscher & Koot, 2017).

### *Towards a political ecology of wilderness*

After having focused on the discursive production of wilderness the attention is directed in chapters 5 and 6 to its material production. First, the dissertation will revisit a long-lasting debate on the meaning and implications of wilderness, understood by many as a colonial project (Guha, 1989; Denevan, 1992; Cronon, 1996; Haila 1997; Havlick, 2006), but also as one predicated on emancipation and hope (Malm, 2018). I join others in reconsidering the regional specificities of wilderness preservation in the European context (Lupp et al., 2011, 2012; Kupper, 2014; Kirchoff & Vicenzotti, 2014). I argue that the local historical and socio-political context makes the Eastern European wilderness protection significantly different than other similar movements. Far from adopting a globalized Yellowstone narrative, European actors propose many interpretations of wilderness, each with profound political and social implications (Saarinen, 2015; Bastmeijer, 2016; Schumacher, 2018). While public attitudes to wilderness vary (Bauer et al, 2017), most of the recent legal developments champion a strict separation of wild nature from human history and use (Martin et al, 2008; Wild10, 2013; Egerer et al, 2016). As I see its developments in the Carpathian case, the strict wilderness protection impacts local livelihoods unevenly, deepens historical inequalities and has the potential to reshape many of the traditional land-use practices in the near future (Merckx & Pereira, 2015).

Strict conservation as a neoliberal project has made an impressive career headlined as ‘fortress conservation’ (Brockington, 2002; Igoe and Brockington 2007; Heynen et al, 2007; Büscher, 2015). Proposing that biodiversity protection succeeds only in isolation from any human influence, this model has been tested over and over again across multiple geographies and is still alive and dynamic (Büscher et al, 2012). In chapter 5 I

show how the model has been unexpectedly implemented in Eastern Europe within a project heralded as a model for the future of conservation in the region. By doing this I make extensive use of the concept of access theorized by Ribot and Peluso. They propose a switch from a traditional focus on use rights to power and the *"ability to derive benefits from"* different resources (Ribot & Peluso, 2003:154). I follow their recommendation and proceed in *"identifying the constellations of means, relations and processes"* that enable the proponents of a wilderness reserve to obtain exclusive benefits from public or common goods. A detailed mapping of these multiple identities embodied by the Foundation Conservation Carpathia will be at the centre of the analysis and the constellation of powers in which this actor is situated will be the skeleton of Chapter 6.

Enclosing commons under the pretext of biodiversity protection, be it by public or private actors, has international ramifications and is considered by many to be a global phenomenon (Peluso & Lund, 2011; White et al, 2012; Corson& MacDonald, 2012). The phenomenon is analysed as green grabbing, and many scholars have shown how it supposedly takes nature of the market and reserves it for ecotourism and the development of green businesses allegedly friendlier with the environment (Fairhead et al, 2012; Ojeda, 2012). In chapter 4 I follow Holmes in showing that green grabs are predominantly a philanthropic endeavour and I support my claim by uncovering striking similarities with processes taking place in Chile and elsewhere (Holmes, 2014). In the case presented in this dissertation, the conservation project is legitimized by its promoters as undoing some of the environmental harm done by a recent ruthless exploitation for profit. While stopping commercial logging and hunting, the Foundation Conservation Carpathia aims and succeeds to buy as much land as there is available, believing that exclusive ownership is the sole guarantee for strict protection in perpetuity.

A strict protection of biological diversity would not be possible without creating this nature as external and autonomous (Evernden, 1992; Braun, 2013; Merchant, 2016). Smith, for example, shows how capital sees nature not only as pristine but also as "the frontier that is constantly pushed back" by the development of industrial capitalism (2008: 11). Others go further and claim that nature is constantly on the move,

metabolized as value by the circulation of capital (Büscher, 2013; Ekers & Prudham, 2017a, 2017b; Sullivan, 2017). There is already an extensive discussion of how nature enters capitalist accumulation strategies, and I will not go into that direction within this dissertation (Robertson, 2006; Smith, 2007; Sullivan, 2009; Fletcher & Büscher, 2017; Fletcher, 2018; Ojha, 2019). In chapter 6 I will focus on one particular process of capitalist transformation of nature into commercial value. This is the *cheapening of nature* that has been recently proposed by Moore and it created quite an academic stir (More, 2015; Moore & Patel, 2017). Simply put, the cheapening of nature is a process of control and devaluation of nature as a source of important inputs for the development of global capitalism. Molly Doane, for example, documents the process of Chimalapas' capitulation to the global neoliberal model as a result of decentralized local governance (Doane, 2012). In the case she investigates, the political and agrarian landscape of two indigenous communities becomes an important ecological territory in the new development plans of the early 90s, opening up the space for conservation initiatives and enterprises. Similarly, in the Romanian case, the forests of Făgăraș Mountains heavily impacted by post-socialist processes are currently considered of particular ecological value and are targeted by non-state conservation programs. While I attempt to understand this transformation I take Moore's concept further and I propose to study the *cheapening of wilderness* as a foundational moment for strict conservation initiatives in Eastern Europe. This process is contextualized within recent historical events such as land restitution and reform, establishment of protected areas by the state and constant devaluation of traditional livelihoods.

Building on Harvey's interpretation of primitive accumulation (2003), a recent body of literature has assimilated strict conservation with a process of accumulation by dispossession of certain indigenous or local groups (Li, 2010; Kelly & Ybarra, 2011; Benjaminsen & Bryceson, 2012; Loperena, 2016). This framework has been used by others to illustrate how ecotourism and extractive activities lead to displacements and radical transformation of livelihoods (Büscher & Davidov, 2015). In the Romanian case, ecotourism is oftentimes advanced as the silver bullet for many types of problems from nature protection to land abandonment. While sometimes it is promoted as the only

alternative in a purely capitalist realist[7] vein (Fischer, 2009), ecotourism and other associated green businesses are a contested path of development in many rural communities that I have studied. As it is presented to the general public as a fair economic model not only for nature but also for locals, ecotourism initiatives in the Făgăraș Mountains have been so far sustained by a logic of securitization. This is another currently popular concept among political ecologists, and it captures the processes of capital accumulation as they are bound to a vast array of resource enclosures and dispossessions (Kelly, 2016; Masse, 2016; Masse & Lundstrum, 2016; Huff & Brock, 2017). In this dissertation, I observe how a powerful foundation secures an entire territory for accumulation by concomitantly taking over the roles of exclusive owner, custodian of Natura 2000 sites, administrator of hunting grounds, member of historical commons and many others detailed in Chapter 6.

Part of the securitization logic is the use of technologies that not only assist conservation purposes but also account for poaching and trespassing attempts. Careful analyses of technology mobilization show how an apparently de-politicized practice constantly redefines categories such as environmental crime and poaching, while further operate a separation of wild nature from humans (Duffy, 2014; Fairhead 2018). In the Southern Carpathians, but also throughout the entire Eastern Europe, camera traps, drones and other allegedly neutral technologies are employed in monitoring wildlife and equally spectacularizing it (Benson, 2010). My research sees such practices as a mechanism of abstracting nature and obliteration of its co-produced histories. From a rich cultural landscape, nature is turned into an ahistorical and anti-political object.

After having paid substantial attention to the material creation of wilderness it is time to consider some of the local responses to the direct and slow violence of strict conservation practice (Nixon, 2011) that pushes towards or deepens systemic inequalities (Sassen,

[7] In a highly popular critical theory work, the late Mark Fischer has promoted the concept of critical realism as the hegemonic narrative that capitalism is the only viable economic system, while other alternatives are simply unimaginable. In the case presented by this dissertation, the conservation project implemented in the Southern Carpathians, claim that no other economic practices or industries would be viable in the region but ecotourism. Thus, if the project will be embraced by all actors, the region will develop and will become a landmark wilderness recognised globally. Any other alternatives would be detrimental either to local communities or nature.

2015). I follow different groups of actors (foresters, shepherds, mushroom pickers, commoners) and trace their mobilization against the wilderness reserve. This takes sometimes forms similar to weapons of the weak (Scott, 1985), other times becomes upfront political contestation. Not all locals strongly oppose the formation of a strict reserve. Quite the contrary, rural communities in my case should not be understood as homogenous entities embracing a coherent set of values and envisioning a unitary development path (Fox, 2011). In this context, there are many who seize the opportunity of conservation, jump to the occasion and expect gains as the project advances.

Finally, my dissertation tries to debunk the capitalist realism of strict protection by investigating already functioning alternatives and by speculating about other prospects that I consider more inclusive. I do this starting from the realization that most of the culturally rich and biodiverse landscapes of Eastern Europe (and the rest of the world) have an intimate relationship with local historical forms of land stewardship (Marris, 2011; Samojlik et al, 2013; Neumann, 2014; Drenthen, 2015, 2018; Crumley, 2017). Traditionally, freeholders' associations which function as commons (*obști, composesorate, comunități de avere, etc)* have been democratically, or less so in some cases, governing natural resources in the Carpathians for many centuries (Vasile, 2009, 2015, 2018a; Dorondel, 2016). I show that we owe current levels of biodiversity to some extent to their affective labour and care for the environment (Singh, 2015, 2018). Similar regimes of governance exist in many other regions of Europe, from the *comunales* in north-west Spain to the Sami *territories of life* beyond the Arctic Circle. There is a growing international movement to recognize and support these communities conserved areas (Borrini-Feyerabend & Hill, 2015), and this dissertation hopes to contribute to it.
Considered as the most exciting conservation development of this century (Kothari, 2012), the recognition and support of community conserved areas and territories is already becoming a global phenomenon. The ICCA Consortium is a platform and an organization whose members work intensely to bring together and make visible the conservation efforts of hundreds of communities from very different geographical regions which are on the frontlines of the struggle to defend and protect their territories. As these lands are considered the heart of their identity, culture and livelihoods, they are

collectively conserved against various attempts of enclosures of governments, companies and commercial enterprises (Borrini-Feyerabend & Hill, 2015). In order for such an area to be qualified and registered as an ICCA (Indigenous Conserved Community Area) – an official designation for protected areas recognised by the UNEP, they have to satisfy three concomitant criteria: there should be a strong link between the territory and the livelihoods of the community, the community should have some sort of governance mechanism in place and the primary outcome of this governance should be the conservation of these lands through sustainable use[8]. The process of recognizing and registering potential ICCAs in Europe has started recently and it can be rightfully claimed that some of the commons that still exist in the Western Balkans, in some Mediterranean areas but also in the Carpathians, satisfy all criteria to be considered as ICCAs (Vasile, 2019).

The type of conservation promoted by the ICCA Consortium is one of the facets of a new conservation paradigm that is gaining popularity among academics in recent years – the convivial conservation. Directly opposed to Half-Earth proposals convivial conservation represents a vision that "proposes a post-capitalist approach to conservation" by promoting "radical equity, structural transformations and environmental justice" (Büscher & Fletcher, 2019)[9]. Considering that mainstream, new conservation and other more radical ideas do not respond to the actual global challenges in a fair and just way, the proponents of convivial conservation situate this new movement beyond nature-culture dichotomies and against a capitalist economic model. Drawing from various existing practices and sources of inspiration, this vision proposes a series of significant shifts: 'from protected to promoted areas', 'from saving (charismatic) nature to celebrating human and nonhuman nature' alike, 'from touristic voyeurism to engaged visitation', 'from spectacular to everyday environmentalism and from a privatized expert technocracy to common democratic engagement' (Büscher & Fletcher, 2019). This dissertation engages with all of these switches and, while discussing the discoursive and material production of wilderness in the Southern Carpathians, shows that there is great

[8] A complete list of the UNEP-WCMC recognised ICCAs can be consulted here www.iccaregistry.org

[9] A remarkable initiative exploring the potential of this proposal is the current research project, CONVIVA, which focuses on transforming conservation for coexistence, biodiversity and social justice. More about the development of the project here https://conviva-research.com/

potential to incorporate existing models of local governance as part of this broader convivial conservation model. In short, the conservation work done by historical commons, the role of local knowledge related to 'virgin forests' and the visions of local development embraced by various local opposed to big plans to protect wilderness, could all be part of a transformation from strict protection of charismatic nature to a more convivial, thus just approach.

## 1.5 Methods

### *Approach*

I situate my research within the political ecology disciplinary field, I adopt a critical realist meta-theoretical position and I use the extended case method as the main ethnographic inquiry method.

**Political ecology** is a dispersed academic tradition approaching environmental issues in their intimate relationships with political, social and economic factors (Robbins 2012, Peet et al 2011, Perreault et al 2015). The field is already well established and institutionalized around many departments of human geography, anthropology, development studies and critical conservation. The interdisciplinary nature of political ecology allows for compelling inquiries into various issues such as environmental conflict and justice, conservation and resource control, climate change mitigation and environmental degradation, production of environmental knowledge or digital commons. While I will not delve into a detailed delineation here, I maintain that my inquiry into the Eastern European construction of wilderness is part of a long political ecology tradition of studying strict reserves and people-free landscapes (Peet & Watts 1996, Brockington & Igoe 2006).

**Critical realism** contends that reality exists out there and "operates independently of our awareness or knowledge of it" (Archer et al, 2016). While we aim to understand the world, our attempts are "conceptually mediated and theory-laden" (Blaikie & Priest, 2017: 177). Methodological pluralism and a focus on ontology and narrative explanations are the main tenets of critical realism. It does not propose a method but favours methods

that fit the research questions in order to identify generative structures or causal mechanisms (Porpora, 2015). By adopting a critical realist position, I show, for example, how political choices inform the conceptual frameworks on which rests scientific knowledge about virgin forests. Furthermore, I acknowledge the existence of old-growth forest and of ecosystems with a high degree of naturalness, but I show that how we represent or protect them is never neutral or apolitical. Additionally, towards the end of the dissertation, from a critical realist standpoint, I 'address normative questions and inquiry about the feasibility of alternatives' to current neo-protectionist conservation (Sayer, 2000: 158).

Although this dissertation embraces methodological pluralism I took up the **extended case method** as a primary way of approaching the field (Burawoy, 2009). This choice allows me to switch my attention from the micro to the macro level, to zoom in and out in order to understand the global underpinnings of the local processes under scrutiny. My ethnography thus shows how local conflicts around strictly protected nature are connected to global processes of nature neoliberalisation and abstraction for the purpose of accumulation. I inquire into the roots of the initial processes surrounding the protection of virgin forests, in order to make explicit the generative structures of a raising European debate about the separation between an autonomous nature and a supposedly harmful human use. "Extending out" from the field like this (Burawoy, 2009), helps me challenge and refashion theoretical claims about untouched nature, and gives me the arguments to engage in a quest for a more convivial conservation (Büscher & Fletcher, 2019).

## *Research Area, Study Cases*

Although it uses preponderantly ethnographic techniques, this dissertation does not focus on a bounded geographical area, but on two complementary processes. One is the protection of virgin forests as untouched nature, another is the Carpathia Project, created by the Foundation Conservation Carpathia. While the first one covers the Romanian Carpathians in their entirety, the latter unfolds in the Eastern half of the Southern Carpathians. Of course, both of them are part of global and regional dynamics, and the extended case method deployed helps to uncover these links. I prefer to call these two

study cases 'processes' in order to capture their dynamic nature – both of them are still developing and will probably continue to do so for an indefinite amount of time.

When I started this research, Romania had no legal framework to protect virgin forests, so my inquiry evolved and is contemporaneous with this process. I see a similar situation in the case of the wilderness reserve. While doing this research, the area included in the project rose from 16,000 to almost 22,000 hectares and the conflicts diversified or took unexpected turns. The international support for the creation of this reserve grew dramatically, and the campaigns for protecting the virgin forests made headlines in all major international newspapers.

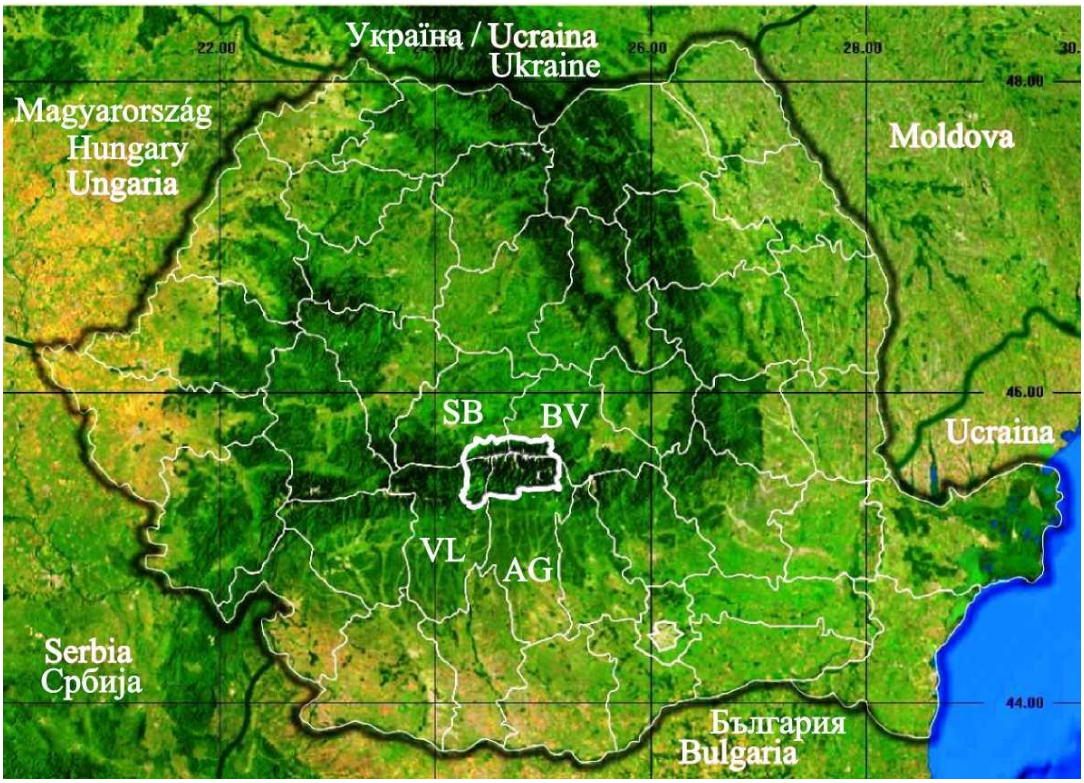


*Fig 1. Făgăraș Mountains (Transylvanian Alps)*

I will refer briefly to the geographical boundaries of the latter since its development is easier to point down on a map. Started in 2009, Carpathia Project aims to build a 'world-class reserve'[10] spanning over three mountain ranges: Făgăraș, Piatra Craiului and Leaota and the areas in between. As expected, this does not happen on unsettled territory but spreads across four counties and more than 40 municipalities, inhabited by thousands of

[10] I will extensively use the structure 'world-class wilderness reserve' throughout this dissertation since this is the main branding formula of the Carpathia Project and hints to the global relevance of this initiative.

people. Since I started this research, due to strong political support, the project extended to encompass the entire Făgăraș range over an area larger than 300.000 hectares. While the boundaries of the proposed national park are still under negotiation, I include below a map of the ROSCI1022 Natura2000 protected area for illustration purposes. The map also shows the projects' boundaries as they were initially set.

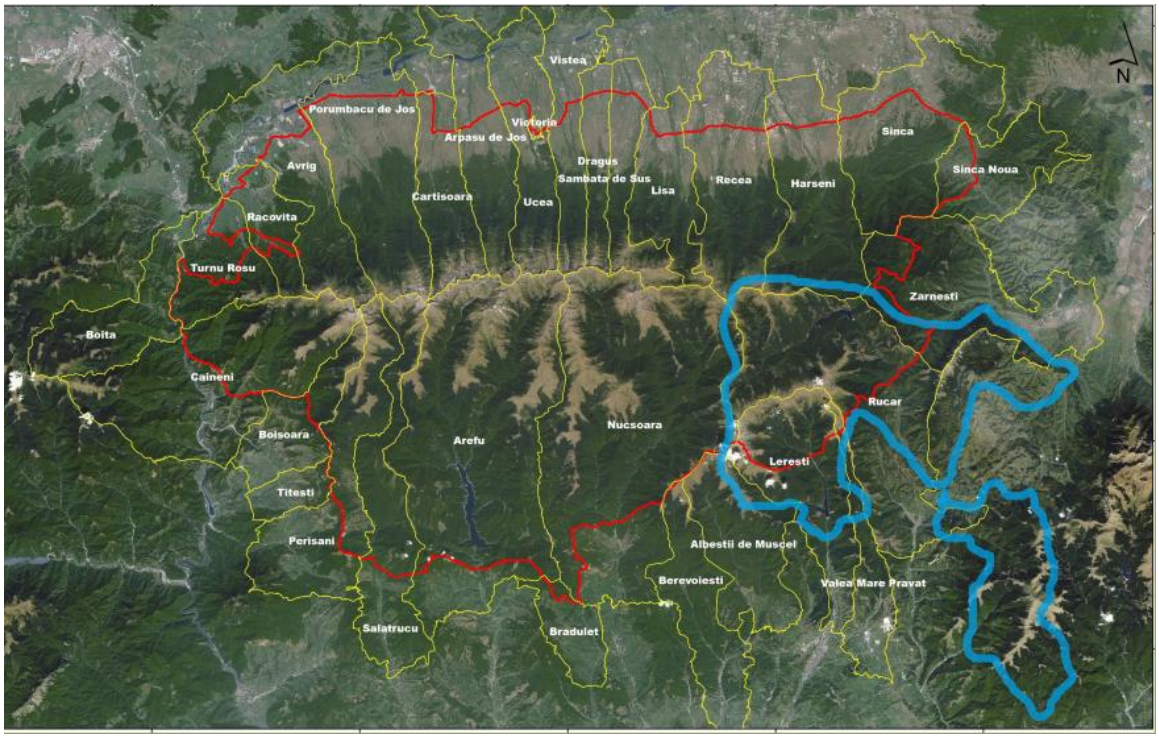


*Fig 2. Făgăraș Mountains and surrounding municipalities (RO): **Yellow** – municipalities, **Red** – the limits of Natura2000 protected area, **Blue** – initial area targeted by Carpathia Project.*

The people from the area have a complicated relation to conservation and a history marked by recent conflicts with the previously established national parks Cozia and Piatra Craiului (Vijulie et al, 2013; Iancu & Stroe, 2016). Additionally, more than 30 historical forest and pasture commons survive within the same area where commoners govern in a participatory way the administration and redistribution of various resources. I focused my analysis on the Eastern part of Southern Carpathians, on what is locally known as the Upper Dâmbovița Valley – Piatra Craiului - Leaota Mountains. Here, the conflicts are the most intense and people's livelihoods have been changed to a greater

extent than elsewhere. The villages of Lerești, Valea Mare, Rucăr, Dragoslavele, Dâmbovicioara, Stoenești and Cetățeni overlap partially over the mentioned geographical area. Within those, special attention has been devoted to the Roma communities from Pojorâta, Gura Pravăț, Valea Bădencii and Valea Chiliei, the most affected groups so far.

## *Research Techniques*

As already mentioned above, both the nature of the topic and my research questions allowed for an undisciplined methodology (i.e. not confined within strict disciplinary boundaries). I followed a different set of techniques for each of the two processes studied.

### Ethnographic fieldwork

I already indicated that this study privileges historical analysis and ethnographic fieldwork. I spent in the area a total of thirteen months unevenly spread over the three years of the PhD program as follows: five months in 2016 (February-April and August – September); five months in 2017 (February-March and May-June); and three months in 2018 (March and July-August). Having previously conducted research in the area, access was not a real challenge. Nevertheless, as I have worked for the foundation previously (a point to which I will come back in the next section), my entrance to some social groups was limited, while to others it was advantaged. I conducted around 50 structured interviews with local authorities, farmers, foresters, presidents of commons and other important figures whose time and availability were limited. Additionally, I collected more than one hundred life-stories and conducted unstructured interviews and conversations with mushroom pickers, local artisans, loggers, shepherds, guesthouse owners, state office clerks, cultural entrepreneurs, tourists and many other locals who would fit harder in these categories.

I participated in commons meetings, I did volunteering for different ecological campaigns in the area, I helped locals felling trees and transporting them home, I picked mushrooms and berries, I helped them mow and work the hay and many other activities according to the seasonal works. I had access to administrative documents, forestry maps and harvesting plans and legal documents of the commons. My historical analysis greatly

benefited from studying locals photo albums, old land titles as well as archival documents found in the regional office of the National Archives in Pitesti, the county's capital.

Since the area is marked by an ongoing conservation conflict and the wounds of past illegal restitution and logging scandals are still open, I paid great attention to ethical considerations. All names, otherwise stated, are anonymized and hardly any interviews were recorded. On the other hand, as the conservation project under investigation is unique, it would have been pointless to use pseudonyms for the villages or the foundation as such, including its most prominent figures.

**Ethnography and practice on foot**

A consistent part of my field research was what Ingold would call *ethnographic practice on foot* (2008). Accompanied by locals, foresters or shepherds I walked the land on numerous occasions, from the most touristic trails in Iezer Mountains to secretly kept places for picking mushrooms, and from ancient transhumance footpaths to current logging platforms. I took pictures and had many revealing conversations while climbing, touching, listening and smelling the landscape. Locals' hospitality and explanations complemented previously acquired methodological advice from Lorimer and Lund about remembering and recording mountains (2008). Villagers of different ages have deep knowledge about their lands, forests and any other surroundings. Besides stories about recent land conflicts or restitution, they constantly amazed me with personal anecdotes about various landscape features, wildlife encounters or tales heard from their forerunners. Approaching the field this way has shown me that someone's wilderness can be other's intimate childhood story.

**Conversations instead of interviews**

I opted for conversations and unstructured interviews rather than structured ones (Driessen & Jansen, 2013). The area has a long history of conflicts around forest restitution, obscure logging operations and recent disputes around conservation issues, many scandals made it to the national media, so people were sometimes suspicious. Very few of my interviews were recorded; sometimes even notes taking would have been

distrustful, so I had to rely often on my memory and write extensive field notes in the aftermath of an interview.

**Short visits**

For independent reasons (timeframe, structure of PhD program, resources, and language limitations) I was not able to approach in great detail comparable processes of wilderness construction/protection unfolding in other countries of Eastern Europe. Notwithstanding, I tried to conduct short visits and supplement with desk study some of the phenomena that seemed of interest for my argument. In the summer of 2017, I spend two weeks in Puscza Białowieża, the most iconic virgin forest of Poland, a place highly revered by natural scientists and environmental activists alike. This happened just as a European scandal related to uncontrolled logging was opposing the European Commission and the European Court of Justice to the Polish government. Besides some guided and solitary visits into the reserve and its surrounding, I had the chance to engage in meaningful conversations with few locals, tour operators and some foreign tourists.

I had the same approach in the case of Armeniș rewilding project. Starting from 2014 Rewilding Europe reintroduced in Țarcu Mountains the European bison (Bison bonasus) a species absent for many centuries, and developed an entire conservation ethic and ecotourism destination around this program. The project is of great significance for expanding my argument and having a term of comparison between conserving nature 'as it was' and letting nature 'developing according to its own devices' oriented towards an open future. Undoubtedly, these short visits did not allow me to get the insightful knowledge that long fieldwork did in other cases, but nevertheless, I acknowledge their value.

**Online study**

Due to the extensive array of actors and institutions relevant for the research topic I was unable to engage directly with each of them, so I chose to conduct a qualitative web content analysis (Ackland, 2013). I identified three big ENGOs active in Romania and I constantly followed their accounts on social media (Facebook and Twitter) from January

2016 to March 2019[11]. Additionally, I regularly checked their activity on their official web pages and other dedicated platforms. All the relevant posts were read and backed-up and subsequently were analyzed by taking notes, highlighting important topics and key terms. I applied the same technique for state institutions in charge of environmental protection, forestry, wildlife management, and for dozens of other international organizations. This resulted in an enormous archive of more than 1500 screenshots and backed-up items classified according to key topics for a painless reference.

**Visual research**

In addition to the techniques describes so far, I engaged in visual research on various occasions, not only to understand the aesthetics of wilderness conservation but also to diversify the argument about the spectacular creation of virgin forests as a matter of public concern. By doing so I tried to read on the presence of absence (i.e. human absence) in recent green documentaries, but also on how images can get to influence public policy and the development of legal framework (Mitchell, 2011). I was lucky enough to be part of the team organizing the largest documentary film festival in Eastern Europe – *Pelicam International Film Festival* in the Danube Delta at Tulcea. The festival screens recent productions about people and their environment, and features relevant Talks and less formal discussions connecting the audience to the artists and filmmakers. Here I had privileged access to the latest visual productions, wildlife photo exhibitions and many personal interactions with the filmmakers.

## *Types of data and data analysis*

Because of the methodological pluralism, the data I have gathered is heterogeneous: transcripts, field notes, pictures, press clippings, screenshots, maps and land titles, comments on documentaries and touristic advertisements, official reports and databases, online petitions and legal documents. In a critical realist fashion, I considered all of them

[11] The beginning of this period was marked by the appointment of a new technocratic government who, through the Ministry of Waters and Forests, dedicated considerable attention to environmental issues in the country. Also, the online study stopped in March 2019 as I had to switch attention from data collection to writing only.

relevant in finding evidence to support my argument, but I approached them differently. Bellow, I explain briefly how I analyzed them:

**Coding of data**

I recurred to specific codes in order to classify field notes, transcripts, images and screenshots. Both descriptive and reflexive codes organize my data per process studied (virgin forest protection or wilderness reserve) and within each process according to relevant overarching topics (conflict, land use, negotiation, tourism, etc). The topics are each further split in discrete units of analysis (conflict over resources, conflict over access, conflict about wildlife, and so on).

**Discourse analysis**

I used discourse analysis to understand what different actors say or omit, declare or deny, post or obstruct on mass- and social media, in touristic brochures or in official texts such as law and public petitions. I sought to establish the operation of power in legal frameworks but also the hegemonic undertones of environmental NGOs' press releases (Antaki, 2011). I used a close reading of grey literature as a form of discourse analysis in a critical realist fashion (Porpora, 2015).

**Iconographic analysis**

Frequently used in art history and cultural studies, iconographic analysis seeks to determine the meaning of an artwork in its contemporary context. With regards to the study of virgin forest creation and protection, I understand this tool in a very loose way and I apply it to the study of documentaries, murals, wildlife photographs and even art installations. I seek to situate these objects within their historical and cultural context and I reconstruct the political meaning behind them (Manzo, 2009). For example, while discussing in Chapter 3 *Diodrama* (2016), an artistic intervention commissioned by the National Museum of Natural Sciences in Bucharest to draw attention to deforestation, I not only explain its visual elements but also account for the political alliances initiating it.

**Analysis of legal framework**

Both at the European and at the national level, relevant legislation has been adopted over the last decade making the protection of wilderness more coherent. I was interested in how scientific objects such as virgin or quasi-virgin forests are created by law, regulated and further translated into public policy (Latour, 2009). The analysis of legal frameworks

helped me understand the relationship between institutions and the agency of apparently insignificant bureaucratic documents (such as validation notes) in creating and maintaining a certain regime of truth. By looking at the fabrication of things (Pottage 2009) within legal developments I was able to assess who are the missing voices from the entire protection mechanism.

### *Positionality*

This methodological section would be incomplete without a few thoughts on my position. This step is not only necessary within the critical realism tradition and for someone who was formed inside a critical anthropology department, but also fair for potential readers. My knowledge about the observed reality is situated within particular historical, political and cultural contexts (Harding, 1986; Haraway, 1988; Abu-Lughod, 1991). The processes and the realities under scrutiny in this dissertation are to a certain degree also my history and my present.

First, I was born, raised, and continue to call home a village located only 45-50 kilometres south-west from the core conflict area of the Carpathia Project. Although not currently targeted by the wilderness reserve, my village neighbours the project and I expect to feel some impacts as the project develops. A scientific interest in understanding the causal mechanisms of a raising wilderness momentum in Eastern Europe is doubled by a personal interest in this particular unfolding.

Second, I am a commoner. As I will show in Chapter 5 over the last ten years there have been some frictions between the project and the historical associations of forest owners. These commons give us a sense of pride and a particular relation with the local environment sanctioned both by law but also by a rich tradition. While I passively observed numerous commons' general assemblies during my fieldwork, I actively took part in the meetings convened by our own community of freeholders. The way in which our mountains are to be governed and managed for conservation is there everyone's business.

Third, and connected to the previous point, is my involvement with the ICCA Consortium, an international body supporting and promoting community and indigenous conserved areas and territories. Starting with 2019 I became an honorary member of the Consortium and I had the chance to contribute to drafting several policy proposals advocating for inclusive conservation and increased recognition of territories of life.

On the other hand, I worked for the foundation that is behind the Carpathia Project in 2015 for several months within the ECOSS project (which will be discussed in Chapter 4). My attributions involved the collection of socio-economic data in several municipalities surrounding the Făgăraș Mountains and contributing to a report summarizing the main findings. In this report[12], we offered recommendations towards a more democratic consultation process and better representation of local communities' interests among others. However, together with my colleagues, sociologists and anthropologists involved in this particular task, during the assignment, we became critical towards the means used by the foundation, a critique which informs this dissertation. Adopting a more personal voice, sometimes manifested by irony and sarcasm is my own personal strategy to deal with these multiple identities, oftentimes irreconcilable while doing research.

## 1.6 Outline

The argument of this dissertation is organized around four chapters preceded by an introductory part and followed by conclusions. The Introduction prepared the ground for the analysis by stating the international context, the disciplinary boundaries of this research and its many transgressions. The relevance, research questions and thesis architecture were treated here as well. The chapter continued with an exploration of the two main theoretical traditions that inform the present study: the study of power and environmental knowledge production and the political ecology approach to conservation and environmental justice. A methodological section laid out the research design and discussed my positionality.

[12] The report has not been yet published on the beneficiary's website, although it was used to produce different other reports and sets of recommendations, see for example Linnell & Kaltenborn, 2016 and Linnell et al, 2016.

**Chapter 2** presents the recent developments in wilderness protection in Europe. From the European Parliament resolutions to changes in national legislations, the chapter will trace the discussions about wilderness as a strategy to save nature in a period of climate emergency. A desk study informs the examination of the main actors and networks championing this debate. After a brief discussion of other Pan-European initiatives to save wilderness, the chapter ends with a discussion on the relevance of the Romanian case for this debate. Thus, this chapter aims to set the context for the rest of the dissertation.

**Chapters 3** and **4** engage with the politics of identifying and inscribing for strict protection the virgin forests in Romania and should be read as a diptych. The first chapter of the series complement the discussion in the previous one and focuses on a practical example of how wilderness narratives translate into legal frameworks at the national level. Activists' campaigns and the production of environmental knowledge by experts will occupy most of this part. Using methods specific to eco-criticism and green cultural study, I investigate the circulation of images of virgin forest within popular culture. The last chapter of the series concludes with an examination of virgin forests as heritage, underlining the main points of contention and recovering the perspective on the matter of other missing actors. The role of these two chapters is to uncover the politics of protecting virgin forests as one dimension of the current wilderness momentum that the thesis investigates.

**Chapter 5** proposes a minute study of a renowned wilderness conservation project currently under development in the Southern Carpathian Mountains, Romania. Here I complement the analysis from the previous chapters by focusing on a clear case of putting into practice the wilderness narrative. Advertised as the European Yellowstone, the initiative is backed by international philanthropists and has gained considerable international public attention. Both the global connections and the political economy of Carpathia's Project will be given substantial attention. While discussing their specific conservation approach, the chapter will not go into tracing the social or economic impacts of their projects, as this will be the focus of Chapter 5. The chapter's role is to offer an

account of the functioning and values promoted by Foundation Conservation Carpathia, it should be read in close relation with the next one.

**Chapter 6** gives voice to the local communities that over the last ten years have witnessed their environment turning into untouched nature. Based on ethnographic data, I discuss here the main forms of resistance against the impacts of developing a large private wilderness reserve. The project affected more than a dozen villages, unevenly, and it forged numerous mobilizations and negotiation strategies among the locals. The chapter also uses archival materials, oral histories and local monographs to reconstitute past connections of local communities to the environment. These relations were not only transformed over the recent period but were also used as strong arguments for claiming rights across the study area. The role of the chapter is to trace both the mechanisms through which the wilderness projects impacted local livelihoods, but also different types of resistance and contestations.

The argument is recapped by the **Conclusions**, which aim to reorient the reader through the entire research project. I wrap up the argument by acknowledging that protecting wild nature as human-free and untouched will run into strong local opposition, at least in Romania. I argue that a selective remembrance of environmental history and contempt for the affective labour of local communities in relation to their surroundings, both features of wilderness protection, are not only unsuited but also unjust. I conclude, in this respect, that such a rich layered cultural landscape is not only the base of biodiversity in the Southern Carpathians but it also embodies the hope for a resilient future.

# Chapter 2 Towards a New Wild East?

*„For millennia this medium-altitude mountain range has been characterized by the same ecosystems, same habitats and the same array of species. Then came the Cold War and with it the Iron Curtain, which divided up Europe for 45 years. (...) Most other species of wildlife (...) flourished because the Cold War's demarcation line had created a safe heaven from human disturbances by leaving breading sites undisturbed for some species for decades. (...) It is our hope that the relationship between Germany and the Czech republic finds some light but solid footing in a mutually developed concept of wilderness."*

*(Meyer et al, The Wild Heart of Europe, 2009)*

## 2.1 Introduction

Over the last ten years, wild nature protection gained increasing momentum in Europe. From a rather marginal approach among conservationists, the strict protection of untouched nature, generally identified as *wilderness* has been propelled among the most intensely discussed environmental topics amongst scientists, politicians and civil society. From extensive mapping of remaining wilderness to important signs of progress in the EU legislation, proposals for strict protection of supposedly undisturbed natural areas have set the ground for many continent-wide alliances permeating national and institutional boundaries. Although merely a decade old, such conservation approach previously unpopular in Europe already triggered important changes in the socio-environmental relations. This dissertation shows that wilderness protection projects targeted predominantly the marginal regions of the EU, creating thus an imagined green periphery. As I am focusing on such processes developing in Eastern Europe, I propose to call this green internal periphery **The New Wild East**. The dissertation argues that **The New Wild East** represents a politico-environmental frontier whose importance goes beyond nature protection and is underlined by spiritual values, productive aesthetics and

a lot of experimentation. As it is read from the West, this wilderness frontier was revealed and subsequently discovered after the fall of the iron curtain. Official storyline goes like this: *"the fall of the iron curtain, (...) revealed large, intact areas in central and Eastern Europe, primarily along the east-west border, and created significant opportunities for government-protected areas"* (Martin, 2008: 34). This chapter will revisit the most important moments and actors marking the recent history of The New Wild East.

2009 is a landmark year for wilderness protection in the European Union. Intensely lobbied for by a coalition of environmental NGOs, scientists and philanthropists, wilderness debuted on the EU political scene with the adoption of a dedicated resolution by the European Parliament on 3rd February (P6_TA (2009)0034). Ten years after that moment, the strict protection of 'undisturbed' nature is considered now the most radical conservation approach to date. Although no member state adopted specific legislation dedicated to wilderness protection under the influence of this resolution[13], many projects nurtured by international ENGOs and kindled by national governments unfold concomitantly. I do not claim that wilderness protection manifests as a coherent project from one end of the continent to another, not that this process is centrally orchestrated. However, I see that numerous synchronicities are at play and important vectors are leading the movement to a certain direction. Features of this direction include attempts to define wilderness unitarily, to build scientific coherence and homogenize tools and indicators by assembling Pan-European standards, reference indicators and a uniform set of criteria. The strict separation of the newly discovered wild nature from managed landscapes and socio-historical natures is another facet of the same process. Numerous attempts to define wilderness for policymaking have stressed the idea that those areas with potential wilderness qualities have developed historically and ecologically without human management, independent even from traditional land-use practices. Within this chapter, different definitions and wilderness standards will be reviewed. This strict

[13] A detailed analysis of this resolution will be provided in the section 2.3 where wilderness is analysed as a political process.

separation is important and directly impacts on local strategies for rural development frames imaginations for the future of humans relations with the environment and often contradicts locals' aspirations and perspectives.

It is widely accepted that the wilderness in the EU policymaking and environmental law is very young (Egerer et al, 2016). However, considering wilderness an original creation of European conservationists or just an imported product from the US already traditional environmentalism would be inaccurate. I think that the current wilderness momentum should be historicized and investigated against wider global debates about reserving half of the planet for nature in the context of biodiversity shrinkage and climate breakdown (Wilson, 2016). Not foreign from dated Malthusian panics related to overpopulation, the Half-Earth Debate is currently opposing the scientific community beyond any foreseeable middle ground. Though critiques of this idea have been many, a recent analysis showed that more than 1 billion people will be indirectly affected if the Half-Earth ideals would be put to practice (Schleicher et al, 2019). I propose to read the European wilderness momentum as a process of reterritorialization part of a global attempt to strictly secure large areas of land for nature to develop according to its own rules. Within this process, clear boundaries are drawn between the anthropized ecosystems and the areas where (mostly white male) scientists and conservationist discover an autonomous nature. Within this dissertation, I bring forward several concrete cases of such boundary-drawing processes that not only change the socio-environmental relations but also the political economy of the areas in which they are implemented. By investigating the features of this wilderness momentum from a political ecology standpoint, I hope to prove that my concern is not only timely but necessary as well in the rapidly changing field of Eastern European environmentalism.

This chapter aims to find answers for two interconnected questions: *Why is Eastern Europe a fertile ground for these wilderness protection projects? How does the post-socialist processes advance or hinder these projects?* In doing so, I am not interested in the history of wilderness as a philosophical or even ecological category, but in the recent transformations of wilderness discourse. There is a long tradition of analysing different

attempts to preserve wilderness, starting with the Yellowstone model that has become a global brand to various reiterations in different geographies (Oeleschlaeger, 1991; Callicott & Nelson, 1998; Nelson et al, 2008). In some cases, wilderness preservation has been a central value in the development of environmentalism at the national level, such as the case of the United States (Turner, 2012).

As I explore the process of wilderness protection in Eastern Europe I uncover the network of synchronicities that give the entire movement an internal coherence, albeit not being a centrally managed enterprise. Turning the attention to the Romanian case I show that most of the actors occupying key positions within this momentum have links with projects unfolding in the Romanian Carpathian Mountains, an area that will make the focus of the next three chapters.

While adopting a critical stance, I should make it explicit that I do not oppose the protection of ecosystems with a high degree of naturalness, but I try to uncover how such process is politically and historically situated. Lastly, I have to flag out that rewilding is not the focus of this dissertation, although it is an important part of the European wilderness momentum. However, in many initiatives, rewilding is considered one of the strategies to attain the wilderness ideal within a proposed wilderness continuum (see below). This conservation approach, including passive management, reintroduction of missing species, ecosystem restoration, etc., is briefly canvassed here while discussing the wilderness shifting definitions. A detailed analysis of rewilding is beyond the scope of this research, moreover since a rich scholarship has been given the topic considerable attention over the last years (Jørgensen, 2015; Pellis & de Jong, 2016; Tănăsescu, 2017, 2019; Vasile, 2018b).

After sketching the context and the aim of this chapter it is time to lay out its structure. The next section discussed the attempts to decide on the appropriate definition of wilderness and explores the most important projects and actors that have been working together over the last decade to put wilderness on the public agenda. Further, the most important political events that advanced the strict protection of wild nature in the EU are detailed. A fourth section discusses a few dimensions of wilderness protection in Eastern Europe and delineates some lines of inquiry for a political ecology of The New Wild East.

A final summary of the argument will wrap up the analysis and will prepare the ground for the next chapter.

## 2.2 Defining a collective effort

### *Definitions and orientations*

The rediscovery of wild nature in Europe and the subsequent efforts to conserve it has been manifested over the last years in two different but interconnected approaches. The first one aimed to protect what is left from what is considered an untouched autonomous nature. This has been done according to and in parallel to the development of a 'golden standard of wilderness' which comprises apparently clear criteria: naturalness, underdevelopedness and large size (Carver, 2016:62). The second approach, known as rewilding, was marked by an orientation towards the future and proposed to engineer degraded or dysfunctional ecosystems with the aim to create wilder landscapes and eventually wilderness. While promoters of the last approach assumed from the beginning that rewilding is productive, supporters of the former always considered themselves saviours of an already existing wild nature, on the verge of imminent destruction. I argue that wilderness preservation is to a considerable extent also a process of creation, and I show throughout this dissertation how knowledge exchange and the exercise of power make this a productive process too. I begin my analysis by exploring the differences between the two mentioned approaches, and the most important actors and events that marked the wilderness momentum over the last decade (2009-2019).

**The state: wilderness**

Wilderness protection has been part of the US environmental legislation and public policy since 1964 and it led to intense debates within the academic community over the last decades (Nash, 1965; Cronon, 1996; Callicott & Nelson, 1998; Nelson et al, 2008). Many critical views have been expressed regarding the history and transformations of this concept, some rightfully pointing to its colonial or imperialist legacy (Guha, 1989; Havlick, 2006). I do not think that the current European wilderness momentum is just a re-naturalization of the American wilderness approach. I do, however, believe that this

literature offers important lines of analysis to further understand the European process. One is the attention dedicated to the role of technology in creating or exposing the boundaries between wild and tamed nature (Havlick, 2006). Another one is the interpretation of wilderness protection as a cultural and classed project part of a colonialist and imperialist mythology (Guha, 1989; Cronon, 1996; DeLuca, 2007). The association between wilderness and pristine landscapes observed in the American context (Denevan, 1992) also works in the European context where the term 'pristine', when not used explicitly, is replaced with 'intact' or 'untouched'. At the global level, wilderness areas are a rather recent category of the IUCN system of protected areas, known as **1b**. The guidelines for this category published in 2016 mention as primary objective the protection of *"long-term ecological integrity of natural areas that are undisturbed by significant human activity, free of modern infrastructure and where natural forces and processes predominate (...)"* (WCPA, 2016).

Within the soft law of the European Union, the widest agreed **wilderness definition** dates from 2013 and it appears in a set of guidelines on Natura 2000 network of protected areas:

> *'A wilderness is an area governed by natural processes. It is composed of native habitats and species, and large enough for the effective ecological functioning of natural processes. It is unmodified or only slightly modified and without intrusive or extractive human activity, settlements, infrastructure or visual disturbance.'*
> (European Commission, 2013:10).

According to this document, areas with wild nature are considered wilderness if they satisfy concomitantly a set of three criteria: *naturalness* – which implies no extractive uses such as agriculture, mining, forestry, hunting, fishing, etc; *underdevelopedness* – translated as the absence of permanent infrastructure and human settlements; and *scale* – which means that wilderness areas should have a size large enough to allow natural processes to happen (Bastmeijer, 2016). In short, wilderness has been considered a '*reference point of ecological purity'* according to which any other natural ecosystem could be assessed (Carver, 2016: 39). Resulting from this assessment is what scientists

have called a ‘wilderness continuum’ – a scale ranging from intensely anthropized ecosystems to the allegedly purest ones labelled as wilderness.

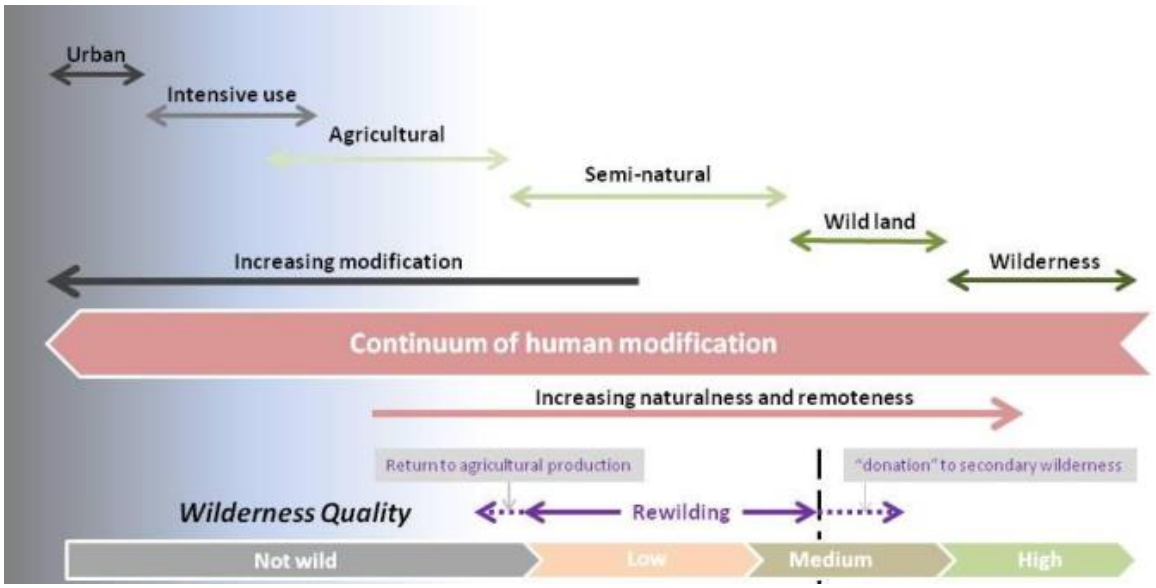


*Fig 3. The wilderness continuum (Adapted from wildlandresearch.org)*

Such definition stressing the importance of untrammelled nature (Chapman, 2006: 466) has been criticized for being reactionary and for writing off competing views about nature protection (Malm, 2018). It has also been noted that a strict protection of areas with high degree of naturalness combined with the removal of invasive species does not necessarily improve the levels of biodiversity, particularly when species are dependent on traditional management practices (Lupp et al., 2011). Moreover, empirical studies have shown that in various cases over a long period of passive management, some species such as beetles and lichens even decrease as the canopy closes and wilderness status is achieved (Horak et al, 2018).

While I do not intend, nor have the competence to assess the ecological impact of such approach, I go forward in analyzing the transformations of wilderness protection as they are historically contingent (Kupper, 2014). For a detailed review of scientist’s perceptions about wilderness, a fair account can be found in Kirchoff (2014).

**The process: rewilding**

If wilderness protection enjoys a minimum political consensus at the EU level, rewilding, as another complementary approach to wild nature conservation, is far from being clearly defined. The European rewilding concept is an amalgam of conservation approaches, from traditional ecosystem restoration to more visionary proposals hardly sanctioned by the scientific practice (Hintz, 2007; Jamieson, 2008; Drenthen, 2005, 2009; Deliège, 2016; Prior & Ward, 2016). Rewilding projects to not make recourse to already existing wild nature, but kindle the production of wilder landscapes (Prior & Ward, 2016). Although these future natures are not presented as pristine, they are still considered genuine as long as they are a result of 'autonomous natural processes' (Drenthen, 2018: 407). Through rewilding, processes such as wildfires, flooding, vegetation succession and pest outbreaks are restored (Carver, 2016) while missing species considered as having great importance for ecological dynamics are reintroduced. European rewilding projects implemented so far have not stressed the regulatory role of big carnivores advocating for their reintroduction as it is the case in the American rewilding tradition (Soulé and Noss, 1998; Foreman, 2004; Noss, 2003). Nevertheless, European rewilding balances between pro-active management and entirely passive approaches, as this conservation practice has proved very versatile over the last decade across the continent (Corlett, 2016).

The most pervasive difference between rewilding and wilderness is thus its processual nature. If wilderness is the end state of autonomous nature, rewilding is about 'upgrading' dysfunctional ecosystems towards an open-ended future (Shepers & Jepson, 2016: 26). Environmental historians have been so far the most inclined to theorize and identify underlining traits among various existing rewilding projects and visions at play (Jørgensen, 2015; Gammon, 2018). These studies contend that rewilding approaches are underlined by a surprising permeability of the nature-culture divide, although advocates promoted a clear separation between the two (Lorimer et al, 2015; Svenning et al, 2016)

Ultimately, some common features run through both approaches at the European level. One is the glorification of past ecologies, with or without assumed baselines (Gammon, 2018: 344). Another is the assumption that wilderness protectors or rewilding proponents understand the complexities of natural processes and are able to foresee the consequences

of introducing allegedly missing species. In both cases, sound scientific support is still limited (David Nogues-Bravo et al, 2016). Recent studies have shown that the outcomes of species reintroductions can shatter initial assumptions and prompt unexpected developments of the entire conservation endeavour (Tănăsescu, 2019).

### *Actors and turning points*

The current European wilderness momentum is an outcome of cooperative work done by various local, national and regional actors, with dissimilar leveraging power within the entire process. In order to show how different initiatives are connected, I scrutinize three of the most important platforms, foundations and think-tanks which have influenced in my opinion the protection of wilderness the most. Further, I revisit another three turning points that marked the evolution of this momentum over the last decade. The following chapters will then pick and further discuss the role of these actors and moments relevant for the Eastern European wilderness momentum.

The **Wild Europe Initiative** is a partnership of NGOs, public institutions and agencies working at the European level towards a stronger public policy support for already developing or planned wilderness initiatives.[14] The platform is coordinated by Toby Aykroyd, who is also the head of The European Nature Trust (TENT) and a founding member of Foundation Conservation Carpathia, an initiative taking shape in the Southern Carpathians and the focus of Chapter 5 and 6. Currently being the strongest actor advocating for wilderness protection on the EU political stage, Wild Europe Initiative includes most of the big players in the European conservation: BirdLife International, EUROPark Federation, Frankfurt Zoological Society, Conservation Capital, Rewilding Europe, WWF, Wildland Research Institute, The European Nature Trust and representatives from UNESCO, European Commission, IUCN and the Council of Europe. Wild Europe Initiative has backed or directly influenced all wilderness related developments in Europe over the last ten years.

[14] Wild Europe's operational website can be accessed here https://www.wildeurope.org/, last accessed 29 July 2019.

Established in 1997, **PanParks** was the most vocal actor to support wilderness protection through connecting and certifying strict nature reserves all over the continent. Since its liquidation in 2014, the work of PanParks has been taken over by the **European Wilderness Society**. With the intended aim to strictly protect 1 million hectares of wilderness across Europe by 2030, the European Wilderness Society has set up a clear body of identification and assessment criteria know as the European Quality Standard and Audit System.[15] Their work is of extreme importance for the scope of this dissertation since this foundation is the only big actor aiming to connect all wilderness areas into what they call a European Wilderness Network. The network currently includes 40 wilderness areas ranging from 50 to several thousand hectares. With few exceptions, most of them are located on the eastern side of the former Iron Curtain. As all these islands, coasts, rivers and forests are audited, and certified according to a unified standard, the management and future development of these areas is also supposed to follow a consistent set of practices, making the wilderness preservation movement more coherent.

Based at the University of Leeds **Wildland Research Institute** (WRi) is probably the most representative laboratory for wilderness knowledge production. While modelling and mapping existing wild areas are the central focus of the institute, its members have been very active over the last decade in popularizing and advancing debates on wilderness and rewilding in academia and beyond. Steve Carver, Mark Fisher and others are leading contributors to virtually all collective volumes marking the European wilderness momentum. So far, the institute has produced an extensive mapping of wilderness in Scotland and has developed a comprehensive wilderness index which was used starting with 2014 to build the European wilderness register (Kruiters et al, 2013; Carver, 2016:58).

A crucial moment marking the early developments of wilderness protection in EU was the **Conference on Wilderness and Large Natural Habitat Areas in Europe** which

[15] More on the EWQS here https://wilderness-society.org/european-wilderness-definition/, last accessed on 29 July, 2019.

took place in Prague on May 2009. Organized during the Czech Presidency of the European Council the conference is mostly known for its concluding document *'The Message from Prague – An Agenda for Europe's Wild Areas'*. The document was endorsed by top-rank politicians, scientists, activists and representatives of other relevant institutions and provided in 24 points suggestions and recommendations for policy development and awareness building. These recommendations developed the key points expressed in the European Parliament's Resolution and constituted the basis for further political negotiations over the next few years.

Four years after the Prague moment, during the **WILD10 – World Wilderness Congress 2013** which took place in Salamanca, a new document furthered the ambitions of the biggest nine European environmental organizations to protect Europe's wildest areas. The *'Vision for a Wilder Europe'* expanded the scope of wilderness protection towards giving considerable attention to rewilding processes and was presented to representatives from the European Council and Commission. For the first time, particular importance was given to the development of business and financial mechanisms to support the development of this vision. Aiming to protect all remaining wild areas by 2023, this essence of this vision is captured in the following excerpt:

> *"By 2023, wilderness, wildlife and wild nature have become essential elements of Europe's identity and are seen as a reflection of a new, modern society in the 21st century. The new, liberated relationship with nature creates increasing health and happiness at a personal level for many people – young and old, urban and rural – throughout the continent."* (WILD10, 2015)

A third turning point for the wilderness momentum was the organization of another conference in **Brussels** on September 2017 focused on the elaboration of a protection strategy for the remaining European old-growth forests. This moment is particularly important for the discussions offered in the next chapter about virgin forest protection in the Carpathians as a concrete example of wilderness conservation in practice. The conference was hosted by European Committee of the Regions and was directly endorsed

by representatives from the European Commission (DG Environment), UNESCO and the Council of Europe. Wild Europe Initiative, discussed above, was the main coordinator of the event. Unlike previously mentioned turning points, this conference was focused on a concrete feature of wilderness – the old-growth forests which were discussed as the most valuable element of Europe's natural heritage. The resulting document, '*Old-growth Forest Protection Strategy'*, testifies that such rich natural heritage is also a fragile one, suggesting that immediate action has to be promoted by all interested parties (Wild Europe, 2017). Besides mapping and improving protection to already identified old-growth forests, this strategy devoted extensive attention to the development of financial mechanisms for effecting future conservation. The Payments for Ecosystem Services (PES), special allocations from EU funds and private grants were among the identified solutions. The establishment of funds to purchase land for conservation strategy was also widely advocated. This approach constitutes the basis of the Carpathia Project analyzed in Chapter 4 and 5.

## 2.3 Wilderness as a political process

A central argument of this chapter is that wilderness protection is, first of all, a political process. The previous section uncovered the most important actors and moments contributing to the promotion of wilderness on the EU political agenda. This section revises the most critical political responses. It is important to note that, with the exception of Finland, no EU member country adopted so far explicit legislation for wilderness protection, nor is this topic openly assumed by existing European environmental legislation (Bastmeijer, 2016). Moreover, local support for wilderness protection in Eastern Europe has been weak so far, even if the concept is widely popular in the West (Urban, 2016).

The Finnish case is rather marginal and should not be considered a new development part of the current wilderness momentum. Adopted in 1991 The Finnish Wilderness Act promotes quite opposite values from the strict protection characteristic to current wilderness protection projects. According to this document, wilderness areas are established for securing indigenous Sami culture and traditional livelihoods while maintaining a low economic use of the land (Saarinen 2005, 2015).

Unsurprisingly, the establishment of an IUCN dedicated category for wilderness areas is also a recent development, started only in 1992 (Bastmeijer, 2016:25). According to the new revised system, Category 1b comprises protected areas that are *"usually large unmodified or slightly modified areas, retaining their natural character and influence, without permanent or significant human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve their natural condition." (IUCN, 2008)*. This definition is more liberal than the European understanding of wilderness as it admits a certain degree of human habitation and a slightly modified appearance.

At the European level, a single binding document comes close to creating the legal grounds for the conservation of wild nature – **The Carpathian Convention**. Adopted in 2003 and entered into force in 2006, The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians is a document signed and assumed by seven Parties whose borders span across the Carpathian Mountains range (Egerer et al, 2016)[16]. Although wilderness protection is not explicitly mentioned within the document, the overall approach and a protocol signed by the Parties in 2011 encourages the identification and strict protection of areas with a high degree of naturalness. The Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management develops Article 7(5) of the Convention and offers a set of recommendations for the identification and protection of virgin forests in the Carpathians, already promoted as the last in Europe. The protocol defines virgin forests as *'natural forests which have not been influenced directly by human activities in their development'* (Egerer et al, 2016:232). Due to its binding character, the Convention and its Forest Protocol is of extreme importance to understand, for example, the debut of virgin forest protection in Romania, a process detailed in the next chapter.

As stated in the beginning of this chapter, the breakthrough moment for wilderness protection on the continent is the adoption of the European Parliament **Resolution on 'Wilderness in Europe'** on 3 February 2009. Started as an own-initiative procedure (2008/2210INI) of the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety Committee, the

[16] *The Framework Convention on the Protection and Sustainable Development of the Carpathians* was adopted and signed by seven Parties (Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Ukraine, Romania, Serbia and Slovak Republic) in 2003 and entered into force in January 2006. It is a framework convention through which Parties pursue comprehensive policy and cooperation regarding the protection of the Carpathian Mountains.

document was widely lobbied for by the Wild Europe Initiative. The entire legal procedure lasted less than five months and was eventually adopted by a majority of 538 against 19 votes.[17] The resolution called on the European Commission and the Member States to adopt a set of measures structured along seven overarching objectives: definition and mapping, wilderness areas development, promotion, better protection, wilderness and Natura2000, invasive alien species and lastly, wilderness and climate change. Interestingly, when calling on the Commission to define wilderness, the Resolution also expressed a set of aspects to be addressed in the new definition: ecosystem services, conservation value, climate change and sustainable use (European Parliament, 2009: Art 1). Strangely, the ecological aspects seem to remain outside the scope of this demanded definition. At the same time, the Commission is asked to recognize the seminal role played by Wild Europe Initiative in fostering wilderness protection on the continent (Art 15). Lastly, the Parliament requests that wilderness is given a central role in the Natura 2000 network (Art 20), proposing thus a radical change from the official focus that stressed the role of traditional land uses for conserving biodiversity on the continent.
Although not having a binding character, the Resolution was celebrated as a huge success by conservationists, as it was the first time a European institution explicitly asked for strict protection of the remaining wilderness areas. This event started the ball rolling towards full recognition and protection – an objective still not fully realized in 2019.

The next significant political moment for wilderness protection in Europe was the release of the **Guidelines for Wilderness in Natura 2000** by the European Commission towards the end of 2013. The technical report was prepared by a consultancy from Wageningen – Alterra, together with PanParks Foundation. Wildland Research Institute was also a big contributor being responsible for the section related to mapping and domestic legislation development (European Union, 2013). Although the document does not have a binding nature, as the Resolution, it is assumed by the Commission services and aims to clarify aspects related to wilderness management that are already provisioned by the Habitats and Birds Directives. These guidelines follow on the European Parliament 2009

[17] The entire procedure file can be accessed here https://oeil.secure.europarl.europa.eu/oeil/popups/ficheprocedure.do?lang=en&reference=2008/2210(INI) , last accessed on 29 July 2019

Resolution and offer a working definition of wilderness, which has been already discussed in the previous section. Among the measures to be taken in order to improve wilderness qualities of Natura 2000 PAs remarkable are the zonation of protected areas, better ecological connectivity, restoration of modified habitats, establishing non-intervention management after natural disturbances, reintroduction of missing species and eradication of invasive ones, and the minimization of poaching and other 'unwanted' activities in the strict protection areas (European Union, 2013:57).

This document offered to the custodians and administrators of Natura 2000 sites very valuable tools to increase the wilderness character and start a reconfiguration of socio-environmental relations. As will be explained in Chapter 4, the document gave to these actors increasing powers to control access for a wide category of customary land users. By backing this set of guidelines originating from the collaborative work of several members of Wild Europe Initiative, the European Commission changed for the first time in the European environmental legal history the purpose of Natura 2000 network. If previously the two Directives strongly advocated for a continuation of traditional land uses (Neumann, 2014) including marginal agriculture, transhumance and other historical or customary practices essential for maintaining a rich European landscape, now it was suggested for the first time that a strict separation of an allegedly wild nature could be more effective for biodiversity conservation if any human influence would be halted.

## 2.4 Wilderness in Eastern Europe – towards a political ecology

An overarching argument of this dissertation is that the recent initiatives aiming to protect wilderness unfold almost exclusively on the European periphery. The eastern part of the continent occupies the centre stage for some of the most remarkable and well funded strict protection projects. I have called this Eastern European wilderness frontier The New Wild East.[18] This section will point out several possible lines of inquiry to be taken into consideration by a future political ecology of wilderness in this region. A quick overview of the European Rewilding Network, a pan-European movement connecting most rewilding initiatives since 2013, will show that 23 out of around 60 rewilding

[18] Eastern Europe as a region should be understood here as liberal as possible, including former socialist states or regions from Central Europe and the former German Democratic Republic.

initiatives are located in former post-socialist countries in Eastern Europe[19]. Nevertheless, the European Rewilding Network comprises a heterogeneous assemblage of conservation initiatives varying in size and scope and which should not be considered as strictly related to wilderness preservation. Still, the massive concentration of these projects in the region is telling. Another example is Rewilding Europe, the most important actor of this kind on the continent, which established five of their seven rewilding areas in Eastern Europe (Fig 2). The other two are also implemented in very peripheral regions of Southern Europe.


*Fig 4. Rewilding Europe Areas (own elaboration)*

The Endangered Landscape Programme is a recently launched program aimed at supporting remarkable environmental restoration projects for a long period of time in order to secure their success. Financed by the Arcadia Foundation and managed by the Cambridge Conservation Initiative, the programme announced the first round of projects to be catalyzed in March 2019. Five out of the eight projects receiving support are located in Eastern Europe or in its immediate vicinity (Georgia and Turkey). In chapter 4 I will discuss one of these initiatives aiming 'to give space back to nature'.[20]

[19] Full details on https://rewildingeurope.com/european-rewilding-network/ , last accessed 29 July, 2019
[20] Official Programmee presentation on http://www.endangeredlandscapes.org/about-the-endangered-landscapes-programme/, last accessed 29 July 2019

EuroNatur, Germany's oldest and most important foundation advocating for wild nature protection, is involved in 19 projects across the continent, of which 13 are located in Eastern Europe. One of its most daring initiatives is the European Green Belt, an initiative aiming to protect and promote the strip of land formerly known as the Iron Curtain.


*Fig. 5 The European Green Belt (Source europeangreenbelt.org)*

Stretching over more than 12,000 km, the former demarcation line between the East and the West is allegedly Europe's 'precious natural pearl necklace' consisting of 'pristine forests and swamps, wild mountain ranges and river landscapes' that cannot be found anywhere else in Europe.[21] Currently, the foundation is intensely involved in opposing plans to develop hydropower plants on various 'wild' Balkan rivers, all the efforts being framed by the international campaign 'Save the Blue Heart of Europe'. In Romania, EuroNatur is one of the leaders of an environmental campaign for the protection of virgin forests.

[21] Brief presentation on https://www.euronatur.org/en/what-we-do/campaigns-and-initiatives/green-belt-europe/, last accessed 29 July 2019

It seems like there is a lot of wilderness to be saved in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, we will most probably witness a proliferation of such initiatives in the near future as it is generally accepted that this region contains the highest percentage of virgin forests (UNESCO, 2017), wildlife (European Parliament, 2018) and intact landscapes. Although apparently very heterogeneous, all these projects and initiatives, of which I enumerated above only the most important ones, share a few common features: they come as a response to degradation narratives and/or land abandonment; they oppose a strict protection approach to an allegedly failing marginal agriculture; they legitimate the interventions by appealing to Western scientific knowledge; and lastly, they glorify past ecological riches that Western Europe has lost. A political ecology of Eastern European wild nature should focus exactly on these common features while discussing aspects related to power, productive knowledge, environmental justice, wild aesthetics and hegemonic conservation narratives. For the rest of the section, I will expand briefly some of these topics which I think deserve more attention from political ecologists. Goes without saying that the field of Eastern European Political Ecology is severely underdeveloped.

**Land abandonment**

As posited by rewilding approach, land abandonment is an opportunity for the future conservation of environment moving towards a new wilderness. This land abandonment is taken for granted and rewilding comes as a restorative process 'in which formerly cultivated landscapes develop without human control' (Hochtl et al., 2005:86). Within this new conservation ethic, land abandonment is productive (Jørgensen, 2015: 484) but the underlining causes are always left unaddressed. The misleading character of this term has been already discussed by Tănăsescu (2017) in relation to different projects made popular by Rewilding Europe. In Eastern European countries land abandonment could be caused by underdevelopment, lack of infrastructure, lack of healthcare, education opportunities or jobs, huge rural-urban divides and a steady devaluing of agricultural work combined with a lack of outlets for selling the fruits of this work (Fox, 2011).

In one of the most renowned rewilding projects implemented in Eastern Europe at Armeniș, Romania, a decline in the former agricultural practices such (farming, animal

husbandry and sheep rearing) has triggered important transformations in the landscape. While pastures became overgrown with bushed and pioneer species, forest started to occupy former seasonal grazing areas. Situated in a region where several national and nature parks offered a relatively large intact territory, Rewilding Europe and WWF-DCP, considered that the context could be turned into a great opportunity to reintroduce a landscape architect – the European Bison *(Bison Bonasus).* The species is expected to create and maintain a mosaic landscape that would prove eventually beneficial for other species as well (Vasile, 2018). Similar assumptions about actual or relative abandonment of landscape are producing material consequences in various wilderness and rewilding projects across the region.

**Depopulation**

Closely connected to land abandonment is the issue of depopulation of rural areas. Many wilderness protection projects celebrate so-called wildlife returns across the continent. Leaving aside the fact that only charismatic species seem to return (brown bears, wolves, lynxes), such processes happen predominantly in areas affected by outmigration, ageing population and other descending demographic trends. From the Alpine communities to the Spanish *comunales,* depopulation seems an important process affecting negatively environmental stewardship. For rewilders and wilderness protectors this phenomenon is usually considered an opportunity. In Eastern Europe, one of the first rewilding projects started in the early 1990s was the reintroduction of Konik horses in the Pape region of Latvia, an area marked by massive outmigration, ageing population and total absence of markets for local products (Schwartz, 2006). Here, previous Soviet rule changed to a great extent both the rural economy and the cultural landscape around Runcava village. While pre-Soviet fishing practices were abandoned as the area became militarized, families moved to the bigger cities leaving the land almost deserted. When a rewilding project started to be considered as feasible in the area, the locals still present were trained how to see the land in terms of sustainability, biodiversity and restoration. But the donors chose Pape not only for the ecological riches and sparse population, Schwartz shows, but also for the low wages and low prices according to European standards, while the region was close enough to countries like Sweden and Germany, from where potential tourists

could be attracted (Schwartz, 2006:159). After several batches of Konik horses have been introduced successfully, the project continued with the reintroduction of wild cattle, development of a visitor centre and several other low impact facilities. The project is considered a success for rewilding, WWF managing to create here a new wilderness in a landscape previously emptied consciously by the Soviet state.

**The fate of marginal agriculture**

A close reading of current scholarly debates on rewilding and wilderness protection leads to a surprising conclusion – there is a wide consensus about the replacement of marginal agriculture with wilderness and rewilding enterprises. Although traditional agriculture and land uses were considered seminal for maintaining biodiversity (Bignal & McCracken, 1996; Blondel, 2006; Halada et al, 2011), proponents of rewilding think that such low-intensity farming systems should not be supported by EU direct payments (Merckx& Perreira, 2015:97). Following this logic, passive management and the reduction of human control of landscapes should benefit from EU funding schemes, and the Common Agricultural Policy should divert the direct payments from marginal agriculture to rewilding projects (Navarro and Pereira, 2015). In such a situation, fertile land should be intensely farmed, and the less-productive land should be given back to nature. So far, the EU main biodiversity conservation strategy has been designed to keep people in the rural area (Neumann 2014: 41). Cutting off direct payments and diverting them to projects of strict protection and to conservation experiments would advance outmigration even more. With regards to peculiar Eastern European cases, EU rural development funds and direct payments are further blamed for the decline of the untouched nature: *"EU 'rural development funds", which have included funding to build logging roads in areas that have hitherto not been accessible as well as the construction of weekend and guest houses in uninhabited mountain valleys. Also, the payment of agricultural subsidies to farmers after the accession of Romania to the EU has resulted in the increase of livestock grazing the alpine areas."* (Promberger & Promberger, 2015: 245)

Many farmers around Făgăraș Mountains in Romania, but also elsewhere keep raising cattle and sheep for the financial incentives received from the European Union as direct

payments. During fieldwork, I have visited multiple farms, sheepfolds and medium-sized households on all sides of Făgăraș. Had not been for the EU subsidies, farmers say, they will go out of business. The lack of access to markets for their products as well as the tight requirements to sell the meat, cheese and milk that they produce are also important points to take into consideration. Many say that the meat, the wool and even the milk is not sold for a fair price, so the current direct payments compensate for some of their loses. As an illustrative example, in 2017 one kilogram of wool was worth 1 Romanian leu (0.23 euro) and a sheep produce an average 2 kilograms of wool each year, the cost of shearing a sheep would go as high as 6 Romanian lei (1.5 euro), so each farmer would lose a significant amount of money. But nevertheless, a scenario in which farmers would decrease or even sell their sheep is a winning prospect for the rewilding and wilderness projects. Not only more funds would be made available for conservation enterprises (Merckx& Perreira, 2015), but also the landscape creates more opportunities for passive management, reintroductions and restoration practices.

**Degradation narratives**

Since the wild nature of Eastern Europe and the wilderness in the periphery has been discovered, an extensive array of degradation narratives has proliferated. Overgrazing, intensive use, deforestation, overhunting, highways development and many more are facets of an unprecedented attack on Europe's last wild areas, conservationists say. Monbiot considers shepherding as the cause of England's landscape despoliation (2011), damming in the Balkans is destroying Europe's blue heart (EuroNatur, 2016), illegal logging backed by the state are a threat to the last remaining wilderness of Poland (Gross, 2016) and the list can be extended on many pages.

On the other hand, these threats are rapidly turned into opportunities for conservation, as some of the most renowned conservationists have explicitly argued:

*"Unfortunately, some areas are being logged nonetheless, creating a real threat to wilderness and biodiversity, and narrowing the window of opportunity for private conservation investors"* (Martin et al, 2008:34), and

*"Conservation organizations today have the unique opportunity to acquire large areas of land to secure in perpetuity. Ecological and evolutionary processes can be allowed to*

*convert landscapes that still possess wilderness qualities and ecological richness back into true wilderness-for the benefit of biodiversity and the people alike."* (Promberger & Promberger, 2015:242).

One area in which degradation narratives were turned into opportunities for strict protection and ecological restoration through species reintroduction is the Danube Delta, a peripheral region of both Romania and Europe, but in the same time considered one of the most important hotspots for biodiversity on the continent. The delta has been modified by human intervention to a large extent for fishing, agriculture and reed production. As it is currently sparsely populated, dykes and human-made canals are still playing an important role in the functioning of the ecosystem so that a joint project of WWF and Rewilding Europe saw a great opportunity to implement one of their experimental initiatives here. Tănăsescu explains how the project has been challenged on various levels in the first years and was confronted by various locals who had different aspirations (Tănăsescu, 2017).

Similarly, this dissertation will show in the last two chapters how illegal logging and deforestation in Făgăraș were presented as a crisis situation and offered the background to intervene and implement a strict wilderness protection project by the Foundation Conservation Carpathia.

Could it be that the fast development of degradation narratives has the potential to trigger unprecedented green grabbing in Eastern Europe? Chapter 6 offers substantial arguments for an affirmative answer.

**Cheap nature**

Degradation narratives are only one mechanism that could potentially kindle green grabbing in Eastern Europe, cheapening of nature could be another one (Moore, 2015; Patel & Moore, 2017). I argue that nature is cheapened in many parts of Eastern Europe by a series of factors including incomplete or inappropriate post-socialist land reforms, arbitrary establishment of protected areas, framing certain land-use practices as inefficient and even the perceived incapacity of local communities to understand and value ecosystem services. In the aftermath of the 2005 Romanian forest restitution, the representatives of country's most iconic wilderness conservation project wrote to an

international audience the following: *"Private owners want to sell, and what happens after a sales contract is rather irrelevant to these new owners. What if conservation organizations step dynamically into the picture?"* (Promberger & Promberger, 2015: 245). Similarly, proponents of rewilding approaches advocate explicitly for the artificial cheapening of land in order to promote more conservation initiatives: *"we propose to disconnect subsidies for marginal land from farming activities. Doing so will make farming less economic to owners of marginal land, which will reduce land prices, and hence reduce competition for land with other societal players, bringing opportunities for ecosystem restoration"* (Mercks, Perreira, 2015:99). A political ecology analysis of wild areas in Eastern Europe shows that they are not only scarce and threatened, but cheap as well.

**Productive knowledge and territorialization**

While analyzing the role of scientific knowledge in advancing wilderness narratives in Eastern Europe, political ecologists should note that Western or domestic epistemic communities draw clear boundaries between what is considered wild and untouched and what has been intensely managed. In Romania, large areas of strictly conserved land are about to be converted from commercial forests to a private wilderness reserve. Bisecting the continent, the European Green Belt Initiative works towards implementing 'an extensive north-south conservation corridor' (Martin et al, 2008:35) comprising lands left in a wild state by the Cold War legacy. Similar other initiatives propose fencing wild areas, or, on the contrary, removing past signs of human management such as dams, forestry roads, telecommunication antennas, etc. Although aiding such reterritorialization processes, scientific knowledge is sometimes either ignored or considered irrelevant for central policymakers. For example, most Eastern European EU members do not adopt scientifically sound wildlife management practices. In Romania, Slovakia and Bulgaria, little is known about some important species' dynamics and populations (brown bear, wolf) (European Parliament, 2018). Same applies for virgin forests; states have been criticized for not having accurate data about these ecosystems in order to adopt effective protection measures. Yet, when states partner with scientists, the later tend to claim

exclusive power to decide what and how nature should be saved, a tendency identified also as territorialization (Guha, 1989).

**Hegemonic vision**

Lastly, an important topic deserving attention for political ecologists is the conservation vision most suitable to be promoted for Eastern Europe. The way it is currently framed wilderness conservation could trigger conflicts or foster unexpected collaborations (Drenthen, 2018:412). The highly praised untouched character of nature is for the moment at odds with the region's many rich environmental histories. If the EU landscape conservation approach will shift from a traditional appreciation of hybridity (Neumann, 2014: 32) towards a duality of wild vs. non-wild, this should not happen at the expense of erasing human histories from the landscape. Wilderness conservation can be genuinely promoted in Europe not by taking people off the land or controlling their access to the natural environment, but by celebrating a fertile traditional culture that used to consider wild places a refuge, a place of emancipation and an escape from injustice. From being a wild frontier of an intensely anthropized West (Haila, 1997: 132), Eastern European nature should be considered both resilient and co-produced.

One example that illustrates a clash between local public interests and a certain hegemonic vision is the case of Šumava National Park situated in the Czech Republic at the border with Germany. Together with the Bavarian Forest National Park on the German side, the region has been popularized around 2010 as the Green Heart of Europe (Krenova & Kiener, 2012), a transboundary wilderness area of great importance for the development of wilderness momentum in Eastern Europe. Here as well, the militarization of the Iron Curtain led to the abandonment of many local settlements and the destruction of the local economy (Petrova, 2014: 134). Former environmental management practices involving intensive logging were replaced by non-intervention strategies in the early 1990s without prior consultation with the local communities. The excluded local residents have started voicing their discontent as the area, promoted as wilderness, became more and more attractive to tourists and less appealing for habitation (Petrova, 2014).

Without doubt, the current wilderness momentum unfolding in Europe and manifested through the creation of a green internal periphery constitutes a rich topic for political ecology. Many of the projects enumerated above show striking similarities: they have been directly or indirectly emptied of people in the recent past, or the current economic conditions force people to move out. The actual or relative abandonment of landscape is considered an important opportunity for conservation, while the land is reserved exclusively for restoration or reintroduction of missing species. Lastly, the hegemonic discourse about how nature should look like coupled with degradation narratives act as productive knowledge against a rich local environmental history.

In this section, I briefly detailed only some aspects that could benefit from more scrutiny using political ecology tools. The next chapters will take this discussion further and will follow several processes as they unfold in Romania. The role of knowledge and power, the conservation vision and the way wilderness protection functions as a securitization project triggering local resistance will be the central topics for the remaining part of this dissertation.

## 2.5 Summary of the argument

This chapter offered a synthesized analysis of recent wilderness protection developments in Europe. The central aim of the present discussion was to revisit some of the most important moments marking a decade of wilderness discussions in the EU and the actors that have contributed the most to this debate. I argued that wilderness conservation targets predominantly the European periphery and I called the sum of conservation initiatives unfolding in Eastern Europe – The New Wild East. The chapter paid considerable attention to the political context of wilderness protection starting with the adoption of a wilderness resolution by the European Parliament in 2009.

I explored the scientific potential of studying the emergence of wilderness narratives in Eastern Europe by using the tools of political ecology. I concluded by advocating for a deeper understanding of some taken for granted Eastern European realities such as land abandonment and degradation narratives and I showed how they were turned into opportunities by conservationists. The next three chapters will contextualize the current wilderness momentum by moving the focus on Romania.

# Chapter 3 Assessing virgin nature: Discourse and narrowing of vision in protecting Romania's virgin forests

## 3.1 Introduction

*"Valentin Sălăgeanu[22] helped me discover the story of the virgin forests, forested ecosystems where nature lives in its purest form without being significantly affected by any human intervention. I could say that there is more precise information about Sharp Mountain on Mars than about the woods of Romania – for example, a national cadastre is still missing. (…) A significant part of illegal logging has been tolerated because the authorities were not capable, starting with 1990, to solve the most pressing problem: peoples' access to firewood. Across the country, 3.5 million households are dependent on firewood." (Glamour, April 2018 – own translation)*

The April 2018 issue of Glamour fashion & lifestyle magazine featured an editorial article on the protection of virgin forests in Romania. Within the article, the readers could get the latest news about a Greenpeace campaign for saving the 'last virgin forests of Europe'. Here readers were invited to support the cause and were offered a dose of optimism *"The good news is that civil society becomes more and more sensitive over this issue, 42% of illegal cases of logging in 2016 were identified by citizens."* The so-called 'eco issue' also included a piece on pre-owned clothes, and an extensive dossier about H&M Conscious Exclusive 2018 – a new collection proposed by the fast-fashion world champion, made from materials with appealing names such as organic silk or recycled silver. The photos depicting the new sustainable garments were shot in the lush greenhouses of the Botanical Garden of Bucharest. Towards the end, the readers were told to green up their lives and to choose from a set of recommended activities: watching a green movie, attending an international environmental documentary festival or use an app to report places with abandoned garbage.

[22] Valentin Sălăgeanu leads the Forest and Bioriversity campaign at Greenpeace Romania

Over the last seven years, similar articles and communications had been broadcast by different Romanian media, contributing to a national debate about the protection of old-growth temperate forests. Under the name of 'virgin forests,' these complex forested ecosystems caught constant public attention becoming a source of inspiration for street artists, designers, musicians, activists and the growing urban liberal youth [23]. Concentrated efforts of renowned national and local environmental NGOs made possible the continued presence of these forests on the public agenda. The struggles fought by all these diverse actors were mirrored by proportional reactions from politicians and state institutions. These came up with a strategy and the tools to ensure the protection of Europe's last virgin forests. Eventually, the movement gained momentum, becoming a societal exercise in which citizens were both co-opted and made responsible for the protection of these treasures. In the meantime, they became also consumers of a spectacularized mythical nature.

This chapter does several things. First, it gives an account of the various ways of conceptualizing virgin forest in general, and their protection in particular. Second, it engages with these diverse ways of knowing by confronting them with more localized and pragmatic attitudes towards 'untouched nature'. The chapter concludes with an attempt to convince the reader of the relevance of this debate for the general controversy around wilderness protection in Europe.

## *Complexity of the phenomenon*

The complexity of the phenomenon under scrutiny lays both in its scale and in its multiple and successive metamorphoses. Beyond constituting a hot public debate for several years, the virgin forests have been the object of intricate political debates ranging from national security to the development of big infrastructural projects. Moving the focus away from the national stage we will find out that the protection of old-growth forests is part of an international sustained effort to identify and find ways of conserving

[23] Various campaigns promoted by WWF-DCP, Greenpeace, Agent Green and other environmental NGOs have recurrently used the term virgin forests and not old-growth, ancient, primary, primeval or other term more preferred by natural scientists. An account of and comparison of various definitions used by different scientists is offered by Lund (2002). An extensive discussion of the ecological values and specificities of old-growth forests is beyond the scope of this dissertation.

wild nature. As shown in the previous chapter this effort encompasses the most radical reinterpretation of our relationship with the natural world, one that redesigns the cartography of environmental protection across the continent. This chapter and the following one will contextualize the wilderness momentum by narrowing the analysis to a more discrete element of untouched nature – the virgin forests of the Carpathians.

It should be clearly stated that these two chapters do not take a stance against protecting these very valuable ecosystems, quite the contrary. By approaching critically different aspects of virgin forests protection in Romania, I hope I will succeed to open up the discussion about what we think we are saving when 'we save virgin forests', and how can we make this process more inclusive and just. Of course, here I refer particularly to giving voice to actors that do not find themselves in the categories that have been hegemonic so far (i.e. the experts and the state).

## *Some features*

Throughout the entire public debate, which started around 2012[24] but gained momentum in 2016[25], the virgin forests were addressed as a comprehensive and a discrete object. For the successful outcome of various campaigns and for the efficiency of delivering impactful news, the virgin forests had to be reduced to a set of common features, usually referring to age, biodiversity, scarcity and potential or imminent disappearance. The huge diversity of their ecology and history (both on deep time scale and on a human scale), has been brushed off. With the notable exception of a handful of scientific articles, in the public or legal discourse technical terms to describe these rich ecosystems have been tuned out. Numbers, on the other hand, have taken centrefold, literally. The decreasing size of the surface occupied by these forests, the quantity of carbon that they can sequester, their age, or the total number of species they could shelter has been ever-present in press releases, billboards, calendars, documentaries, in the official reports and in numerous radio broadcasts. Stepping just one step back, it is not hard to notice that using such abstract numbers could easily turn the entire debate into an 'information

[24] With the adoption of Ministerial Order 3397 by Rovana Plumb, Minister of Environment, setting out the criteria for virgin forest identification.
[25] With the signing of Ministerial Order 2525 that instituted the National Catalogue of Virgin Forests

dump' (Morton 2018). Using rough data to demonstrate their scarcity and their imminent disappearance does not imply that the participants to the debate are always informed about what they are trying to save. Furthermore, the association of numbers with spectacular images, usually produced by drones, has changed radically the way people understood the entire process of protecting virgin forests, and therefore their participation. I argue that the spectacular production of virgin forests happened concomitantly with the campaign for their protection. Mass- and social media, the street, numerous artistic events, marketing campaigns for luxury items, even political programs picked on the topic. Although it crossed geographic divides, this campaign took different turns. While the national movement produced a digital object of desire through VR technologies, artistic interventions and mapping (Greenpeace, 2017), the way the movement unfolded internationally hinted more to the construction of virgin forests as a /mythical, almost sacred object (EuroNatur, 2017). When they were not spectacularized, the virgin forests became either an environmental or a climate fix. Although this view had been less present in the public discourse in Romania, it constituted the central focus for important actors at the European Union level (Wild Europe, 2016).

### *Why is it important*

This introduction would be incomplete without reflecting on the relevance of virgin forest protection at this particular moment. Environmental movements in Romania do not have a strong tradition, or at least not the sort of continuity and power similar to those in Poland or Hungary (Karper, 2006; Szulecka & Szulecki, 2017). However, recent history has witnessed a strong mobilization of civil society around two environmental topics: cyanide gold mining and illegal deforestation and loss of virgin forests. The first, which peaked in the autumn of 2013, has been constantly investigated by scholars ranging from political ecologists to historians (Velicu, 2012, 2017; Pașca, 2010), underlying aspects related to environmental injustice, corruption or the imminent evanescence of ancient heritage. On the other hand, the campaign against the disappearance of virgin forests was not as coherent as 'Save Rosia Montana' campaign, but it still continues to keep the headlines, to catalyze online communities and push for

political change. Scholarly interest in approaching the movement critically has been either marginal or focused predominantly on the aspects of bad governance or low legal enforcement (Vasile 2007, 2009; Knorn et al, 2012). This chapter (and the following one) does not aim to approach the movement in its entire complexity, but try to bring to the forefront facets that have been overlooked: the role of power in producing knowledge about virgin forests, the role of images and their circulation and the wider societal implications of defining these ecosystems as national or universal heritage.

The analysis comes as timely also when we consider the global debates about strict protection of old-growth forests and nature-based solutions for climate mitigation (Bastin et al, 2019). Together with other intact ecosystems, these forests are regarded as the most efficient strategies in mitigating climate change and other global challenges such as the falling rates of biodiversity (Luyssaert et al, 2008). As they are an important source of information about the structure, natural processes and general functioning of intact ecosystems, their protection is considered by many natural scientists as crucial (Veen et al, 2010). At the same time, their constant display as paradisiacal nature makes them the object of desire for ecotourism projects around the world, in an attempt to switch global high impact tourism to at least discoursively more just and ecological ways of developing this industry (Koivula, 2018)

Last but not least, this critical inquiry is consistent with the growing interest in the political economy of environmental services and biodiversity. Although the study of abstract nature's creation and involvement in global processes of capital accumulation has produced great scholarship (Bellamy-Foster & Burkett, 2016; Moore, 2015; Harvey, 2003), the attention to current proliferation of financial and mechanisms to assign value to wild nature has either been marginal or simply ignored in the European context.

### *Chapter's structure*

After this extended introduction, the chapter continues with two rather large sections followed by a conclusion. The first descriptive section reviews the actual studies of virgin forests, the most notable public campaigns and the proportional response from the state. Next, I will explore the role of the science and technology involved in knowing virgin

forests. Additionally, this section will analyze how scientific data laid the ground for the development of legal framework and mechanisms such as The National Catalogue of Virgin and Quasi-Virgin Forests (further on The Catalogue). A brief conclusion will wrap up the argument and will reaffirm the relevance of the present discussion.

## 3.2 Case description

This section will describe and examine the growing interest in virgin forest protection in Romania. After succinctly bringing to light previous scientific interests the most robust attempt at cataloguing them will be discussed. The review of most notable campaigns and their social and political ramifications will occupy the biggest part of the section, while the political response and recent legal developments will conclude it.

### *How it all began*

The first attempts to map and describe old-growth forests in the Romanian Carpathians were those of forest management officers, working in the first decades after the WWII, a period of extensive assessment of country's natural resources. Zeno Oarcea, in particular, stands out with his passionate descriptions combining technical information with valuable field notes written in a highly passionate manner (discussed by Biris, 2016). After that moment, the first dedicated and complete work would need to wait until 1995 when a collective of biologists and forestry specialists will publish in Timisoara '*Pădurea Secular*ă' – a work discussing the functioning and features of twelve representative forests from South-Western Carpathians (Bandiu et al, 1995). More recently, wilderness projects and discourses have been paying particular attention to that area (Stanciu, 2015). Unfortunately, their attempt was singular, and the old-growth and primeval forests had to wait at least one more decade until the first complete study and inventory started. The *Inventory and Strategy for Sustainable Management and Protection of Virgin Forests in Romania (PIN-MATRA/2001/018),* is today regarded among environmentalists and conservationists as a founding moment of virgin forests protection in Romania. The Project, enjoying the generous support of Dutch Ministries of Agriculture, Nature and

Food Quality and Foreign Affairs, was executed jointly by the Romanian Forest Research and Management Institute (ICAS) and the Royal Dutch Society for Nature Conservation (KNNV) and made available to the general public in 2005. The stated aim of the project was the identification of old-growth forests in Romania, a country considered to host the largest area of these forests in Europe. The most important results of the collaboration were a map of 218,000 ha of untouched virgin forest, a final definition of what constitutes a virgin forest and a set of policy recommendations. As the authors admit, the urgency of issuing this report was the rapid disappearance of woodlands in the Carpathians triggered by the massive restitution process taking momentum after 2000 (Veen & Biriș, 2005). While the previous works preferred to use the terms old-growth (*secular*) or primeval and to acknowledge sporadically the role of local communities and customary rights in their protection (Bandiu et al, 1995), the PIN-Matra study opted exclusively for the use of 'virgin forests' as an umbrella term, excluding thus any human involvement in their development: *"We propose to use the term virgin forest as a unifying concept for forests which are not influenced directly by man in their development"* (Veen et al, 2010:1808). The species composition in relation to biogeographical factors, the structure and forest dynamics, but also the issue of scale were important factors of this inventory.

Specific criteria for their identification and the methodology used will be discussed in the next section (2.3). The study has had a great importance for virgin forests protection, it has been used and abused ever since in myriad environmental reports and press releases, official documents and on Facebook posts, invoked in public awareness campaigns and disregarded by authorities at the same time.

### *Building momentum*

This section will review three of the most important campaigns in the protection of virgin forests in Romania. All of the three ENGOs used online petitioning, the development of online platforms and websites while involving public figures in their actions. Their

efforts pushed the government and ministries to reform and adapt the legal framework, as the next section will show.

**Virgin and unprotected**

The old-growth forests topic remained marginal or even absent from public attention in Romania until October 2011. Although not explicitly linked to the international developments, the adoption of an additional Protocol to the Carpathian Convention to which Romania is a state party might have led to a new interest in the protection of these forests. Partnered with a top television, WWF Danube-Carpathians Programme (WWF-DCP) launched a massive campaign trying to get the critical mass involved in pressuring the government to ensure complete protection of the forests considered of extreme importance by existing literature (Knapp et al, 2007; Stăncioiu, 2008). Conceived by Headvertising Agency the campaign was launched on TV at maximum audience hour and rapidly gained momentum. The corollary video, shorter than a minute, was showing flashes of two foresters felling old trees with a chainsaw mixed with sights of journalists wearing WWF t-shirts while signing the petition on a tree trunk. The only words accompanying the images were the following: '*Currently, there is no law to prevent felling down 82% of the virgin forests, but we could have one if you sign the petition!*' (WWF-DCP, 2011a). The ball started rolling and the old-growth and primeval forested ecosystems previously known only to scientists were entering public attention under a new name 'virgin and unprotected' (WWF-DCP, 2011b). In less than three days from the campaign's lunch, Prince of Wales stated publicly his endorsement, as the Telegraph reported under the title *'Prince of Wales campaigning to save Count Dracula forests'*[26]. The campaign included thematic visits to a strict nature reserve close to Brașov, constant media presence (on radio, TV, blogs and newspapers) and the development of a dedicated website - *padurivirgine.ro* (WWF-DCP, 2011c). After one month of media presence and intense lobbying, president Traian Basescu declared that preserving the virgin forests is a strategic objective for the country's future development. By the end of the year, WWF Romania and the Romanian Ministry of Environment

[26] https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/earth/earthnews/8851383/Prince-of-Wales-campaigning-to-save-Count-Dracula-forests.html, last accessed 29 June 2019

signed an agreement to identify, map and grant full protection to these endangered ecosystems, pledging at least 100,000 euro. IKEA and Lafarge - building materials world leader, were WWF's main supporters. To this date, *padurivirgine.ro* remains the best source of information for virgin forest protection in the country, the platform being constantly developed and updated.

**Boot camp for the wild**

Unlike WWF-DCP who mostly relied on scientists, Greenpeace Romania involved celebrities and charismatic figures in their campaigns dedicated to virgin forest protection. Probably the most visible and successful action was the organization of a volunteer camp in the heart of Făgăraș Mountains in the summer of 2016. Part of the larger *Save Our Forests* campaign, 'The Romanian Forest Rescue Station' based at Cumpăna, involved volunteers from 14 countries. When they were not shooting testimonials and drone footage, the volunteers helped with mapping and documenting 854 hectares of virgin forests and around 1000 additional hectares of 'degraded ancient forests (Greenpeace, 2016). The whole aim of this endeavour was to gather the relevant data for a grounding study demanding the inclusion of the Cumpăna forest in the National Catalogue of Virgin Forests. For more than one month, the enthusiasm of these volunteers had been catalyzed by the involvement and support of a dozen actors, artists, bloggers, climbers and other celebrities renowned among the environmentalist society. Blog posts written by the international participants praised the 'true wonders' of these forests that allowed them to have a sense of how 'Europe looked like more than 30,000 years ago'[27]. Very preoccupied in the previous months about the fate of our Carpathian beech forests Leonardo DiCaprio himself posted about the camp on Instagram. In the first 20 hours, the post hit 230,000 likes[28]. Another last virgin forest of Europe was being rescued. Judging from its publicity the campaign was a massive success. Indeed, to map a virgin forest just meters away from two of the biggest communist symbols of the country (Vidraru Dam and Transfăgărașan Carpathian Road) was truly a remarkable thing. But

[27] More details on the camp: https://www.greenpeace.org/romania/ro/campanii/paduri/camp/Romanian-Forest-Rescue-Station/the-romanian-forest-camp-volunteer-story/blog/57344/ , last accessed on 15 June 2019

[28] As reported by an article in Business review: http://business-review.eu/news/american-actor-leonardo-dicaprio-warns-of-forest-destruction-risk-in-romania-119491 , last accessed on 15 June 2019

this connection was shadowed during the entire campaign. Public outcry about the logging in these ancient forests bordering the hydropower dam of Vidraru accompanied every communication about the camp. Nothing has been said about the massive forestry operations undertaken in the interwar period on the exact same spot when railway lines were transporting logs down the mountains day and night and forestry colonies were prosperous in the exact same area. Where now virgin forests were allegedly merciless massacred, 1930's pictures show summer residence villas frequented by the artistic figures of that time, picturesque haystacks along with endless wagons carrying logs (Gheorghiescu, 2017). The early years of the 1960s witnessed massive geoengineering projects in the same basin which involved a complex network of underground tunnels collecting the streams of more than five rivers spanning over 100 miles into what will become a wonder of communist Romania – The Vidraru Hydropower Dam. Pictures from those times show barren mountain slopes, impressive machinery and more stacks of logs (Gheorghiescu, 2017). Only ten years after the inauguration of the hydropower facility, Argeș basin was again turned upside down by the development of an ambitious trans-Carpathian road crossing the mountains at 2000 m altitude – The Transfăgărășan. Post-socialist memory labelled these two projects as a symptom of Ceaușescu's megalomania. Regardless of the current interpretation, the area had been previously a strategic border between the medieval principality of Walachia and the Kingdom of Hungary. The ruins of Poienari Citadel and countless legends still bear witness of that period.

As in the case of other charismatic virgin forest of the Carpathians, local commons called *obști* are still big and powerful in the area. Here they were endowed with woodlands as communal properties as early as mid 15$^{th}$ century (Stănciulescu & Stănciulescu, 2006). Under their bylaws, the forest has been used, exploited, conserved and protected for the benefit of locals whose livelihoods concentrated around logging and animal husbandry for centuries (Stănciulescu & Stănciulescu, 2006: 91). When not managed by the local population, these forests were massively logged for export, as recent robust analyses of post-war images taken by spy satellites have proven (Nita et al, 2018).

Although social media was flooded in August 2016 with testimonials about the untouched forests of Cumpăna-Vidraru representing an unseen 30,000 years old

European landscape (Greenpeace, 2016), local memory and historical records show that these forests are highly social. The scientific consensus about post-glacial beech colonization of Europe (which ended around 10,000 BC) was another fact obscured by 'factoids' alluding to a people-free golden past (Morton, 2018). By June 2019 the forest mapped by Greenpeace volunteers had not made it to The Catalogue yet.[29]

Precisely one year after the camp, Greenpeace hit the headlines once again. A group of activists blocked for several hours a logging operation in Bratocea Forest, part of Ciucaș Mountains, 70 km north of Bucharest. Claiming that the logging was destroying a quasi-virgin forest, the activists chained themselves to the tractors and streamed live the entire occupy movement. Their post hit rapidly 200,000 Likes and more than 5,000 Shares on Facebook.[30] After presenting the general importance of virgin forests the spokesperson mentioned the reason for which the current forest was logged – to meet the need of firewood for the local population. The issue was picked by enraged supporters who manifested online their disagreement and even transposed it into articles claiming that the government attempts to solve the severe firewood crisis by logging its virgin forests (Agent Green, 2017). Greenpeace asked the regional forestry guard to fine the logging company and the ministry of environment to institute a moratorium for logging in all virgin forests while finalizing a complete national inventory. While their actions were broadcast by most mass-media, ROMSILVA, the national agency administering the state forests offered solid proofs for the legality of the blocked exploitation. The ministry also reinstated the fact that the forest did not meet the criteria to qualify as virgin or quasi-virgin (ROMSILVA, 2017). Once again disagreement about what constitutes a virgin forest ignited a public scandal. Although the PIN-Matra study (see above section 3.2.1) regarded the area as virgin forest following a remote sensing analysis, field verification concluded that the plot does not feature the entire set of characteristics to make it to The Catalogue and thus ensure its full protection. Eventually, to calm down the crowd, the

[29] The Catalogue is constantly updated and available to the public on the Ministry of Waters and Forests website

[30] The live Greenpeace post of 31st August 2017 is available here http://www.bursa.ro/greenpeace-exploatarea-din-padurea-bratocea-este-realizata-ilegal-00040330, last accessed 19 June 2019

logging company was fined for using the river bed to transport their logs. Greenpeace was accused by ROMSILVA for spreading fake news and later sued for slander.

**Paradise forests' protectors**

Agent Green, established in 2009, is another environmental organization putting great efforts in protecting Romania's virgin forests. After several years of campaigning against genetically modified organisms, the NGO became the most vocal actor investigating illegal logging with a focus on deforestation in national parks. As of March 2017, Agent Green partnered with EURONATUR Stiftung in an original European-wide campaign to save Romania's virgin forests – *'Save Paradise Forests'*. EURONATUR, established in 1987[31] in Germany is also the main promoter of another renowned campaign that embraces wilderness values in the Balkans – '*Save the Blue Heart of Europe'*, petitioning for the removal of existing dams or blocking hydropower projects on (again) 'the last wild rivers of Europe'. The originality of 'Save Paradise Forest' lies more in their discourse and aesthetics than in their deeds. Hans Knapp, one of the promoters of the extension of UNESCO's property 'Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and other regions of Europe' and part of EURONATUR presiding committee used the following words to describe these forests in a recent policy brief: *"It's a magical place. This is a completely untouched nature. This is one of the very few places in Europe with prime* (sic!) *forests that have been untouched since the beginning"* (Agent Green, 2019). He is also known for authoring articles infused with spectacular 'visual evidence' testifying the breadth of illegal deforestation in the Carpathians under the name '*Impressions of a forest excursion to Romania'* (Knapp, 2016).

A remarkable moment of their campaign happened in the early hours of March 10, 2017, when around 30 'paradise forests protectors' stopped for a few hours the trucks transporting timber in Vidraru area, Făgăraș Mountains (same area targeted by Greenpeace in 2016). Wearing bright blue jackets and holding banners with the campaign's logo the activists climbed the trucks in the cold rain standing with their bodies against the imminent destruction of 'an outstanding global natural heritage (that)

[31] An overview of their activity is available here https://www.euronatur.org/ueber-euronatur/ueber-uns/organisation/), last accessed on 19 June 2019.

must not be destroyed' as Knapp present himself at the blockade declared[32]. Their action is to date one of the most visible among all campaigns to save virgin forests in Romania, having more than 62,000 shares, over 3 million views and 20.000 live comments. Following the blockade, the ministry initiated several control actions to six forestry districts in the area[33] and started legal actions against the forestry companies involved in illegal logging, unlawful land restitution and deforestation (Agent Green, 2017a). The ministry also denied many claims made by the activists, such as the disappearance of 70% of the forests in the area or the fact that the forests were classified as virgin. These details have been ignored by upcoming press-releases and references to the blockade. Moreover, the ministry admitted for the first time that the renowned PIN-Matra study had never been authorized by the relevant Romanian forestry research institutes, nor had it been officially transmitted to ROMSILVA, the body in charge with the forest administration. This detail hints to possible fractures within the wild nature truth regime. ROMSILVA is not only in charge of guarding the state's forests but also manages various commercial enterprises such as nurseries, timber felling, fisheries, mushroom and berries collecting points and so on. It falls under their duties to regard the forest as productive and to manage its various resources in a sustainable manner.

Virgin or not, the forests of Argeș Upper Valley caught already the attention of big players in the international environmental movement. Country's most renowned conservation actor, Foundation Conservation Carpathia, had already acquired around 400 ha of charismatic forests in the area by 2017 (A. Pop, personal communication 2017).

Towards the end of the 2017, Agent Green turned from the harshest critic of Schweighofer Holzindustrie, the biggest wood processing company on the Romanian market, to one of their partisans praising their commitment to identify and protect the virgin forests under their direct ownership (Agent Green, 2017b). Previously, Schweighofer had been publicly shamed by the Environmental Investigation Agency for their disastrous impact on Romania's forest since 2015, which led to losing its Forest Stewardship Council Certification (EIA, 2015).

[32] Agent Green's official declaration is available online https://www.saveparadiseforests.eu/en/agent-green-activists-scientists-and-mountaineers-stop-logging-trucks-in-romania-to-raise-alarm-about-paradise-forest-destruction/ last accessed 19 June 2019.

[33] Official communication of ROMSILVA is available at http://apepaduri.gov.ro/3757-2/, last accessed on 19 June 2019

## *Political response*

### Towards full protection

As mentioned in the previous section, the first public campaign initiated by WWF - DCP in 2012 generated some weak political support, the most notable being a Protocol of collaboration between the Ministry of Environment and the initiators. The authorities seemed open but a clear legal framework was still an unfulfilled promise. 2012 was marked not only by a change of government but also by extensive anti-austerity protests. From the capital city Bucharest to medium-sized towns, people were marching for reforms of the health and education system, internet freedom and against a massive cyanide mining project proposed to start in Roșia Montană (Gotiu, 2013; Velicu, 2017). Claims to halt deforestation and protect what was still left from our old-growth forests were rather marginal by that time. However, the organized sector of Romania's civil society was constantly pressuring the government to keep their promises and adopt a new legal framework for virgin forest protection. During a rather controversial office at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change, Rovana Plumb signed the *Ministerial Order 3.397 of 10/09/2012* which set the criteria and indicators needed for the identification of virgin and quasi-virgin forests across Romanian Carpathians. This is the inaugural moment of a set of legal developments that has been ongoing ever since. Within only four articles, MO 3.397 offered the first legal definition of virgin and quasi-virgin forests, established specific categories to be used in future management plans (Art. 2) and enforced their strict protection (Art. 3). The two criteria - naturalness and size, were each supplemented by nine, respectively five indicators fixing thresholds and limits for a future separation between virgin forests and managed woods. This line of separation set clear boundaries between what needed to be considered an untouched nature and what could be managed according to forestry conventional practices, rural development programs and other human uses. The order offered forestry management officers (*amenajiști*) new instruments to classify a type of forest considered before of secondary economic importance. In addition, it stated that a special protection status should be granted to those plots identified within the PIN-Matra study as virgin forests, more than

seven years before. As a reminder, the study concluded that around 82% of remaining forest enjoyed no legal protection, a predicament that kindled WWF's 2011 campaign.

Even though the criteria and indicators for virgin forest identification had been set, it did not translate into a considerable progress. Over the following years, illegal logging scandals mushroomed and images with deforested landscapes made recurrent headlines. As the executive power changed again from social-democrats to technocrats in late 2015 a new window of opportunity seemed to open for those who demanded more reforms in the environmental protection sector. During those 400 days of technocratic rule, Romania saw a dramatic evolution of environmental protection, from new mechanisms to report wildlife crime to wide public consultations and innovative instruments to combat deforestation (Ministerul Mediului, 2017). Representative for this momentum was the signing of *Ministerial Order 2525 of 30/12/2016* by Erika Stanciu, state secretary but also president and founding member of several ENGOs. The order constituted the **National Catalogue of Virgin and Quasi-Virgin Forests** (hereby the Catalogue), a much-needed instrument, that had been strongly demanded by environmentalists ever since the identification criteria were established in 2012.

MO 2525 became the pinnacle of the new wilderness truth regime. It established clear criteria about who has the competence to identify and propose forests for inclusion, specific procedures, relations between institutions and standardized forms of classifying, measuring and reporting virgin nature. Unchanged ever since, MO 2525 remains the only legal framework to grant strict protection to old-growth woods classified as virgin or quasi-virgin forests. The two categories, *virgin* and *quasi-virgin*, correspond to the functional categories 1.5j and 1.5o in the Romanian forestry management system. The Quasi-virgin category is almost absent from the international scientific literature, although most of the forests put under strict protection in Romania belong to this category, as we will see further. This is another line of fracture within the wild nature truth regime. The conservation ways of seeing these forests will be discussed at length in the section about the science and mapping technologies.

**Cataloguing a disappearing forest**

The Catalogue proved to be a useful instrument, although the inscription process was regarded as slow and tedious. While the first version of the Catalogue had been made already available to the public before the end of the technocratic rule, the subsequent two were disseminated only in October 2017 and May 2019 respectively.

According to the ministerial order plots of forested land could be included in the Catalogue in two ways, by updating their decennial management plan or through an independent study done by experts and named 'grounding study'.

Decennial Management Plans (*amenajament silvic)* are mandatory instruments for all forest owners owning more than 10 ha and for all forest administrators, public or private. They set clear quotas for harvesting, they clarify which species should be exploited and other forestry operations that should be undertaken. Elaborated by authorized forestry management companies, these plans have to be renewed every ten years. This explains part of the delay in identifying plots of virgin or quasi-virgin forests. Technically, if a management plan had been issued before the MO 3397 established the identification criteria and indicators (i.e. September 2012); potential virgin forests will be classified as such only after a new plan will be validated in 2022.

The second mechanism of inclusion follows the submission of an independent expert study, called Grounding Study, verified and validated by the authorities.

Two environmental NGOs have been very industrious in submitting grounding studies to support the inclusion of new forests; Greenpeace for 555.02 ha and WWF for 3421.09 ha over the last years. However, it should be noted that the on-ground verification done by authorities is a long process and that there might exist other proposed studies waiting for confirmation.

Private owners are encouraged to propose their forests to be included, but the mechanisms that compensated them for not being able to exploit these woods started working only as of 2017 (HG 447/2017). In the last version of the Catalogue, made available to the public on 15 May 2019, the vast majority of virgin and quasi-virgin forests are state (State) or municipalities' properties (TAU). For now, only four private owners decided to include their properties in the catalogue, one of them being largely

examined in the next chapter. It should be noted that their properties do not satisfy the criteria to be considered as virgin, so they have been included as quasi-virgin forests. This aspect is important to remember when we will analyze the public environmental discourse. With the exception of one commons from Hunedoara County, all virgin forests included in the catalogue are under public ownership exclusively.

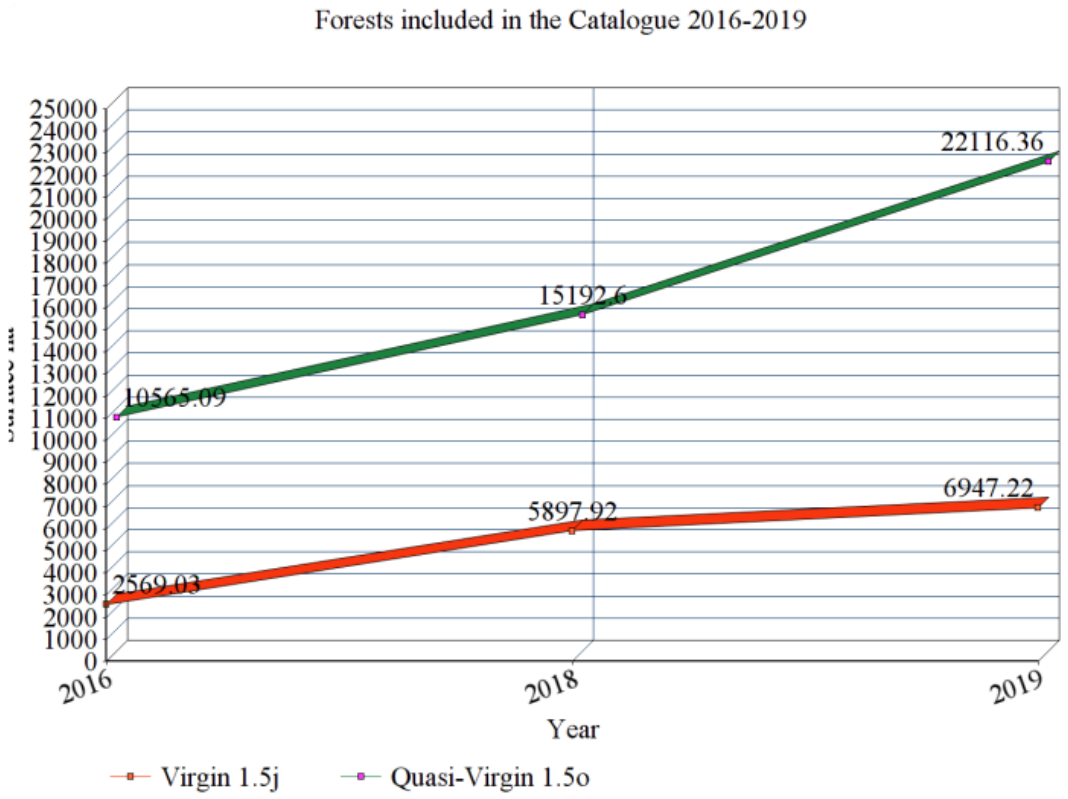


*Fig. 6 Evolution of virgin forest areas included in the Catalogue 2016-2019*

The slow pace of Catalogue's development has been widely criticized by ENGO's and civil society alike. Both the Ministry of Forests and Waters and RNP ROMSILVA, the state's forests administrator, had been constantly shamed in mass- and social media for delaying the process or even refusing to include certain forests in the Catalogue (Greenpeace, 2017). The available data proves the contrary. Most of the forests included so far are state forests, and ROMSILVA is not only responsible for inclusion but also open to collaborating with those who elaborate grounding studies (WWF, 2019). Yet,

ENGO's claim that grounding studies have been elaborated for more than 30,000 ha, but the authorities are delaying their validation (Greenpeace, 2017). It would seem that the development of a proper and coherent legal framework for virgin forest protection met civil society's demands and diminished its interest for this topic. The subsequent events showed that the campaign to save these forests was far from reaching an end.

**Development without deforestation**

2018 started on a positive note. WWF reported about their collaboration with the Forestry District from Baia de Aramă which resulted in the inclusion of more than 2,070 hectares of newly identified virgin forests. Also, the National Program for Rural Development was about to be revised for offering fair monetary compensation to owners whose forests have been put under strict protection. Towards the end of February, a draft law aiming to amend a previous act regarding public infrastructure development proposed to allow the advancement of infrastructure projects even in protected areas and virgin forests already included in the Catalogue. ENGO's responded instantly and soon the entire civil society was split between virgin forest lovers and those claiming that rural communities are denied basic standards of living for the sake of untouched nature. These extreme attitudes were steadily displayed on social media, national newspapers, on the radio and even on the national television (TVR, 2018). While WWF-DCP submitted a draft of amendments, Greenpeace initiated a new public campaign - '*Development without deforestation'*, launched a petition and instantly drew parallels with the unfortunate logging in the Białowieża forest in Poland. Agent Green issued a statement of support for virgin forest protection signed by 200 scientists and a document comprising an analysis of big logging companies and their policy with regard to virgin forest protection (Agent Green, 2018). Representatives of the three ENGO's were invited on a debate at peak audience hour on the national television. Here, the draft law's initiator, already hated by the nation decried the abusive techniques through which protected areas have been declared over the recent years: "The virgin forest encroached upon us!" ('*A venit pădurea virgină peste noi!'* Emanoil Savin, my translation). Intense lobbying and constant pressure from the civil society resulted in the withdrawal of the proposed amendment in early May. Summer continued with new public positions for stricter virgin forest protection, artists embracing

and creating for the cause and even more images of deforested mountains on social media. This event proves the wide public support for strict protection of wild nature. As we shall see in the coming sections, this support follows classed and rural-urban dividing lines.

An intermediary conclusion is that the entire set of legal developments functions as a regime of truth. The Catalogue as such grants exclusive survival to a wild nature constructed in opposition to a social one. Those surfaces that do not make it to the Catalogue, although evolving beyond forestry management operations, remain virtually unprotected. While clearly having its strengths, the legal framework developed under this regime of truth essentialises complex and unique ecosystems reducing them to no more than 16 columns in a chart. Not only is their ecological complexity obscured by this way of seeing, but their entire cultural and historical substance becomes obliterated. In this light, the truth regime appears far from operating according to a unitary discourse. As various governments and different conservation NGOs mobilise and operate with slightly different definitions and features of the virgin forest. These aspects will be the focus of the next section.

## 3.3 Science and Technology

### *Scientific expertise and state's gaze*

**Virgin forests assessment criteria from the Carpathian Convention to MO 3397**

Chapter one on wilderness production and protection in Europe has shown that there is still no consensus in defining and using an agreed set of indicators to identify wildlands. A legal framework is still underdeveloped at the national level, and the most progressive binding law in this respect remains the Carpathian Convention (Egerer et al, 2016). It is important to remember that the convention and its subsequent protocols are to date the only international legal documents mentioning the importance of unmanaged ecosystems such as primary and old-growth forests. For our discussion, this aspect holds particular significance. The Romanian legal framework for protecting virgin forests started to be

developed only after the party states of the Carpathian Convention have signed the Protocol on Sustainable Forest Management in May 2011 (the Forest Protocol from here on). Few months after, WWF Romania initiated their *'Save the virgin forests*' campaign which resulted in the adoption of Ministerial Order 3397 in September 2012. The Forest Protocol responds to Article 7(5) of the Convention and refers to the designation of virgin forests and the need to strictly protect them. The identification and measuring of these forests is the focus of the protocol's Art.7 which defines virgin forests as "*natural forests which have not been influenced by humans in their development"* (Art 7(k)). The protocol offers two identification criteria: 1) naturalness, and 2) area and delimitation. While the indicators for the first criterion refers to species composition, structure, presence of deadwood, complete absence of human activities (grazing, felling, infrastructure, collection of non-wood forest products), the area and delimitation indicators refer only to a minimum size of 20 hectares and to the shape of the forest plots. It is important to remember this information because we will find it adapted in the first Romanian framework for virgin forest protection. Lastly, the Forest Protocol does not mention how assessment studies should be done, so that Parties are free to adopt their own methodologies. This could explain why it took more than four years for the Romanian government to come up with clear procedures for the inscription of forests in the Catalogue.

For our discussion, it is important to note that the category of virgin forests is set up within the Carpathian Convention frame in opposition to any human influence which may have affected their development (indicator A1.4). The Forest Protocol is nevertheless cautious and explains it as "*no documented evidence and no visible traces of forest exploitation infrastructure*", and "*no felling occurred in the past, confirmed by documentary evidence*" in the case of grazing, forest litter removal, non-wood forest products and other land uses. It is important to remark that there is no past threshold mentioned. Could this be interpreted in absolute terms, as in no felling occurred ever, or should this give the freedom to parties to adopt their own thresholds? We will see in the next chapter that the environmental discourse overemphasized the absolute spatial and temporal absence of humans from the realm of virgin forests. Same applies for the way in which this absence is testified. The phrase "*no documented evidence*" seems an unjust

one, since most of the traditional ecological knowledge and folklore could escape attempts of inscription or recording. Once again, the state enjoys the freedom to frame what is a virgin forest in a particular way, setting clear boundaries of this category.

Getting back to the Romanian case, we observed that the Ministerial Order 3397 introduced in 2012 for the first time a set of criteria and additional indicators for the identification of remaining virgin forests in the Carpathian Mountains. These criteria proved helpful in several ways. First, it offered the forest management officers a clear instrument to classify plots of already recognized by forestry practitioner primary forests (*pădure bătrână*) as strictly protected keeping them outside of any management or felling operations (Stăncioiu, 2008; Stănciulescu, 2013). Secondly, it rapidly entered the wood certification mechanisms (Gavriluț et al, 2016), commercial operators were obliged to refuse timber sourced from strict protection areas under the European Timber Regulation (EUTR). Thirdly, the order offered big timber processing companies like IKEA, EGGER or Holzindustrie Schweighoffer a great tool to pose as environmental guardians by publicly declaring their strict policies against wood sourced from virgin forests (Agent Green, 2018). In reality, independent investigations proved the contrary (EIA 2015), timber originating from virgin forests or core zones of national parks still ended in the commodity chains of big companies.

In the absence of an inventory or a catalogue to be promoted publicly as material evidence for the protection of virgin forests, the criteria and indicators mentioned in MO 3397 escaped the general public's attention. Abstract numbers and impressive features of certain species were far easier to sell, share and like on social media. Before getting there, let's see how virgin forests got framed under this order.

From the beginning, it should be noted that the two criteria (naturalness, and size and limits) are operationalized differently for virgin and quasi-virgin forests. The order defines virgin forests as

*"(...) that forest which formed and developed exclusively under the action of natural factors, and in which ecosystem processes and their dynamics unfold without any direct or indirect human influence" (MO 3397/2012, Annex, own translation)*

On the other hand, quasi-virgin forest criteria admit "*observable human influence, insignificantly affecting the structure, geography and ecological processes*" (own translation). As it is further explained, this 'insignificant' influence has clear temporal boundaries. For example, if any forestry roads are to be identified, they should have not been used for the last 30 years (indicator 1.4). Same applies to other land uses: while virgin forest should show no trace of domestic grazing, or timber harvesting (indicator 1.4), in quasi-virgin forests it is allowed to have maximum five stumps older than 30 years per hectare. These criteria directly mentioning human impact (or the lack thereof) seem unequivocal – virgin forests are 'untouched wildernesses', forests 'in which man never stepped in', as the environmental discourse often suggests. In reality, these forests are located often in the upper part of the forest line, in immediate proximity to alpine pastures and traditional grazing lands. It would be hard to imagine that no sheep flocks ever crossed or grazed them.

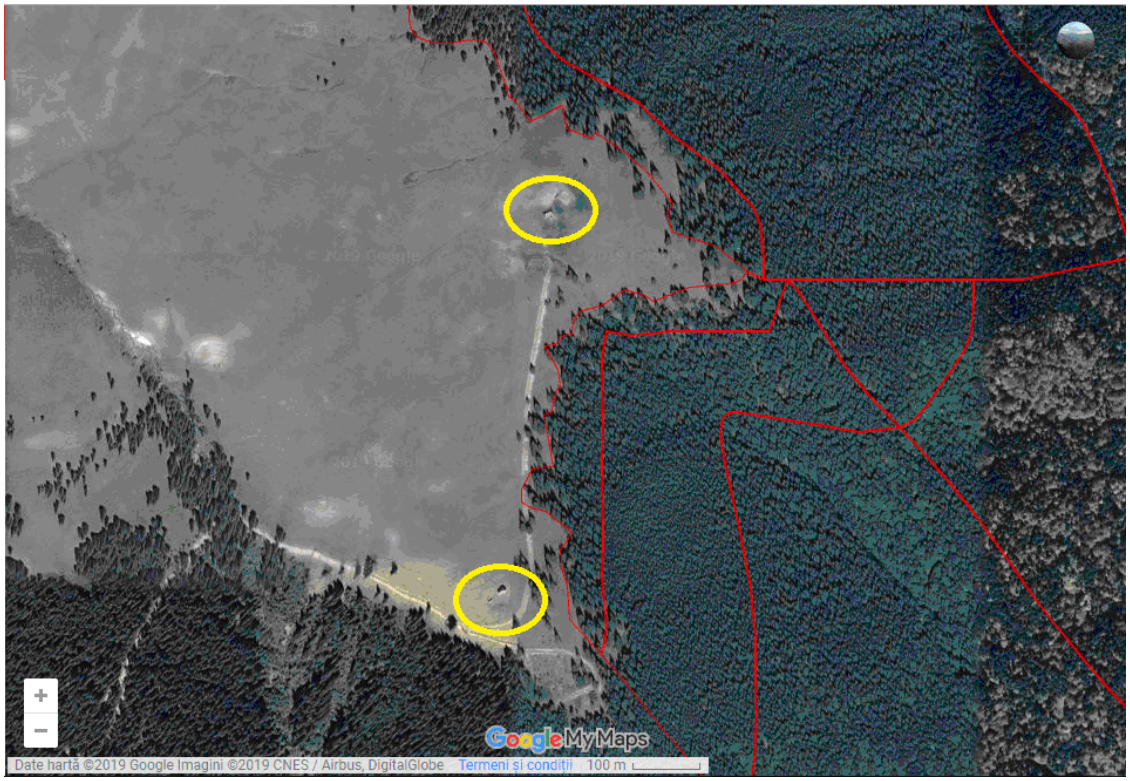


*Fig 7. Sheepfolds near Mușeteica Virgin Forest, Făgăraș Mountain.*

Even when analyzing closely the already inscribed plots in the catalogue we could easily find active or abandoned sheepfolds located just meters away from iconic forests that were presented in the media as absolute wilderness. It is hard to believe that the marked

forested perimeters, now strictly protected as virgin forests, have never been 'touched' by shepherds and their flocks if we consider the historical importance of transhumance in the region.

A more detailed analysis about how this regime of truth has affected local livelihoods will be offered at length in the next section, for now, we shall return to the state's way of seeing.

**The order of discourse in the Catalogue**

Having no legal mechanism to assess the extent of protected virgin forests' surface, it is hard to appreciate if forestry management officers had been diligent in applying the discussed criteria and indicators prior to 2016 when a standardized catalogue was presented for the first time. As introduced in the previous section The National Catalogue of Virgin and Quasi-Virgin Forests is a legal instrument mentioned in the organic law for the first time in the new Forestry Code adopted in 2015 (Law 133/2015). It is the only instrument that ensures strict and full protection, and it was constituted following the issue of Ministry Order 1417/11.07.2016 and updated by Ministry Order 2525/31.12.2016. As a reminder, these legal developments along with the Governmental Degree allocating the funds for the assessment studies were important milestones of the technocratic government of 2015-2016. But how exactly functions the Catalogue within this regime of truth? Which are the procedures, rules and constraints that order this new wild nature? In short, how do virgin forests emerge as a knowable object once there is a clear classification system set by MO 3397?

It has been already mentioned that forests can make it to the Catalogue either after a decennial management plan has been updated or following the validation of a grounding study. While organic law establishes the condition of elaborating forestry management plan (Technical Norms, 2018) by recognized professionals (*amenajisti*), a grounding study should be developed by independent parties. MO 2525 mentions clearly who qualifies to perform this task, in other words, who can speak the 'truth' about wild nature. As Art.3 stipulates, they have to be renowned researchers, forestry/ecology professors, and to be registered as forestry experts and project managers. Elaborating a grounding study becomes thus an expert operation, reserved to only a few (Turnhout et al, 2019).

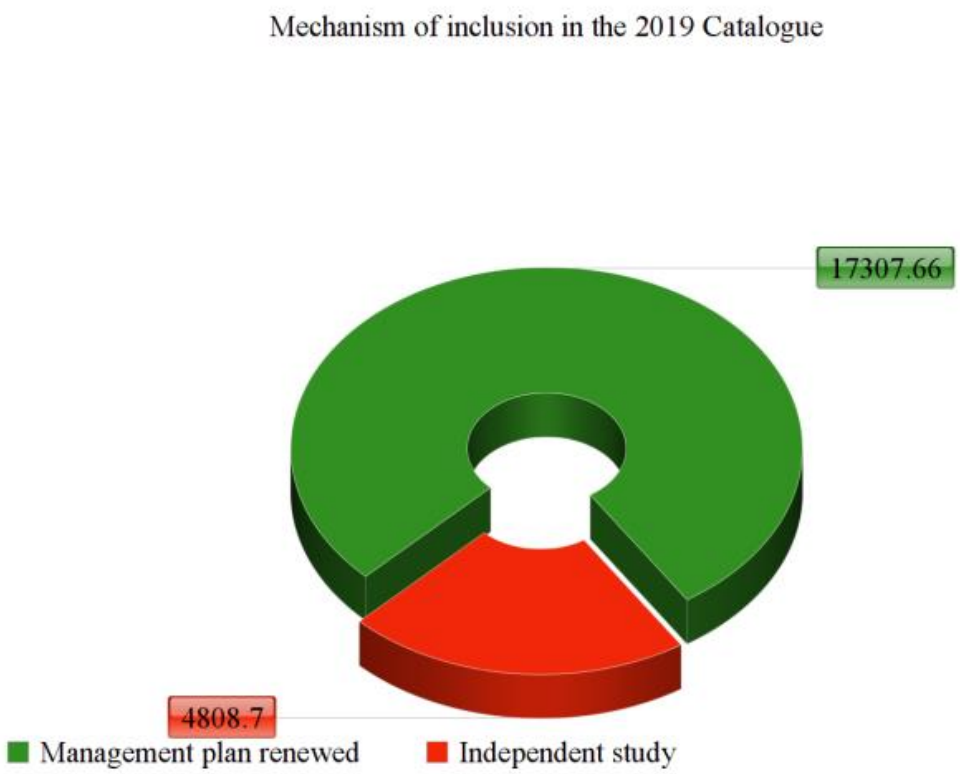


*Fig 8. Inclusion mechanisms of virgin and quasi-virgin forests in the 2019 Catalogue*

This type of expert knowledge, on the other hand, has not been challenged by either the state or the civil society in the Romanian case. This could explain why only 21% of all virgin forest surfaces so far have been added to the Catalog through grounding studies. Figure 8 presents the surface included so far as split my inscription mechanism.

MO 2525 which instituted the Catalog sets a clear procedure for the inscription of forest plots. It mentions the competence and attributions for all involved actors, deadlines and formats for specific documents involved in the process. Figure 9 below offers a visual representation of it. The developers, who can be individual experts or experts contracted by third parties, must notify the forest owner and the administrator half a month before initiating the study. The later will offer access to relevant documents such as management plans, and detailed information about forestry operations for the previous 30 years. When owners or information are missing, the regional forestry authority (*Garda Forestieră)* has to make available the documents. While elaborating the study, the developer combines

desk study with field visits, the entire process extending to no more than 90 days. The study is submitted to the regional forestry authority, which notifies the owner/administrator to halt all operations on the studied plots, and convenes a special verification committee. This actor is in charge to verify the validity and accuracy of the grounding study, and it is comprised of all stakeholders involved in the process (owner, forest administrator, developer, one representative of regional forestry authority and a representative of the protected area if that is the case). It is important to note that the committee can function without involving the owner or the forest administrator. If everything goes right, the committee issues a verification report according to which the developer has to review the initial grounding study. Eventually the study gets validated and it is again sent to the regional forestry authority which passes it further to another technical committee functioning under the central forestry authority. In the same period, the administrator and the owner are notified to stop any management or timber extraction operations. Finally, the central forestry authority proceeds to inscribe the studied plots in the Catalogue ensuring their strict and perpetual protection. Figure 9 has been compiled after a careful analysis of the existing legislation complemented with interviews done with practitioners.

The entire process can take a minimum 195 days, if all actors involved cooperate, all documents are available and submitted on time, and if weather conditions are favourable for the study and its verification. Seven institutions and lots of documents exchanged between them, all being part of a truth regime whose aim is to certify the existence of a wild autonomous nature.

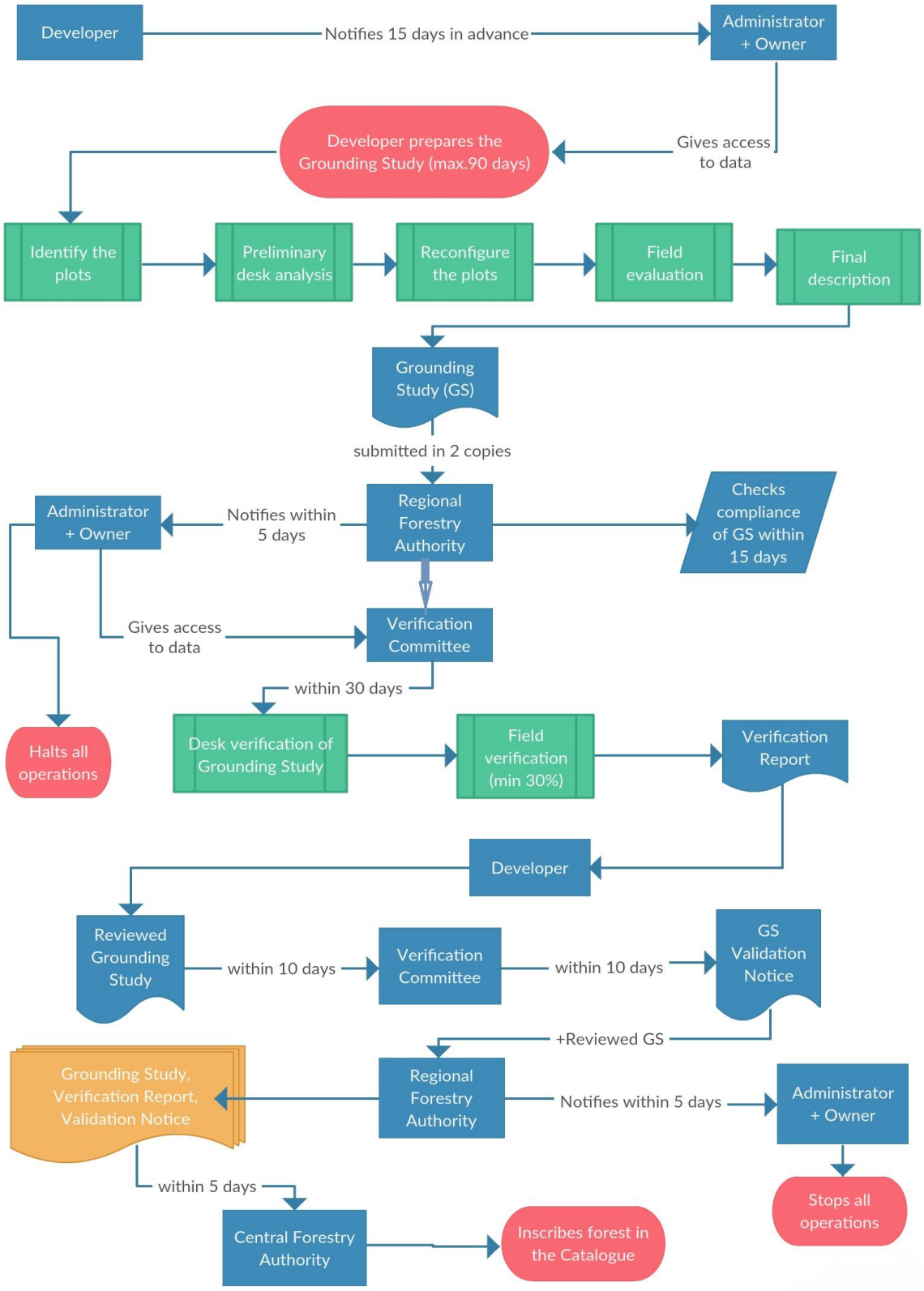


*Fig 9 Visual representation of Virgin forests inscription process*

In the latest version of the Catalogue, one could notice that a big majority of the strictly protected forests were inscribed by updating previous management plans. As for the ownership status, we can strongly say that public properties belonging to the state make for more than half of the entire surface. The following two diagrams show the property regime of inscribed virgin and quasi-virgin forests.

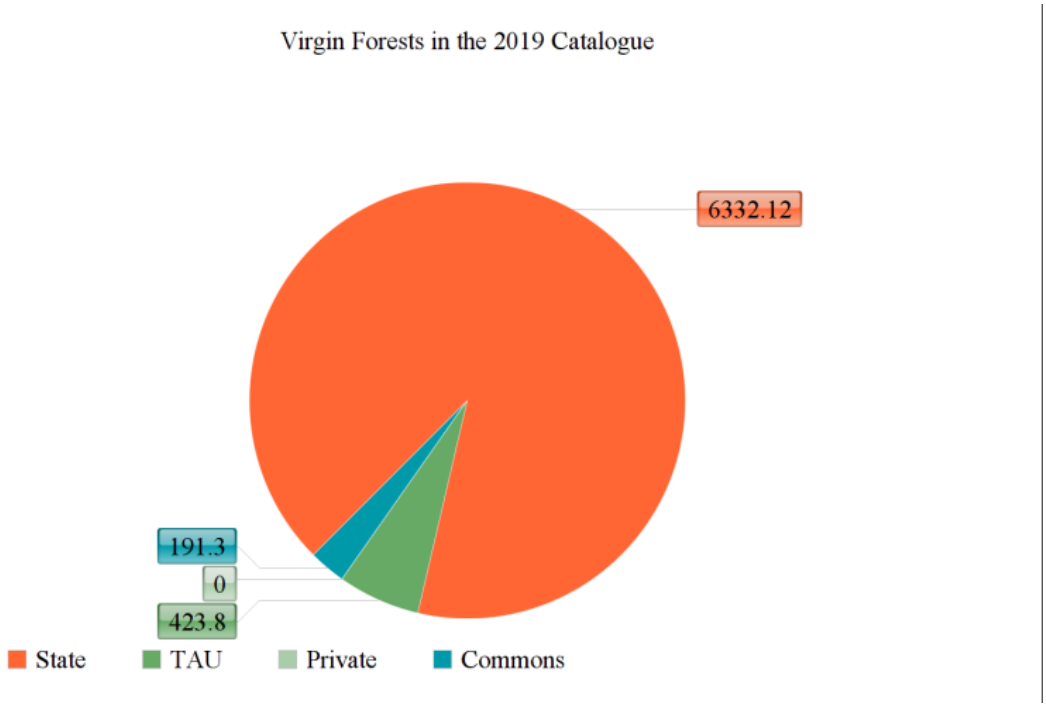


*Fig 10 Virgin forests in the 2019 Catalogue*

If we add also the plots under municipal ownership (TAU-territorial administrative units) we can understand the extent of public authorities' involvement in protecting this rare nature, contrary to the widespread allegations of ignorance and lack of support uttered by most environmental NGOs. In fact, careful analysis shows that the myth of private owners' support can be refuted easily. Until now only four big landowners chose to get their forests inscribed. The historical owners' associations (commons), whose joint ownership makes for 14% of the entire Romanian forests[34] contribute with more than 800 ha of virgin and quasi-virgin forests to the Catalogue.

[34] Estimate from the Romanian Mountain Commons Project's database, more details here https://romaniacommons.wixsite.com/project

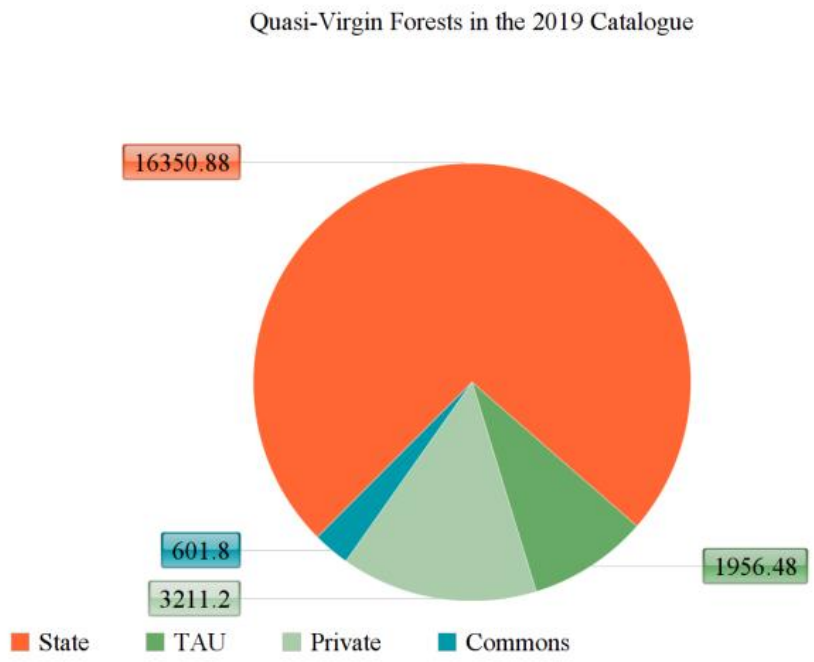


*Fig 11 Quasi-Virgin forests in the 2019 Catalogue (in ha)*

**Rendered visible**

It is now necessary to turn our attention to understanding how this wild nature is translated into bureaucratic language. We have mentioned throughout the chapter the importance of numbers and figures for the success of public environmental campaigns. Here, frequently abstract values are uncritically circulated to ensure citizens' sympathy, outrage or involvement. In the state's language, virgin forests are not aggregated numbers, but fragmented plots recorded under a unique attribute number. If ENGOs aggregate them, the state separates them into discrete entities. Two manifestations of the same regime of truth, each embodying a different logic. In the end, both actors reduce virgin forests to numbers turning thus a complex ecosystem into a new object expressed by raw data. This new reality appears totalizing or broken into pieces as it fits better the discourse. By the time the virgin forests make it to the Catalogue, they become a row in a table recording 16 distinct features such as GIS coordinates, surface, ownership, administrator or altitude. Here, plots' surface, probably the most important feature, can vary from 0.06 to 57.33 hectares (The Catalogue, May 2019). The Catalogue records nothing about the ecological richness and the biological diversity, both features used as

main arguments for their protection in the public discourse and in the scientific literature (Lund, 2002; Biris & Veen, 2005, Veen et al, 2010; Knorn et al, 2012)

| | A | B | C | D | E | F | G | H | I | J | K | L | M | N | O | P | Q |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | National Catalogue of Virgin and Quasi-virgin forests of Romania | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | version 15 May 2019 | | | |
| 3 | No. | Name of virgin/ quasi-virgin forest | Inclusion based on | | Type of property | Latitud N | Long E | Altitude | | Administrative localization | | | | | | | |
| 4 | | | Management plan, version ... | Grounding Study, version ... | | | | min | max | County | Admin OS/OSP | UP | u.a. | TP | S (ha) | of which: surfaces which do not satisfy naturalness criteria | |
| 5 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | u.a. | S (ha) |
| 6 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14.00 | 15 | 16.00 |
| 7 | *A.* | *A. Virgin Forests* | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 8 | 1 | Aleu | 2014 | | public state | 46° 39' 21.36" N | 022° 38' 08.93" E | 750 | 1050 | Bihor | OS Sudrigiu | II | 23B | 4191 | 19.49 | | |
| 9 | 2 | Aleu | 2014 | | public state | 46° 39' 10.54" N | 022° 38' 26.07" E | 800 | 1250 | Bihor | OS Sudrigiu | II | 27A | 1343 | 30.49 | | |
| 10 | 3 | Aleu | 2014 | | public state | 46° 39' 00.51" N | 022° 38' 26.41" E | 840 | 1250 | Bihor | OS Sudrigiu | II | 28A | 4114 | 21.44 | | |
| 11 | 4 | Aleu | 2014 | | public state | 46° 37' 14.20" N | 022° 40' 25.06" E | 710 | 960 | Bihor | OS Sudrigiu | II | 86B | 4183 | 17.12 | | |

*Fig. 12 Snapshot from the May 2019 version of the Catalogue (own translation)*

As shown so far, the Catalogue renders legible but also hides. In Foucault's words, it makes visible but also tells something about the invisible (cited by Nale & Lawler, 2014). It tells much about the scientists' and management officers' gaze but also discloses the asymmetry of power relations between the actors involved. While developers can propose forests for inscription, the validation process can go on without the consent or the involvement of the forest owner in the process. At the same time owners had no clear legal framework available to demand compensations from the state until 2017 for the forests from which they were not available to extract any benefits. On the other hand, as argued in the initial section, the Catalogue can become an instrument for cheapening nature and make it more appealing for entities looking to acquire valuable land as old-growth forests are considered part of the climate mitigation set of actions (Veen et al, 2010). One of the four private actors that has included its properties in the Catalogue is involved in massive land acquisition operations in the Southern Carpathians, as my analysis will argue in the last two chapters.

**Mapping potential virgin forests**

One of the aims of the present chapter is to uncover how wilderness discourse unfolds beyond the written text and we have focused so far on state's ways of seeing and the process of inscribing virgin forests for strict protection. The analysis continues with a focus on scientific practice and mapping technologies. Maps are powerful technologies to claim land for conservation (Adams, 2019), and the next case shows perfectly how risk, scarcity and imminent destruction can be factored in the discourse about autonomous nature. Presented to the public on November 2017 the "*Map of Potential Virgin Forests of Romania*" reignited rapidly the national debate around virgin forest protection while re-stating state's lack of interest in protecting this natural heritage. The project was the outcome of a joint effort of Greenpeace Romania, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iași and Eberswalde University for Sustainable Development. The only previously existing extensive mapping had been issued more than 13 years before within the PIN-Matra study, so recent developments such as land restitution and deforestation had to be considered by the new project (Knorn et al, 2012). Greenpeace as the main initiator, hoped to pressure the government to hurry up with the inscription of new forests in the Catalogue while presenting to the general public how rapidly the country was losing its valuable natural heritage. Valentin Sălăgeanu, Greenpeace spokesperson, formulated the urgency of their venture in the following way:

*"(…) saving the virgin forests is blocked by authorities' lack of interest. Unfortunately, the Ministry's apathy motivates those in charge to enforce the law to remain passive. This obvious lack of accountability results in the loss of important areas of nature's last refuge and an irremediable decline of biodiversity" (Greenpeace 2017:13, my translation).*

The declared aim of the mapping effort was the elaboration of a GIS database of old-growth and natural forest which could have virgin or quasi-virgin features. The map analyzed the areas falling under the Carpathian Convention, following thus some regulations of the Forest Protocol adopted in 2011 (Greenpeace, 2017). The report explaining the methodology was accompanied by an extensive assessment of virgin forest research and protection in Romania written by Iovu-Adrian Biris, a forestry scientist

involved in the PIN-Matra Study and in the nomination dossier that proposed areas of virgin forests to be recognized as world heritage under UNESCO Convention (Biris & Veen, 2005; Biris, 2014; 2016).

The scientists used open-source data provided by Sentinel II missions from 2015-2016 and their methodology was explained step by step offering other specialists the chance to verify the entire process. For a report aiming to inform the general public, the minute details could seem at least surprising. Making wild nature visible has never been so transparent in Eastern Europe before. The scientists performed a spectral analysis of existing vegetation and the topographic errors were automatically corrected. A second stage implied a manual review of forested surfaces according to species and age structure resulting into a set of plots which as further processed to exclude roads and railways, plantations and reforested areas and existing monocultures. The analysis assumed that certain species should naturally occur within specific altitudes, excluding thus abnormal occurrences. Footpaths were not excluded. Only traces of recent timber extraction and human disturbances in the canopy were excluded. The resulting set of areas was evaluated according to two criteria: size and connectivity. It is important to scrutinize the study's methodology in order to understand that the map is a result of a whole set of decisions, choices and 'corrections' operated by the involved scientists. As it should be clear by now, from one end to another the analysis was a desk study, the scientists inviting other interested parties to verify the results in the field with future occasions.

The map resulting from the study announced 295,779 ha of potential virgin forests, a far greater number than the PIN-Matra study indicated almost 15 years before, yet between the two studies, the overlap was of only 19%. Following simple calculations, we discover that Greenpeace found an additional 160.000 ha of potential virgin forests. The implication of this discovery is manifold. First, it poses serious questions regarding the role of different methodologies in making virgin forests legible. Although the long period between the two studies has been marked by multiple disturbances and disruptions, the second study concluded that there might be a larger area of virgin forests in the Carpathians than we previously thought. Second, it legitimized the NGO's ambition to be considered an important actor setting the agenda for future policymaking. As we remember, the Ministerial Order of 2012 indicated that the perimeters in which the PIN-

Matra study identified virgin forests should be given increased protection. Similarly, Greenpeace asked now for a total moratorium for logging within the areas identified by their new study.

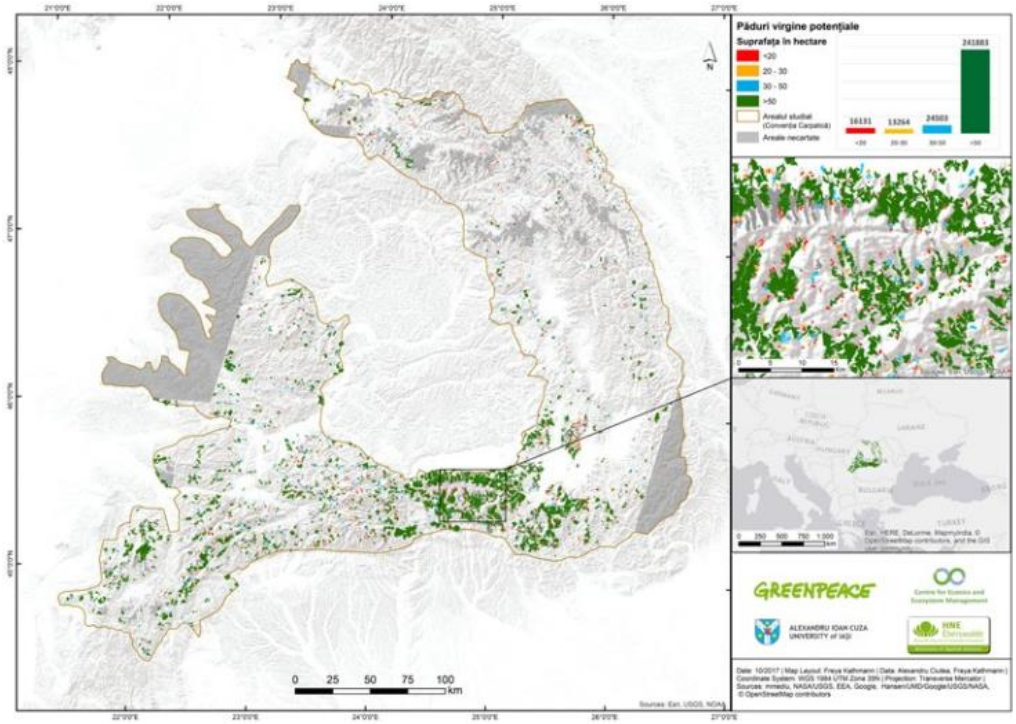


*Fig 13 Map of potential virgin forests, detail of Făgăraș Mountains (Greenpeace, 2017)*

Almost 60% of the potential forests were already included in Natura 2000 protected areas while 13% were already part of national parks. Făgăraș Mountains, our focus in the next chapters, were said to host the biggest area with around 61,500 ha. The situation should not be surprising since this massif is the object of desire for many strict conservation and rewilding enterprises.

Stressing the word 'potential' is of extreme importance because this detail has been frequently ignored in the discussions in the social- and mass-media. In order to make the analysis more accessible to the general public, the total identified area was visually compared to the area of Bucharest.


*Fig 14 Greenpeace Facebook post on 23.11.2017, The post reads "Romania has almost 300.000 potential virgin forests, but these remain unprotected. Get involved, sign the petition: #TogetherForForests*

The Map of potential virgin forests is a good illustration of the productive power of wilderness truth regime – the plots identified became the new wild nature that has to be saved. When presenting the results, Greenpeace asked the Government to take notice of the map and institute a moratorium on any logging in these forests (Greenpeace, 2017). These potential virgin forests produced by manipulating remote sensing spectral images turned into a widely circulated truth which brushed off even the possibility of these forests to present features of quasi-virgin class. To ask for the protection of potential wild nature became the new stage in the advancement of wilderness production on the Carpathian frontier.

There are many issues to be raised about the assumptions and methodology involved in the creation of the Map, but probably the most notable one is a failure to exclude unpaved roads from their analysis. Potentially, this could mean that anything from footpaths and transhumance routes to narrow forestry roads could have made it to the final area of potential virgin forests and thus presented as wilderness. As the authors of the study admit, open-source data available did not allow for such an analysis (Greenpeace, 2017: 39). Why should this matter? The argument is important if we remember than the most circulated stereotype about virgin forests is that they are 'untouched', that 'man has never set foot within'.


*Fig 15 Mielusoaia quasi-virgin forest, Suceava county*

Politically this becomes a dangerous argument for their protection. By instituting a strict protection regime, traditional users like mushroom pickers or herders, are displaced, they cannot claim any rights to forest allegedly 'untouched'. And there are sufficient examples of forests inscribed in the Catalogue that are in close proximity to villages and other human settings. The above figure shows Mielușoaia, a quasi-virgin forest near Mălini village in Suceava county, eastern Romania. The two plots, 57 and 9 ha in size, are surrounded by agricultural fields, less than half a kilometre away from the village.

Although now strictly protected, it is hard to imagine that it this is and has always been an untouched forest.

## *3.4 Summary of the Argument*

Throughout this chapter, I explored how actors within a wilderness truth regime operated a narrowing of vision aiming to protect valuable natural heritage. I have shown that the truth regime is marked by several fractures, particularly between the state and the NGO level, and that these nuances produce different effects. This remark is not unique though, others have also shown how global forests are reduced to their carbon storage capacity (Ojha et al., 2019) in order to make them more investable (Sullivan, 2018). In the Romanian case, the prime rationality of this essentialization was rather emotional than ecological. Absolute figures were publicly over-displayed to provoke either support of environmental causes or outrage against a passive state. Presenting virgin forests through their aggregated area suggests that they could and have to be saved as an integral entity, although the plots are extremely fragmented, and thus each being threatened by different factors. Furthermore, it also suggests that the mechanism of saving them is just one – strict protection. Mark Fisher used to suggestively call this ruling out of alternatives as 'capitalist realism' (2009). Throughout the entire study, I have identified several iterations of this discourse: ecotourism as the only development option, strict protection as the only salvation, privatization of common goods as the only guaranty for conservation success, and so on. Of course, ruling out alternatives is not only unproductive but also unjust. In my analysis, erasing traditional ecological knowledge and selectively remembering local environmental history are all facets of the local expression of capitalist realism.

On another note, we should legitimately ask ourselves how wild is such a scrutinized nature? Are old-growth forests really assessed as wild and autonomous through mapping, remote sensing, measuring, classing and inscribing or are they tamed and even domesticated by the scientific gaze? To what extent can we deploy technology in identifying wilderness and still call it genuine and untouched (Benson, 2010)? Making them legible while assuming their autonomy, species richness and ecosystemic services

can be seen as a process of inclusion (Fairhead, 2018), not only in a dichotomous system (wild – not wild) but also under our direct technologies of management and power. This understanding is not totally original; nature(s) have been tamed and subjected to state's geopower for a long time now (Parenti, 2016), what is original is linking this argument to the emergence of an online object of desire. The creation of a spectacularized 'untouched' nature will be explored in the following chapter. By focusing on the aesthetic of the virgin forest the dissertation will further show how the wilderness discourse adapted when numbers were no longer enough.

# Chapter 4 The virgin forests between spectacle and world heritage

## 4.1 Introduction

One early afternoon in the first days of August 2016 I was visiting with my colleagues the forest of an important commons from Vrancea region, Eastern Romania. Our guide, head of a local forestry district, was driving a Romanian off-road white vehicle over fallen branches, through muddy ditches on a skewed forestry road when he suddenly stopped the car. *"To the right, you can see a true virgin forest!"* he said while pointing to a group of silver fir (A*bies alba*) just meters away from the road. They were standing tall, thick and had traces of healed stumps on their trunks. Young beeches were sheltering under the magnificent firs and some ferns were making the transition to the muddy road. We left unimpressed and continued our visit through glades invaded by pioneer species stopping by to take pictures of some scattered sheep. That was the first time a forester introduced me to a virgin forest. At that point in time, I understood that monumental trees are a requisite of this iconic ecosystems. Same happened in the case of many of the environmental campaigns that asked for the public's support over the last years while using close-up or bottom-up photographs of old trees to represent the essence of their object of intervention. If we were to ask ourselves what object related to virgin forests should we include in a future cabinet of curiosities, as a group of environmental humanists started to ask recently (Mitman et al, 2018), we would probably come up with a photograph of an old beech spreading its branches towards the sky, sheltering hundreds of saplings under its canopy, maybe having some *hypsizygus* or *fomes* fungi on its mossy trunk. Alternatively, we would include a footage shot with a drone flown over an endless green forest in a summer morning to make sure we get details of a raising mist. Unable to see the forest from above as a compact impenetrable object, local people have walked them, found refuge in them and waved many stories and folktales around their presence in and around these ecosystems.

This section will explore the ways in which virgin forests were represented and served to the general public over the last ten years in Romania. From photographs to documentary films and from VR to mobile apps no medium escaped from being deployed to convince and ensure citizens' involvement in the environmental campaigns.

Furthermore, a critical inquiry into the protection of virgin forests is relevant for the wider debate on democratizing decisions regarding environmental or climate issue or framing those policies around expert and scientific discourse (Turnhout et al., 2016). As this chapter shows, traditional knowledge has been mostly ignored so far. Moreover, the virgin forests ended up being constituted as a heritage that is ahistorical, essentialized and devoid of specificity. As with the general debate about wilderness presented in the previous chapter, the movement results in the creation of an ontologically different nature, separated from humans not only physically and legally in the black letter law, but also culturally through the erasure of local environmental history or through selective remembrance.

How people communicate about nature on the internet has been the focus of a few recent contributions coming from environmental humanities (Graf, 2016), political ecology (Büscher & Koot, 2017) and even geography (Smith, 2015). Most scholars underlined the productivist power of new technologies and social media and signalled the risks of getting involved to save and love a virtual nature. The field of eco-criticism is no longer an emerging one, but debates have recently pointed to the decolonization of nature by investigating new materialisms (Demos, 2016) and post-anthropocentric ways of seeing and making sense of an entangled world (Morton, 2007). My intervention is less daring. In examining some of the environmental campaigns dedicated to the protection of virgin forests I follow Berger's tradition and I propose an interrogation of the ways of seeing, particularly questioning the aspects related to power, absence and participation (Berger, 1972).

## 4.2 Discourse and spectacularization

### *Language and image*

What is most striking about popular depictions of virgin forests is the view from above, a technique as old as the photographic process itself. Landscape photography was mastered on the American frontier as early as the mid-19th century. Between 1860 and 1880 pioneering photographers like Charleton Watkins, John Stanley and Timothy O'Sullivan were hired by federal authorities to help with the geological surveys and other works related to railways advancement to the West. They did not only depict the presence of rich resources in the West, but also the '*fantastic and beautiful qualities of landscape'* (Stapp, 1994). A set of best views of the Yellowstone Valley taken in 1869 by O'Sullivan were presented in the American Congress when the establishment of the Yellowstone National Park was decided. When the Yellowstone Park Act passed in the spring of 1872 around two million acres of native lands were reserved for conservation and white settlements (Spence, 1999:39). Although the state recognized in 1851 the rights of Crow and Sioux natives in the Valley, their traditional land-use practices were considered environmentally unfriendly for the new park. At first, access started being limited but soon it ended up with a total ban by military force in the 1880s. During this process, the narrative of a wilderness frontier as a human-free sublime nature took full shape and was ready to be exported around the world.

Fast forward to our days and we see that the *best perspective* in classical photography has been recuperated by drone footage. Drones have been widely used in conservation over the last decade (Wich, 2018) and activists were surely very open in using them in their campaigns even in Romania. Recent scholarship has been very keen on investigating the deployment of unmanned aerial vehicles for conservation purposes underlining their advantages (Bondi et al 2018) but also their social implications (Sandbrook, 2015). There is no doubt that drones equipped with all sorts of sensors helped scientists understand better the dynamics of old-growth forests or their capacity to store carbon (Zhang et al, 2016). On the other hand, when deployed by activists, drones have unexpected effects that have largely been ignored. In the Romanian case, drones equipped with cameras are

a familiar technology for environmental NGOs, investigation journalists or other enthusiasts. The absolute advantage of their use is the distance - a distance that allows for wide perspectives and frames. Bird-eye views of vast swathes of continuous green forests extending from valleys to mountaintops are the most revered images of virgin forests from official UNESCO videos to Greenpeace media campaigns. They offer an image of an idealized virgin forest whose materiality remains unquestioned. They also keep hidden any past or present human uses or traces present under the canopy. And this helps the narrative more than any legal definition or academic paper produced by scientists. Moreover, as in the case of remote sensing discussed in a previous section, drone footage is presented as objective truth continuing what Rancière used to call 'a modernist project of separation' (2009). In our case, the separation of forests from their co-produced history is at stake.

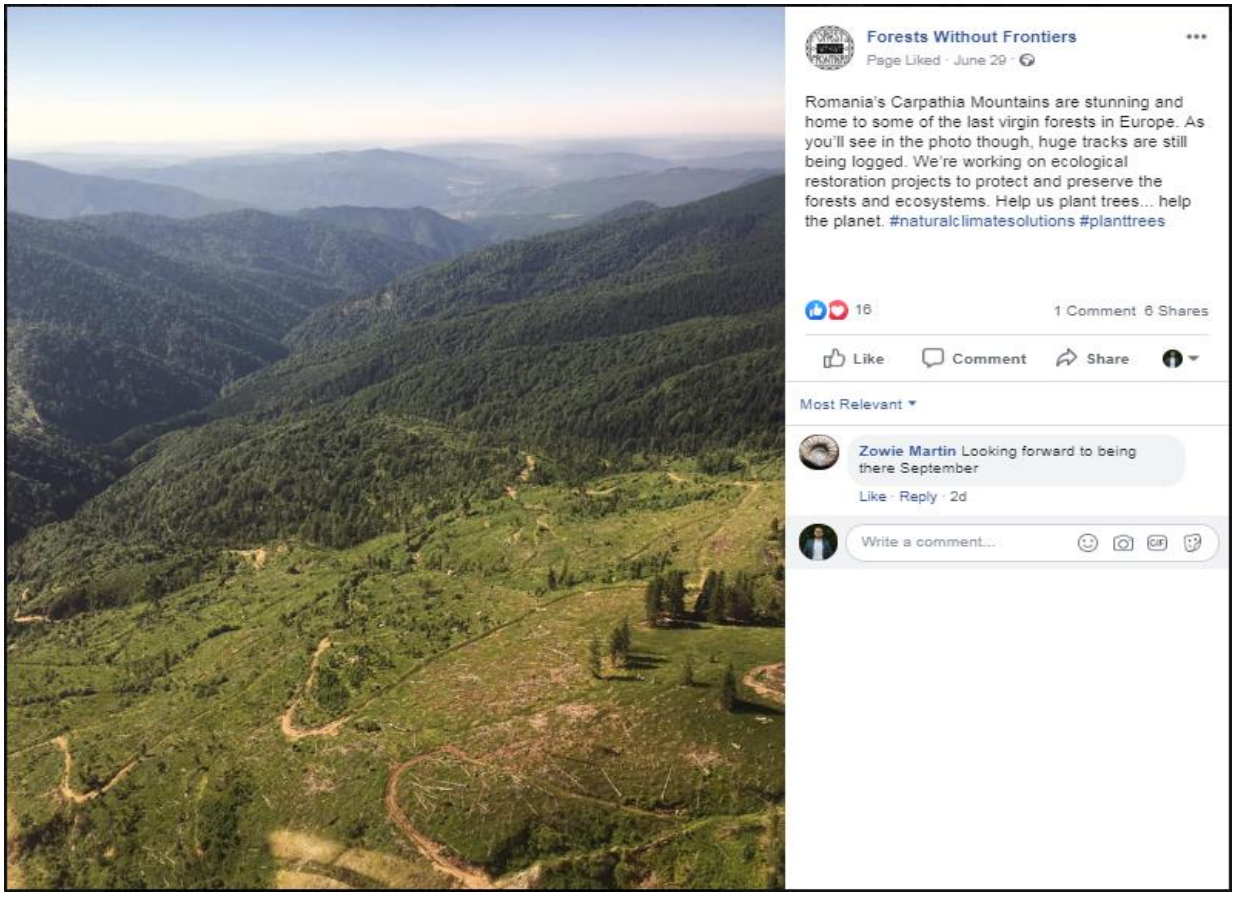


*Fig. 16 Drone footage of an allegedly logged virgin forest, posted by an UK based carbon offsetting initiative, 29 June 2019*

Simultaneously, language has been an important medium and technique to speak truth about virgin forests. Although from a scientific point of view consensus is still far from being accomplished, all public campaigns, legal acts and policies made clear word choices. Precise terms such as old-growth, natural, secular, primary or ancient forest, have been ditched for the catchy term 'virgin' or the vaguer 'quasi-virgin'. An extensive review showed that more than 50 definitions of virgin forests are currently in use within the scientific jargon (Lund, 2002). The choice is not innocent, nor neutral. As in Yellowstone's case (Guha, 1989; Cronon, 1996), particular word choices prove to aid considerably to the creation of frontiers. Romanian virgin forests are always 'untouched' (*neatinse*), 'unspoiled' (*nealterate*), 'where man has never entered or set foot' (*unde nu a călcat picior de om*') – all words clearly fit to complement the discovery and conquest connotations of their preferred name. At the same time, they are 'unprotected' (*neprotejate*), 'menaced' (*amenintate*) and vulnerable (*vulnerabile*). Their pristine-ness can be salvaged only by nature lovers, not by a corrupted state having 'hidden interests' *(interese oculte*). Who would remain insensitive to such a campaign? In this lays the disciplinary power of virgin forests truth regime, as emanating from the big players of the environmental movement. Vulnerability appears to be an important feature of a hybrid nature (re)presented as iconic wilderness, as it is also the case of another charismatic Carpathian species - the rewilded European bison (*Bison bonasus*) (Vasile 2018b).

Along with perspective and language, abstracted data is a third attribute of virgin forests as an object of public interest. Aggregated numbers and percentages have always accompanied communications about virgin forests: 82% were unprotected in 2011, 220,000 ha were identified in 2004, 13,000 species find their home here. When exact numbers are not provided, unique features get mobilized: the tallest spruce is in Codrii Sincii, the oldest beech in Mușeteica, the last forest of its kind on the continent, the most diverse ecosystem, and so on. Over the years, the campaign has clearly become an information dump (Morton, 2018), and this situation does not seem to help in finding appropriate solutions. As shown in previous sections, by mobilizing scientifically sanctioned truths and wilderness aesthetic, emerges the idea that virgin forests are a coherent unitary object. But data is not facts since it lacks interpretation. Finding befitting

mechanisms to protect these ecosystems is not advancing in any way if we continue reducing their biological, geographical and, why not, historical specificities.

For the time being, judging from its representations the virgin forest is what Franklin has called an 'extra-discursive reality', a mediated object that we can and know how to protect if only the state would cooperate (Franklin, 2002). This attitude is widespread amongst most big NGOs in Romania, the narrative of the state as a bad manager extending from health and education to environmental protection and forest administration. Sometimes activists openly advance the idea that their campaigns fill a gap resulted from the state's lack of interest or inaction (Greenpeace, 2017). Looking at many mushrooming private initiatives, from buying land to proposing alternative mapping, further supports the idea that we find ourselves within a neoliberal conservation regime. By looking at the Carpathia Project the following chapters will investigate in much detail how this regime unfolded over the last decade in Romania.

### *Multi-sensorial experience*

The protection of virgin forests means more than just a circulation of stereotypical images on social and mass media. The supporters are lured into the campaigns by the promise of a multi-sensorial experience involving 3D tours, VR technologies, a variety of sounds and hybrid cultural productions. Some scholars are talking about the gamification (Fletcher, 2017) of the conservation enterprises (Tan, 2018) and Nature 2.0, a very productive tradition of studying nature in the new media and web 2.0 environments, both lines of analysis which are already well established among political ecologists (Büscher, 2014; 2016). As it has been repeatedly investigated, web 2.0 applications offer users the tools to share, co-create and rate different types of content found online, when these are used by conservation enterprises, the impact is significant and can alter the entire political economy of such enterprise (Büscher, 2014). Several mobile applications worked to this aim in relation to forest conservation in Romania in the last years, The Forest Inspector and The Forest Guardian. As their efficiency will be discussed below, it is important to

say that these applications have created a virtual environment where users felt empowered and in charge of monitoring and reporting cases of illegal logging.

The relations between human and nature are rapidly changing towards more online involvement, reimagination of pristine nature and even commodification of biodiversity while the links between production and protection are erased (Büscher & Igoe 2013). Cyberspace has gained more and more the attention of big players in conservation, and Romania is not foreign to this trend.

Over the last three years, we have reached what it could be called *Virgin Forests 2.0*, a situation in which everyone from the comfort of their homes can experience (through seeing and listening), protect (through comparing and reporting), and save (through petitioning or donating) an invaluable ecosystem. No less than five virtual tours were made available by WWF Romania for free to anyone possessing VR goggles.[35] These tours were promoted while the technocratic government presented The Forest Inspector, a rapidly popular application to investigate cases of illegal logging and timber transport. Here nature lovers could get immersed in iconic virgin forests from different regions of Romania, find out details about dead wood lying on the forest bed and listen to bird songs. The fact that the sounds are all the same for each tour regardless of season must be a detail considered unimportant by the creators of this immersive experience, and this detail could easily pass unobserved. The spectacle needs to have some degree of standardization in order for the campaign to be successful and it probably did the trick. As the campaign was targeted particularly to a middle-class urban audience, using the same sounds as background for the tours seemed a marketing tool to create an internal coherence among different forests explored and the idea that all these forests are in fact one mega-object that has to be saved.

In a similar spectacular manner, another environmental NGO launched in the late autumn of 2017 the first music album produced by virgin forests. UNCUT was a collaboration between Greenpeace Romania, Coma - a popular Romanian rock band, and a couple of PR companies. [36] The platform complementing the album offers details about Greenpeace's efforts to save virgin forests and an entire playlist of sound samples

[35] The tours are available here (http://www.360mm.ro/forests/forests.html). Last accessed 7 July, 2019.
[36] Available at https://uncut.ro/. Last accessed 7 July, 2019

featuring water streams, bird songs, insects or wind. Listeners are recommended to include these samples in their own musical creations and use them as backing sounds if they have a music band. After Coma, other bands continued to collaborate with Greenpeace and started recording some songs in forests. Moonlight Breakfast, an urban-electro soul band, launched at Pelicam Film Festival 2018 another such music video. Drone footage and close-ups of leaves and insects were again used and abused. Through this project virgin forests were given agency and assigned creativity; natural sounds bore poetic names such as 'Blossoming', 'Life's Chorus' or 'Breaking the Silence'.


*Fig 17. UNCUT Platform by Greenpeace (2017)*

Recording and popularizing forests sounds is surprisingly not a neutral endeavour either. While organizing a Q&A session for Pelicam Festival 2019 I had the chance to engage with George Vlad, a UK based sound designer travelling the world year-round to record the sounds of the wild in the most iconic national parks and protected areas. While telling the audience about the challenges of his work he also described his efforts to do his recordings as far as possible from roads and settlements, sometimes having to travel for hours on end until no human presence can be detected. As is the case with images, virgin forests sounds are consciously purified and decontaminated from anything human.

### *From gamification to civic engagement*

Immersive experiences and forests sounds' auditions are not the only ways of directly getting engaged in the campaigns. Mobile apps such as Forest Inspector, discussed in the previous sub-chapter and Forest Guardians under scrutiny in the following lines are another level of civic engagement. In early December 2016, on the day in which Forest Inspector was officially launched and connected to the online platform Forest Radar, Agent Green posted the following message on its social media account:

*"Right now virgin forests are illegally exploited in Bucegi-Leaota Mountains!*
*Is there anyone from Rucăr who can urgently go with the local police and Forestry Guard there?*
*Be the first Agent Green in the Forest Inspector project.*
*Let's solve together the first illegal logging case in Bucegi Mountains!*
*With the help of a new system launched today in a world premiere, Romanians can fight illegal logging in real-time. (…)*
*Comment under this post and upload your pictures if you get to this area, and share your experience!*
*Good luck! We are looking forward to the results!*

The post was accompanied by a screenshot from the online platform depicting disturbances in the canopy, which could be cases of timber exploitation, a feature that is registered by the system as an 'alarm'. It also offered approximate locations of these alarms and details related to access routes. It immediately got hundreds of Likes, Angry reactions and Shares, although no one checked the accuracy of the event. To this date, no virgin forests were identified or verified on the ground in that area, but the ball kept on rolling. This example is telling for an entire phenomenon of reporting and combating illegal logging using mobile apps in recent years. Until June 2019 the Forest Inspector has been downloaded 150.000 times and has a few hundred thousand active users.

In the early days of October 2018, almost 2 years after the technocratic government launched the Inspector, Greenpeace offered to the public another tool to help with forests

protection. The *Forest Guardians* offered citizens the possibility to get more involved than ever in saving the virgin forests, for free, from the comfort of their homes or during their trips. Users had to set an account and participate in 'Investigations'. These consisted of comparing satellite images from different periods of time, report disturbances, confirm or dismiss other users' reports, upload pictures of logged areas or get involved in the online community. In the first two weeks, around 15,000 hectares were monitored, after half a year the area rose to 42,000 hectares. Up to June 2019, a total of 5,870 cases of illegal logging were reported by the forest guardians inside the application. Zero cases were investigated on the ground or checked against the official documents and no official complaints were filed or submitted to the authorities. Until the time of writing this section, the app has been downloaded for more than 5,000 times. As a recurrent user of this app, I have no certainty that the low-resolution satellite images that I compare are of a virgin or a managed forest in the absence of any GIS data or other coordinates. One must wonder how efficient such a tool is. In the absence of any official position from Greenpeace (probably it will be released in October 2019), we should acknowledge the role played by Forest Guardians in further producing a virtual nature. Even more so, the short clip introducing the app spoke of the virgin forests using a totalizing and unifying term – The Ancient Land (*Ținutul Secular*), a new mythical connotation that had not been present in previous Greenpeace's campaigns. Although users are sure they are good-doers, the conservation work they are actually doing remains a fictitious one. The civic engagement with these two mobile applications reconfigured their political participation, helped them organize in online communities but also created an important movement against timber exploitation in general.

### *Virgin forests in pop culture*

The protection of virgin forests in Romania has never been only an environmental campaign. Classical actions such as petitioning and public protests were from the beginning mirrored by social media mobilization, deployment of mobile apps and even an entire set of cultural productions. The virgin forests entered pop culture as fast as they entered the public debate. Museum installations, jewellery collections and a plethora of

documentary productions are the most representative examples of virgin forests as cultural consumption goods.

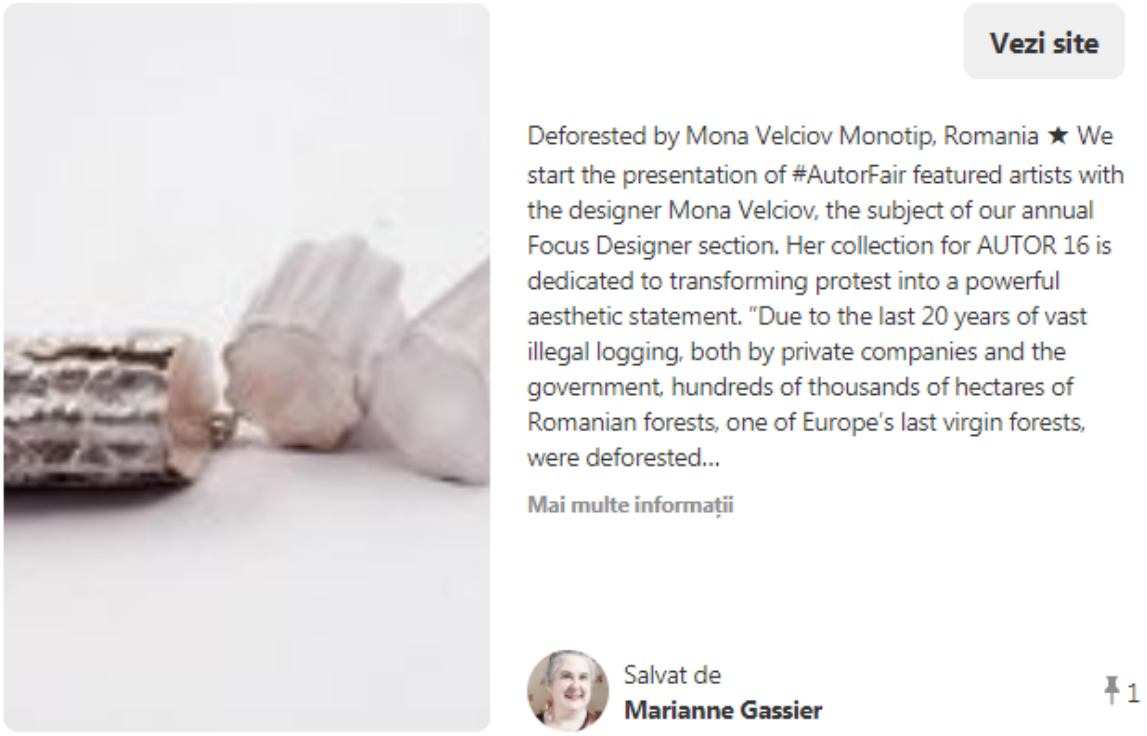


*Fig 18 Earrings from 'Deforested', a collection by jewellery designer Mona Velciov*

This should not come as a surprise, since the entire national touristic strategy has been framed since 2008 around two competitive advantages: the untouched nature and the authenticity of traditions (Iordachescu, 2014, 2016). Launched in Cluj-Napoca right before the debut of the last global financial crises, Romania's new touristic brand lured international tourists with the motto "*Explore the Carpathian Garden*!". The new strategy promised unforgettable wild adventures and a rediscovery of ancient traditions, breaking away from former brands such as Dracula, the Danube Delta or the Saxon villages of Transylvania. Wilderness and virgin forests have become part of tourists' expectations, and the ecotourism industry is currently booming. The great international success of many Romanian environmental campaigns should be read in this logic.

Another very successful object to raise public awareness for virgin forests protection was '*Diodrama*'. Thought as an artistic intervention housed by the National Museum of

Natural Sciences, it was presented by WWF Romania to the public during the 2016 Museum Night, an extremely popular international event. The installation depicted a clear-cut landscape featuring stumps, logs and broken branches replacing a popular diorama about the Carpathian fauna. The text read: '*We brought it to the museum so that you won't have to find it in real life'* and aimed to bring to the public's attention the negative effects of illegal logging on natural habitats.

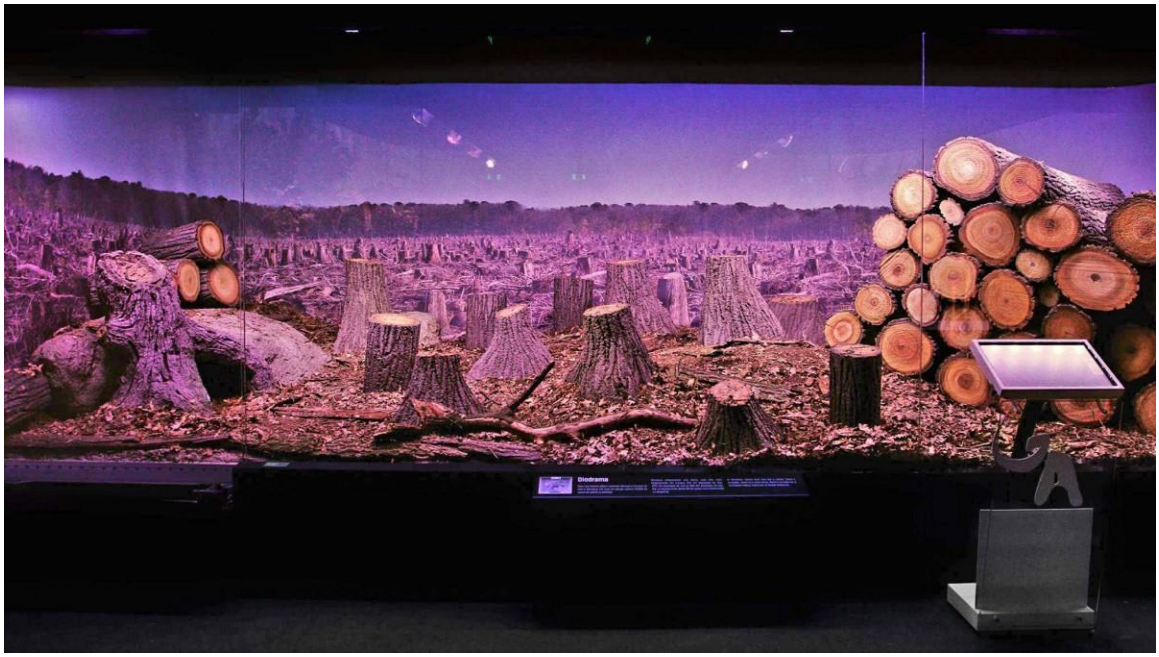

*Fig. 19 'Diodrama', WWF and the National Museum of Natural Sciences (21 May – 5 June 2016)*

Although powerful, *Diodrama* was not the first attempt to talk about virgin forests protection while using degradation narratives. Several other cultural productions, such as documentary movies centred their discourse on people's irrational development needs, passivity and unfortunate behaviours directly affecting virgin forests. Wild Carpathia, a series of four episodes produced by BBC, financed by The European Nature Trust (TENT) and narrated by Charles Ottley was probably the most iconic documentary depicting the wilderness of the Romanian Carpathian Mountains and dedicated to a

Western public.[37] The most recent episode, *Seasons of Change*, abandons the romantic narrative about medieval-like villages and peasants' traditional hospitality and talks upfront about 'the devastation caused by illegal logging'[38]. Once again spectacular drone views of compact virgin forests are presented near deforested mountain slopes. Besides the overt scope of promoting virgin forests as a touristic product among a western audience, it should be said that the person financing the documentary is also one of the philanthropist backing the creation of a massive private protected area in the Carpathians – the Carpathia project which will be investigated in the next chapter.

*Untamed Romania (Romania Neîmblânzită)* is another very popular documentary presenting the wild beauties of the Carpathians. Part of the CSR campaign of French retailer Auchan, *Untamed Romania* was launched at BAFTA in London on March 2018 and one month later in a festive atmosphere at the National Theater in Bucharest. Romanians celebrated in 2018 one hundred years from the Great Union, and many big companies and banks sized the moment and produced different films, shows and spectacles to celebrate the moment. While most of these productions touched on historical events or figures, Auchan allied with The European Nature Trust and proposed an 88' movie. Its generously supported distribution was done by Transilvania Film throughout the entire country for over eight months. From major national film festivals to the last small-sized town cinema, the documentary attracted a wide public for the entire year and it became a true cultural phenomenon. Images of wildlife were printed on promotional cups, plastic bags, pocket knives and other objects and were sold all year round in more than 50 Auchan shops. Following the story of a few charismatic species found in the virgin forests the documentary centres on the conflict and struggles of surviving in the wild across seasons. From its title to its end *Untamed Romania* contributes greatly to the creation of a separated and autonomous nature. Throughout the entire movie, a single human figure appears for less than 10 seconds: an old man mowing the grass and creating the perfect conditions for storks to find food.

[37] First 3 episodes can be streamed online at (http://www.wildcarpathia.tv/).
[38] Synopsis of the 4th episode here (http://www.wildcarpathia.tv/documentary/wild-carpathia-4). Last accessed 7 July 2019.

On the other end, *Virgo* (Romania, 2018, 44') proposed a completely different narrative. After it premiered at Pelicam International Film Festival 2018, *Virgo* toured the world being screened in different contexts from CinemAmbiente in Torino to China International Green Film Week. It is more a docu-fiction than a real documentary and aims to offer *'a journey to the unique territory and virgin forests of Romania.'*[39] Highly emotional, the movie uncovers the strong bond between humans and their environment, using no words. The film's webpage, the discussions following the premiere and several press releases talk about the threat of illegal logging, corruption and imminent disappearance of these valuable ecosystems. Among those 70 different locations listed in the final credits, in which the movie was shot, I counted only two virgin forests. But this is a detail that a nature-loving public can easily overcome.

In a similar vein, *The Ancient Woods* (Lithuania, 2018, 85') became a national pride by opening the debate about the sublime beauty and importance of old-growth forests depicted using an almost microscopic gaze.[40] In 2019 it was also screened at the Pelicam Festival in Tulcea and it rapidly reignited passionate discussions among the audience. Like its Romanian counterparts, *The Ancient Woods* is very reserved in showing any human figures. While this discussion seems already too extended, it is important to realize that such documentaries are screened for a big audience, from Tulcea to Sydney, perpetuating a spectacular wilderness narrative and probably contributing to the advancement of what critics have termed environmental ignorance (Richards, 2013, 2014).

[39] Presentation of the movie here https://volodhendrix.com/virgo/, last accessed on 7 July, 2019
[40] Presentation of the movie here http://www.sengire.lt/en, last accessed on 7 July, 2019

## 4.2 Virgin Forests as Heritage

### *Towards World Heritage recognition*

Besides their ecological value, the virgin forests have been praised for their cultural significance as part of the national historical heritage. In Romania, this resignification went one step further in 2017 with the official recognition of eight large tracts of forests as components of the extended World Heritage serial property *Ancient and Primeval Beech Forests of the Carpathians and Other Regions of Europe* (WHC 41 COM 8B.7, 2017). The 2017 extension agreed in Krakow was the third step of a process started in 2007, and continued in 2011, joining currently twelve party states that make all the efforts to ensure proper recognition and protection of these ecosystems said to have been occupying most of the European continent since the last Ice Age. For the time being, the property is known as the largest UNESCO trans-boundary site. Its outstanding universal value satisfies criteria (ix) of the operational guidelines: *"represents significant on-going ecological and biological processes in the evolution and development of terrestrial, freshwater, coastal, marine ecosystems and communities of plants and animals."*

The second extension has been a bumpy road from the beginning, different party states withdrawing during the process (Poland), others delisting some of the initial components (Slovakia). The extension dossier managed by Austria has been received cautiously by IUCN, the UNESCO's advisory body regarding natural heritage, who recommended '*to defer the nomination under natural criteria*' (IUCN, 2017). In their ample report issues have been raised regarding the capacity of certain party states to administer and protect the property, and the naturalness criteria invoked by the applicants in the case of some components. Telling was the example of the Sonian Forest, a scattered small-sized woodland in the outskirts of Brussels originating from a park-like peri-urban forest planted in the early 18$^{th}$ century. Disregarding IUCN's recommendation of deferral, the Committee decided nevertheless to extend the property in 2017. The political moment might have been also important for this decision. The Polish government, host of the session, was at that time under pressures from the European Commission to stop

harvesting timber in one of Europe's most iconic virgin forest – Puscza Białowieża also an UNESCO and Natura2000 site (Gzeszczak & Karolewski, 2017).

Romania's contribution to the property covers the biggest part of the extension with eight core components amounting to almost 24,000 ha and a buffer zone of more than 64,000 ha. The components are scattered throughout the Carpathians, most of them being already included in the strict protection zone of national parks or in nature reservations for scientific purposes. While no forestry works are permitted in the cores, the buffer zones, sometimes as large as 50,000 ha, are managed and timber can be exploited here legally. Central to WHC decision was the recommendation to increase the size of components that have less than 50 ha (4 out of 78 components) and the issue of connectivity. While Romania has the largest components, connectivity inside component clusters might be *'limited by historic management activities'* (State of conservation report, 2018). This was the moment when neighbouring local communities entered the debate for the first time. Largely absent during the identification, assessment and monitoring stages of the dossier, local communities have become in the latest State of conservation reports important stakeholders to be involved in preserving mature beech forest stands. For many locals, the decision of listing the forests as UNESCO heritage came as a surprise, as several commons' presidents have recounted. In some cases, forests that are now listed as world heritage have been the object of contention for many years. The case of Cozia component is remarkable here. Cozia Massif borders to the south the historic region of Lovistea, an area known for some of the oldest commons in the Carpathians (Conea, 1935). Countless legends about the founding moments of the medieval state of Wallachia are set here, byzantine monasteries have been endowed with forests by the rulers since the 15$^{th}$ century and more than two dozen historic associations of forest owners known as *obsti*, have their past interwoven with these forests. Recently, the murky post-socialist restitution has been marked by intense legal conflicts between *obsti* and the national park established in 2000, but also among *obsti* themselves. Part of the World Heritage component of Cozia overlaps a forest reclaimed by at least two of the historical commons from Perișani, as fieldwork in 2016 has uncovered. In this context, inscribing a property for having outstanding universal value for their human-free evolution seems at least

paradoxical. As I was doing fieldwork in Perișani, I witnessed how the local administration was trying with great efforts to reassert its role in the national history by claiming that the village is actually the place of the Battle of Posada (1330) between the Hungarian King Carol Robert and the Wallach prince Basarab I. Retold in a highly popular late medieval chronicle, the battle scenes depict the ways in which the cunning locals used their dark forests to harass the Hungarian armies and lure them into a narrow gorge where they were finally defeated. As there are still doubts about the actual place of this battle but two villages from Făgăraș have asserted their claims to be identified as the old Posada. In Perișani, the mayor invited archaeologists and historians to find the necessary evidence, has erected a statue of Basarab I in the main square and ordered a mosaic depicting the battle to adorn the outer walls of the town hall. All these material expressions of the local identity and aspirations are located tens of meters away from the UNESCO serial property. This case shows that the forests protected currently as world heritage are not only contested forests locally but also an important object around which local aspirations are expressed.

In Romania, the news about the inscription was received with great excitement. For days on end, major environmental NGOs posted on social media and issued press releases to communicate the news. The moment was celebrated in the central newspapers as well. Here it was described as a victory of a generation conscious about the environment preservation, the same generation fighting an enduring war against cyanide mining and shell gas projects (Velicu, 2012; 2017). Without exception, the press articles mentioned the fact that virgin forests represent ‘nature in its purest form’, ‘no human intervention’, remarkable examples of old or incredibly tall trees and the fact that ‘they are home to 13,000 species’ (Suciu, 2017; Brânduşă, 2017; Mihai, 2017).

Beyond spectacular and almost stereotypical details, little has been discussed about the actual meaning of having an UNESCO listed natural heritage property (Casini, 2018). For many, the extension was equivalent to a confirmation of integral and perpetual protection. Not surprising, if we remember that the public opinion had been fed up with news about virgin forests’ imminent disappearance for many years. In reality, the UNESCO Convention does not have a binding character, the management and protection of an

inscribed site being the responsibility of the party-state. Following this logic, we see that the extension was merely a diplomatic event, being celebrated with fireworks mostly for its symbolism. Indeed, UNESCO has come up with a shaming strategy for party states not taking proper care of their properties known as the List of World Heritage in Danger under the article 11(4) of the Convention. Currently, the list includes 54 sites, 13 of them being natural heritage properties. Some sites have been on the list since 1982 or 1986, while others are more recent. Moreover, the possibility of delisting a site is also an option, the recent example of the Arabian Oryx Sanctuary (2007) and the Dresden Elbe Valley (2009) being more than representative. In sum, UNESCO status does not grant any additional protection, but it represents a very important branding mechanism.

### *Parties missing from consultation*

Returning to the discussion about parties missing from consultation, we see that disregarding locals is not an event-specific only to the UNESCO nomination dossier. The foundational ideas about a lack of human influence and the nature's purity represent the basis for making decisions behind closed doors, in expert assemblies or other technocratic mind labs. The phenomenon is not unique to the nomination dossier, quite the contrary, it has been a main feature of assessing and including virgin forests in the national catalogue discussed in a previous section. Even in cases where the included virgin forest borders the village, as it happens in the case of Dâmbovicioara in Argeș county, the involvement or participation of locals in the assessment is zero. The village is in the middle of the area where Foundation Conservation Carpathia implements their wilderness conservation project (see Chapters 5 and 6).

On the other hand, Greenpeace attempted to identify virgin forests for protection as a bottom-up process organizing an international volunteer camp in the summer of 2016. As it will be shown in the next chapter, this was also an opportunity for representatives of private conservancies to improve their image and promote their projects. After years of campaigning, locals, mostly rural inhabitants have been portrayed more as poachers than as allies for virgin forest protection. And this may come as a surprise if we stop for a

moment and have to devote some attention to virgin forests portrayal and significance in folklore, local history and cultural landscape.

## *Virgin forests in traditional/local culture and national history*

Long before the term 'virgin' started being used for old-growth forest by scientists or activists, *codru* was a popular name for these forests. Historical legends recount medieval battles where different invaders used to be lured in *codri* and defeated. Telling is the example of Codri Cosminului, an ancient forest used by Stephan the Great, Prince of Moldova, to fight the Poles lead by John I Albert (1497) as part of the Polish-Ottoman war (1485-1503) (Neculce, 1998). From medieval to modern times *codri* were also a space of freedom, resistance and a source of social justice. While doing fieldwork in Dâmbovicioara, several locals shared stories of outlaws, *haiduci* in the local language, using the nearby *codri* to find shelter and launch their attacks against the injustices of boyars or local authority. Both the forests around the village and the many caves of the lime massif were used by *haiduci*, the local toponymy being still rich in this respect. One outlaw, Stanciu Haiducul, revolted repeatedly against the enclosures of the local commons in the early 19$^{th}$ century and used to attack the sheepfolds belonging to the predatory boyar Baștea. His deeds are still remembered in the local folktales and one of the most charismatic cave in Piatra Craiului National Park bears his name (Cerdacul Stanciului).

A bit further west in Nucșoara, recent history recalls groups of anti-communist partisans organizing resistance and fighting the new regime from the depths of the old-growth forests. They used to call themselves partisans or *haiducii din Făgăraș (The outlaws of Făgăraș)* and they are up to this day a source of great pride for the local communities. On the northern slopes of Făgăraș Mountains, oral history offers as well rich accounts of this kind.

Besides historical legends, the word *codru* survived in many sayings and words of wisdom to this day. In the north of Argeș country, locals often use '*ca în codru'* to refer to lawlessness, or '*duce-m-aș în codru'* to express a feeling of getting away from the harsh daily life.

Local folklore is still very rich in relation to the forestlands of Făgăraș. Several hermits found their peace in the middle of the woods, and more than a dozen monasteries have been established deep in the valleys on both sides of the massif as early as 17th century. In more traditional villages children are told stories about forests spirits and many local fairytales still enjoy a wide popularity. There are two mythological creatures strongly connected to what we call today virgin forests: *Muma Pădurii* and *Moșu Codrului*. The first one has the attributes of the Slavic Baba Yaga punishing those who misbehave in the woods, and she is known to be the mother and protector of very old and twisted trees (Kernbach, 1989). The second one is similar to the Polish mythological creature *Leszy* and is considered to be the forest's father. It could be that these two deities were traditional mechanisms of forest protection, although local communities developed strict bylaws within the historical regime of the commons.

## *Commons and virgin forests*

If we still have some areas with old-growth forests in the Romanian Carpathians we owe it to several factors. One is for sure the rugged terrain (Stupariu et al, 2013). This kept them inaccessible to massive logging starting with the early years of the 20th century and continuing to the 1950s and early 1960s when intensive timber exploitation was part of the repayment of war reparations to URSS (Nita et al, 2018). This situation started to change after the post-socialist restitution when forests became fragmented once again and new forestry roads cut deep into the mountains (Knorn et al, 2012). Another important factor, largely ignored in environmental campaigns, is the protection regime instituted under historical forms of communal property. The forest commons in the Carpathian Mountains, named *Obști* and *Composesorate*, are historical institutions governing the use, distribution and protection of natural resources and are organized at the community level (Vasile, 2009, 2015). Our recent study[41] concluded that around 14% of all forestlands are managed in *devălmășie*, roughly translated as 'togetherness'. These institutions vary greatly across the Carpathians. Each common is governed according to a strict bylaw; a

[41] Romanian Mountain Commons Project availble online https://romaniacommons.wixsite.com/project

set of rules agreed democratically which regulates the functioning of the association, the balance of power, the distribution of income and other benefits, as well as the obligations of all members. Although Romanian commons started being protected as juridical entities only at the beginning of the last century, those bylaws date as early as the first recorded historical mentions, sometimes starting with the 16th century (Pârnuță, 2005). Numerous historical documents also mention *braniști*, a type of forest whose use is restricted, and most often sheltering old trees. The toponym is well spread across the entire country as Branište, Braniștea, Brănești, for some environmental historians this is proof of a customary protection mechanism (Giurescu, 1975).

Commons are divided in a number of abstract shares (*dramuri*), no member knows exactly where her/his actual plot is located, but each one is familiar with the exact number of sheep or cows she/he can graze and the quantity of wood they are allowed to cut each year according to the number of shares possessed. This system is still in place today and it contributed greatly to the efficient conservation of forests and alpine pastures. Thus, recent proposals for a more convivial type of conservation (Büscher & Fletcher, 2019) could have great potential in Făgăraș and in other areas of the Carpathians where commons have regained their lands and have reinstituted historical land-use practices according to their old bylaws.

If one compares the map of potential virgin forests issued by Greenpeace in 2017 with the spatial distribution of commons in the Carpathians it will easily be observed that most of those forests are located in areas where forests are governed under customary property regimes. Sadly, none of the commons' representatives that we interviewed within The Romanian Mountain Commons Project was asked for an opinion when the national strategy for virgin forests protection was developed. Still, many made efforts to inscribe part of their common properties in the Catalog, as the previous chapter has shown. It is expected that as new decennial management plans will be updated according to the criteria introduced by MO 3397 in the coming years, more commons will find that their forests were put under strict protection. For the moment, the government does not have a mechanism to offer financial compensations for the parcels included in the Catalog, and

only since 2017 forest owners whose properties fall under the strict protection in national parks started being compensated.

Unfortunately, the role of commons in protecting virgin forests across centuries is hardly acknowledged. The proper recognition of local community's role in conserving the environment is a core value of the promoted by the ICCA Consortium, and the commons from Făgăraș have the potential to join this large federation of indigenous conserved territories of life (Vasile, 2019). A notable exception is one of the first comprehensive ecological study of primary forests from Banat (Western Romania), (discussed in section 3.2.1), here the authors repeatedly recognize the historical contribution of *comunități de avere grănicerești* in preserving large tracts of ancient beech forests (Bandiu et al 1995: 7). The study is unfamiliar to most environmentalists judging from how sporadically it is referenced in their campaigns.

## 4.3 Discussion and Summary of the Argument

The first part of this chapter has suggested that the public gets to know virgin forest either in an ethical way (our duty is to protect this valuable natural heritage) or in a spectacular way, which frequently involves a resubjectification from protector to consumer. If the ethical mechanism fits within the wilderness truth regime, the spectacular one is fostered by virgin forests' aesthetic. This aesthetic orbits around bird-eye views, monumental trees seen from bottom-up, deadwood rotting on the forest floor, closed-canopy seen from above and total absence of human bodies. All virgin forests are constantly green, despite the fact that most of them are mixed or preponderantly composed of beech (*fagus sylvatica),* a species that loses its leaves during winter. Most of the enumerated features are not definitive for an ancient or old-growth forest. From a biological point of view, an old-growth forest is an open canopy ecosystem with vegetation representing various successive stages and non-homogenous in terms of age (Bandiu et al, 1995; Lund, 2002; Biris, 2016; Veen et al, 2010). On the other hand, the only human figure present in some widely popular images of virgin forests are scientists, being depicted during their studies or as a comparison standard for extraordinarily tall trees.

One of the most perverse outcomes of using drone views is that they render invisible past or present human presence. Under the closed canopy, any historical or cultural legacy such as sacred sites, transhumance routes or temporary shelters get obliterated. The myth of an autonomous nature doesn't seem a challenge hard to support under this gaze:

*"virgin forests reflect nature's perfection (...) formed exclusively under natural factors and no direct or indirect human influence'* (Greenpeace, 2017).

One should not be deceived into concluding that this aesthetic revolving around a view from nowhere is the sole creation of environmental awareness campaigns. Quite the contrary, it corresponds to the scientific gaze, largely investigate in relation to natural sciences discourse and epistemology (Latour, 1999). It is time to critically ask ourselves what is missing from this narrative. What is happening on the ground when strict protection regimes are instituted? And most importantly, who are the winners and who are the losers of this process? The following sub-chapter will try to bring more light on the attempts to frame virgin forests as cultural heritage.

This chapter also explored the controversies around framing virgin forests as heritage, an argument widely used in public campaigns but rarely questioned. Not inviting local interested parties in the consultations fits within a wider tendency of adopting environmental policy upon hearing only experts' opinions. This rule of the expertariat is a thread spanning throughout this entire dissertation. The protection of wilderness, analyzed here as strict protection of virgin forests, is in my views, the paradigmatic example of a non-democratic decision-making process. Although protective mechanisms try to get everyone interested and involved by framing these forests as 'national heritage' or 'outstanding universal value', clear dividing lines can be observed on the ground. For now, the cultural values attached to these forests are lost in translation; a translation from traditional ecological knowledge to bureaucrats' and activists' sets of criteria and indicators. As listed in the Catalog, the virgin forests have no history; they are depoliticized natures ready to be put under strict protection. Once strictly protected, any human use is suspended: logging, collection of deadwood, mushroom and berries foraging, grazing, transhumance and many other practices around which a great deal of people structure their livelihoods. Of course, virgin forests represent a very small area

across the Carpathians, but their complete separation from human activities or cultural practices is dangerous and unjust. If the core recommendations of the convivial conservation movement would be embraced, these forests would not be ‘saved’ for their unicity and charismatic character, but for their importance as a co-produced heritage of the local communities. Switching from a ‘saving’ paradigm to a celebratory one, would not only give locals a sense of pride and rootedness but would enrich the reputation of these forests from virgin and untouched to biocultural heritage.

As this dissertation will show in the next chapter, this separation narrative to develop green businesses, ecotourism facilities and other accumulation strategies is advanced by a powerful private conservation enterprise in the eastern half of the Southern Carpathians.

# Chapter 5 Securing the European Yellowstone

> *"The noise of chainsaws announces a human presence, but even without hearing this noise it is not hard to see that they have been around. Bellow me, dark green forests alternate with patches of broken trees and many deforested areas, they are like deserts. (...) Sheep flocks are a sort of huge grazing machines that shave all pastures leaving little grass behind. At the end of August, when they leave, it is too late for young grass to grow, so no grass means fewer insects and rodents, which means less food for us, ravens."*
>
> ('The world seen by a raven, nowadays', *Wild Nature. A guide*, Foundation Conservation Carpathia, 2015)

## 5.1 Introduction

This chapter explores how wilderness narratives are put to practice by examining a conservation project currently developing in the Southern Carpathian Mountains, Romania. The analysis of nature's separation and protection under strict regime done in the previous chapters is exemplified here with a clear case of wilderness production. Advertised as the 'European Yellowstone', the initiative is backed by international philanthropists and has gained considerable international public attention.

I claim that this project is a point of convergence for the most revolutionary conservation initiatives in Europe. In supporting this argument, I zoom in and out tracing the connections between the persons involved in the Carpathia Project and the biggest actors in the rewilding and wilderness protection movement. My attempt is to go beyond the conservation network and trace this project's ramifications in the policymaking, academic and business sphere.

Recent critiques directed to the study of conservation projects have pointed out that anthropologists and political ecologists rarely devote attention to the conservation practitioners (Kiik, 2018), and tend to focus predominantly on the conservation as a

political process. With this chapter, I try to fill this gap and follow exclusively the Foundation Conservation Carpathia (FCC) as an actor involved in building a private wilderness reserve in the Carpathians. Its vision, the people that support it and the conservation work done so far are at the centre of my analysis. In doing so, I join other scholars who avoided to represent a caricature of conservation NGOs and inquired more deeply into the shifting rationale behind particular conservation efforts (Carrier & West, 2009).

Whenever possible within this chapter I tried to offer a detached account; I used the words of FCC's members, of journalists who reported on the project or the exact phrasing found in legal documents and grey literature produced by the foundation. Such an impersonal account should be read together with the critical analysis offered in the next chapter where episodes of contention, moment of resistance and locals' disagreement are analyzed with specific political ecology lenses. The present chapter and the next one should be read as a diptych.

The thick description proposed in this chapter is based on interviews with people working for the foundation, direct observation, field visits and the study of legal documents, grey literature, technical reports, wildlife documentaries and several other media productions. The chapter is structured in three sections preceded by an introduction and followed by a summary of the argument. The first section describes the context in which the foundation was established, its vision and future plans and it offers an analysis of its network of supporters. The middle section discusses some of the most important conservation projects implemented so far and explores the FCC's social marketing and lobby strategies. Eventually, a section is devoted to current affairs such as building alliances and framing a new strategy for restoring the endangered landscape of Făgăraș Mountains.

## 5.2 ‘A visionary conservation approach’[42]

### *From disrupted to secured landscapes*

Foundation Conservation Carpathia (FCC) is the most important private conservation actor in Romania and aims to be a leading example on the European level. Over the last ten years, FCC aimed to protect and restore large forested areas in the eastern part of the Southern Carpathians in an attempt to build a ‘world-class wilderness reserve’. Their approach revolves around using private and public money to buy as much land as possible and ensure its full protection. Leasing hunting rights, acquiring custody of Natura2000 protected areas and cataloguing virgin forests complemented their approach towards strict protection. By mid-2019 the foundation and its commercial companies owned and administered over 22,000 hectares of forests and alpine pastures, being considered one of the top private forest owners in the entire country. This section will revisit FCC’s vision and future plans, describe its most important achievements and explore its international connections and network of supporters.

The person that keeps the entire initiative together, and at the same time FCC’s most visible figure is one of its executive directors - Christoph Promberger. The German-born biologist moved to Romania in 1993 while working in a WWF-financed research project studying the Carpathian wolf population. Previously he had studied for several years the same species in Yukon region. Having spent some time in Brașov and Zărnești he and his wife, also a wildlife scientist, moved to Șinca Nouă, a small village nestled between the hills on the northern side of Făgăraș Mountains. Here they set up in 2003 Equus Silvania, an equestrian facility and guesthouse, one of the first eco-touristic initiative in the region. In the same year, the Romanian Association for Ecotourism was established and Promberger became one of its honorary members.

The mid-2000s were tumultuous times for the environmental movement. Not only was Romania in the middle of establishing a network of national parks and Natura 2000 sites within the EU accession, but the ongoing land restitution process was bringing

[42] In most PR campaigns and public interventions, the directors of Foundation Conservation Carpathia have presented the conservation approach of their project as visionary in relation to the mainstream conservation approaches present on the European continent.

unexpected challenges. Started in the early 1990, the restitution of agricultural lands and forests seized by the state between March 1945 and December 1989 was marked by successive legal developments culminating with the Law 247/2005. If previous bills limited the size of the plots to be given back to 10 (under Law 18/1990) or 50 hectares (under Law 1/2000), now lands were restituted *in integrum*. Anthropologists and other social scientists studied this post-socialist land restitution in great detail, so I will not go into that direction (Verdery, 2003; Dorondel, 2009; Nichiforel et al, 2015). An immediate effect of Law 247/2005 that was felt around Făgăraș was an increase in timber exploitation. Dorondel describes how both legal and illegal forest exploitation mushroomed within patronage networks resulting in what he calls 'disrupted landscapes' (2016). Vasile and others uncovered extensive corruption within the same process (Lawrence & Szabo, 2005; Vasile, 2009). These transformations impacted the region not only from an ecological point of view but also visually. Many forest plots have been clear cut as soon as they were restituted to unlawful owners, and left abandoned. When they were given to the actual owners, these had to bear the cost of replanting the forest, an expensive endeavour that would take years. According to FCC's latest estimations, between 1,800 and 2,000 hectares of forest have been illegally deforested in the central-eastern part of the Făgăraș Mountains between 2005 and 2011 (Zotta, 2018). The restitution process is far from being over; many private or collective owners' associations are still waiting to get back all their lands.

This was the context in which Christoph and Barbara Promberger decided to get involved in saving a natural heritage that had previously been the subject of their research and the reason to remain in Romania. The story goes[43] that after discussing with Piatra Craiului National Park's managers, Christoph understood that the only way to save the forest is to buy it: "*I realized that you cannot protect it if you don't own it*" (Adevarul, 2018). He started to contact like-minded people and approached potential philanthropists. In 2008 Erika Stanciu, a forestry scientist, established ProPark – the Foundation for Protected

[43] In the first few years of activity the foundation did not organize public consultations or meetings with the locals, so Christoph Promberger rapidly entered the realm of folklore and rumors. He was referred to as "Neamțul" – the German guy, and people believed that he plans to steal their forests or extract the rare metals. I argue that this lack of transparency was very costly for the foundation's objective, but this topic will be investigated in the next chapter.

Areas[44], aiming to develop and improve protected areas' management on the national level. Promberger joined the project and became ProPark's treasurer.[45]

2009 was a landmark year for wilderness protection in Europe. In February the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the European Commission to come up with concrete measures for wilderness protection. Later in May during the European Council Presidency, the Czech government organized an international conference on Wilderness and Large Natural Habitat Areas whose outcome was a series of policy recommendations for protection and restoration of wild areas (Wild Europe 2009)[46]. Only a few months later, on 2nd December, Foundation Conservation Carpathia was registered by the court of Zarnești, a small town close to Fagaraș Mountains and home to Piatra Craiului National Park's administration. Seizing the European momentum, Christoph Promberger managed to convince ten international philanthropists and conservationists to jump on board and set the plans for Europe's most iconic wilderness reserve. The coordinator and organiser of the Prague Conference, Toby Aykroyd was among them.

In the first months after this event resembling the legendary episode from the Madison Plateau[47], Mihai Zotta left Piatra Craiului National Park's administration where he had previously been a key figure and became FCC's technical director. In the same period, the Foundation established its own hunting association and prepared an international meeting in London to obtain the support of other big names in *conservationland* (Kiik, 2018) and refine their vision.

### *Vision, figures, future plans*

Foundation Conservation Carpathia aims *"to create a world-class wilderness reserve in the Southern Romanian Carpathians, large enough to support significant numbers of large carnivores and to allow evolutionary processes to happen"*. These words are

[44] As mentioned already in Chapter 3, section 3.2, Erika Stanciu played a significant role in the development of the legal framework for virgin forest protection during the technocratic rule.
[45] Court Decision 7843/B/2008, Brasov.
[46] https://www.wildeurope.org/index.php/about-us/history-key-events/wild-europe-events/prague-conference
[47] The campfire from Madison Plateau is considered as a founding moment for the establishment of the Yellowstone National Park. The event is recounted and mythologized in virtually every guide of the charismatic park.

ubiquitous, from their statute to the national registry for foundations and non-governmental associations, from local newspapers to National Geographic international events. If initially, the founders aimed to secure 50,000 hectares to be conserved in perpetuity, recent developments allow for a more ambitious vision. Hoping to turn the entire Natura2000 Făgăraș Mountains protected area (ROSCI0122) into a national park, FCC's ambitions extend also to the current Piatra Craiului National Park and Leaota Massif – adding up to a total of over 250,000 hectares.

Leaving the slight change of vision aside, the three main features of the future Carpathia reserve remained the following: it shall be a 'world-class wilderness', a conservation model for Europe and the most iconic national park on the continent. If Africa has Serengeti and Kruger, and North America their Yellowstone, the time had come for Europeans to have their own emblematic Yellowstone. This comparison is not fortuitous, it has been repeated ad nauseam and *'the European Yellowstone'* has become common parlance among conservationists and nature lovers alike.


*Fig. 20 – FCC's initial plan (Source:* Wild Europe: Carpathia, 2010*)*

Yellowstone is an important brand in the global conservation movement, its legacy as the first national park and the exportation of this conservation model across the world have been analysed by historians for decades (Cronon, 1992, Turner 2012, Kupper, 2014). In the same time, the park played an important role in framing the spectacle of wildlife as part of standardized commodified experiences (Rutherford, 2011).

Central for the evolution of Promberger's vision was the advice and strong support received from the late Douglas Tompkins. Together with Kristine, his wife, they set up several iconic private wilderness reserves in Chile and Argentina over a period of more than two decades and were among the first founders of FCC. (some words about their parks from George Holmes). Alina Pop, communication coordinator for the foundation told us a story while I was taking part in a team of volunteers to take care of one of their nurseries back in August 2017. Fascinated by the landscape of Piatra Craiului and Făgăraș, the late Doug Tompkins inspired Promberger not only to emphasize the development of ecotourism around Carpathia's conservation model but also cautioned him about potential resistance against its bold ambitions. As the Tompkins already did with several of their reserves, the executive director of FCC also promised to return to the state all the forests controlled by the foundation as soon as the state will prove that it has the resources and legal framework to ensure their strict protection in perpetuity according to FCC's high standards.

As briefly stated in the beginning, the FCC's approach to conservation revolves around securing exclusive ownership. It does so directly and through a dozen other commercial companies established or administered by its head, Christoph Promberger: *"I rapidly realised that the only way to conserve these forests is to own them"*. Up to July 2019, the foundation controlled around 22,000 of forests and grazing areas.[48]

Besides buying land for strict protection, the foundation acquired over the last years the custody of two Natura2000 protected areas under the provisions of Emergency Ordinance 57/2007: **ROSCI0381 Raul Targului-Argesel-Rausor** is the larger of the two with 13,213 ha, and **ROSCI0102 Leaota** which extends over 1,393 ha of forests and alpine pastures. Only the latter has an approved management plan as of 2015 (Plan de

[48] The foundation regularly updates the main figures of their project on the website https://www.carpathia.org/ , last accessed 27 July 2019

Management, 2015). Due to strong local opposition in the municipality of Lerești and Rucăr, the negotiation of a similar document for the first site which spans over several villages is still ongoing at the time of writing.

Another strategy to ensure strict protection of wildlife within the project area was to bid for and acquire hunting rights. In 2011 FCC's hunting association successfully became the administrator of *Izvorul Dambovitei* Hunting Ground No.21 extending over 14,856 hectares (Situația contractelor gestionarilor de fonduri cinegetice, 2015) and six years later, towards the end of 2017, it started to administer also Hunting Ground No.22 *Rucar*, adding another 10.843 hectares to their hunting free zone (see Fig. 21).


*Fig 21 Hunting Grounds 21 Izvoarele Dambovitei (in **red**) and 22 Rucar (in yellow), administered by FCC*

Buying land, being custodian of protected areas and administering the hunting grounds are the strategies through which FCC builds the future Carpathia reserve. However, other strategies have also been put into practice. Starting with 2012 the foundation tried to get involved with the local commons, historical associations of owners called *obști (sg. obște)* and to become a member within these institutions.

*Obști* are historical institutions through which villagers manage their forests and pastures in a collective and customary manner. They have been reestablished starting with 2000 when Law 1/2000 offered them the possibility to reclaim properties seized by the state after the Second World War. In May 2014 one of FCC's commercial companies became a member in the commons of Rucar and started soon to gain considerable power inside

the association. This event will be explained at length in the next chapter, for now, it is important to understand that being powerful within a commons opens the possibility to decide on the use of and access to resources otherwise inaccessible.

As for the conservation of this important secured area, the FCC proposed and followed two strategies. First, it worked to restore forest and aquatic ecosystems by reforesting barren slopes, covering old eroded forestry roads and reconstructing riparian alder habitats (*Alnus incana*). A generous LIFE+ grant and several other projects contributed to a successful implementation of this approach, resulting in more than 1,8 million trees already planted. Second, the foundation aims to reintroduce two missing species, considered of great value for the ecosystems in the area. The beaver (*Castor fiber*) and the European bison (*Bison bonasus*) are the usual suspects in many rewilding projects on the continent, and scientists have devoted particular attention to the practicalities of these projects (Tănăsescu, 2017; 2019; Vasile, 2018b). In Făgăraș they are expected to recreate mosaic landscapes and restore the natural ecosystems as these have been abandoned or unproperly managed (see vignette at the beginning of the chapter). A grant of 5 million USD, awarded to FCC in early March 2019, will be party dedicated to this process.

If in the early years Carpathia was merely a project aimed at stopping illegal logging around Piatra Craiului Massif, lately the initiative proposed the creation of an iconic national park around Făgăraș Mountains considered the last unfragmented mountain range in Europe. The properties that the foundation currently controls are expected to constitute the strictly protected core of this park. Since 2016 the project started to be officially considered by central authorities, and by 2020 the park is expected to be operational.

With its almost 300,000 hectares, Făgăraș Mountains National Park (FMNP from here on) shall be Europe's largest forested protected area. The efforts of FCC in building FMNP are part of a larger commitment to ensure 12% of Romania's territory as national parks by 2050. This vision, promoted together with their partners from Natura 2000 Coalition, aims to determine massive political support in conserving 30% of the national land surface as protected areas and secure the necessary funds, estimated at 500 million euro, for their administration (Coalitia Natura 2000, 2018).

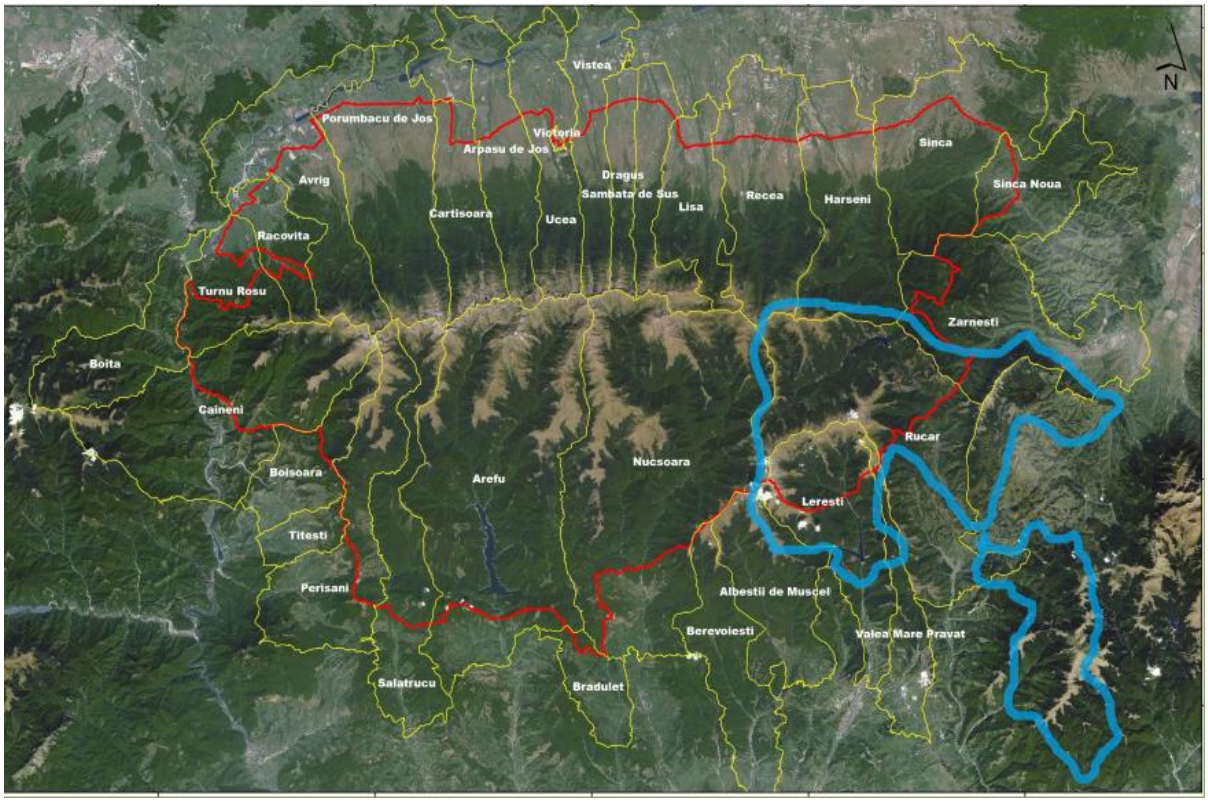


*Fig. 22 Făgăraș Mountain Natura 2000 PA (**in red**) and FCC initial project area (**in blue**), (own elaboration)*

## *Board & international network*

A central ambition of this chapter is to go beyond a caricature of conservation movement (Kiik, 2018) and explore the intimate connections of this particular wilderness conservation process unfolding in Romania. One way of doing it is to investigate how FCC is connected to other regional and global conservation projects. Who backs Carpathia financially and who is involved in narrowing its vision? Is there a stable and coherent approach to conservation or can we observe changes over time? Probably the best way to answer these questions is to check who is supervising the activities, programs and the functioning of FCC. Figure 23 presents a comprehensive mapping of former and actual members FCC's board of directors. The map resulted from compiling data from interviews with foundation's personnel, court's decisions, national associations' registry and the FCC's website. Even though the persons backing the wilderness reserve are involved in numerous campaigns or made fortune in several other industries (tourism,

outdoor clothing, finance, furniture) the map displays only their engagement with conservation. As mentioned at the beginning of this section, the foundation was established in 2009 by 12 persons, including Barbara and Christoph Promberger. The composition of this body changed over time as a response to new challenges and a change of vision, issues that will be discussed further. Before that, it is important to see who were FCC's founding members and how they are involved in other conservation initiatives.

I argue that Carpathia is a concrete example of putting to practice internationally discussed ideas about the strict protection of wild nature, understood as separated from human use. FCC's founders are the leaders of the wilderness movement in Europe. Some of them pursue their own rewilding projects; others put great efforts in lobbying for wilderness at the EU institutional level.

**Hansjörg Wyss** established in 1998 the *Wyss Foundation* and is currently one of the most generous supporters of biodiversity conservation worldwide [49]. Through his foundation, he pledged in 2018 1 billion USD to help conserve 30% of the planet by 2030. FCC's vision also advanced the idea of declaring 30% of Romania's territory as protected areas by 2050 at the end of 2018. One of FCC's many subsidiary companies through which thousands of hectares of forests were acquired over the last decade, is owned by the Swiss magnate. His entire philanthropic activity suggests a preference for projects where conservation is done through buying lands and securing exclusive ownership (Wild Europe, 2010). He is a strong supporter of several 'Half-Earth' initiatives and has committed to back this movement consistently over the next decade[50]

His sister, **Hedwig Wyss**, has been backing Promberger's project before FCC was even born. Her *Foundation Temperatio*, registered in Switzerland, has been generously financing the organization of two national conferences over the last two years during which FCC announced its 2050 vision and tried to get the support of other Romanian politicians and businesspersons.

[49] The entire philanthropy of Wyss Foundation can be followed here https://www.wyssfoundation.org/philanthropy, last accessed 27 July 2019

[50] More on his pledge in this very popular New York Times article https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/31/opinion/earth-biodiversity-conservation-billion-dollars.html

**Toby Aykroyd** is leading the wilderness movement in Europe. He is the coordinator of the *Wild Europe Initiative*, formerly known as *Wilderness Foundation*, and he was involved in every relevant discussion on wilderness protection in Brussels. In 2017 his foundation organized a two-day event in the European Parliament to discuss a strategy for old-growth forest protection, during which Carpathia project received significant attention and another conference on wilderness protection gathering head of states, MEPs and other important political figures in Bratislava in November 2019 is supposed to translate his vision into concrete policies.

**Paul Lister**, also an UK citizen, manages *The European Nature Trust (TENT)*, one of the most powerful actors in European Conservation. He supported the BBC series Wild Carpathia, a documentary where the Carpathian wilderness received great praise. FCC was featured directly or through its members in each one of the four episodes. TENT also produced *Untamed Romania*, a wildlife documentary launched in 2018 and discussed in the chapter on virgin forests. Lister owns the Alladale wilderness reserve in the Scottish Highlands, one of the most iconic rewilding experiments in UK. For sure, the conservation work of each member of FCC's board deserves careful attention, but for the sake of the argument, I will examine another two of them. Others will appear in the discussion later as I describe FCC's projects and challenges.

**Kristine Tompkins** and her late husband **Douglas** are pioneers of the global conservation movement. As already mentioned, over the last three decades, they were involved through *The Conservation Land Trust* in the creation of several large private reserves in Chile and Argentina: Pumalin Park (320,000 ha), Corcovado Park (294,000 ha), Ibera Project, Patagonia Park and other private conservation enterprises. Some of these protected areas have been donated to the state, others are still private, but all are considered very important ecotourism destinations on the global market. The two welcomed Promberger on many occasions on their estates. Promberger gives them as an illustrative example each time he promises to return to the Romanian state the forests of Făgăraș strictly protected by FCC.

A similar supporter of FCC is **Anders Holch Povlsen**, Denmark's wealthiest citizen and founder of *Wildland Ltd*. Povlsen and his wife Anne are the biggest landowners in Scotland. Here they operate several estates for ecotourism, hunting, conservation and

rewilding degraded ecosystems. He owns one of FCC's subsidiaries, a company buying forests and pastures in Leaota Massif, south-east from Făgăraș. Although he joined the Carpathia project only in 2012, his steady financial support and involvement shaped FCC's vision.

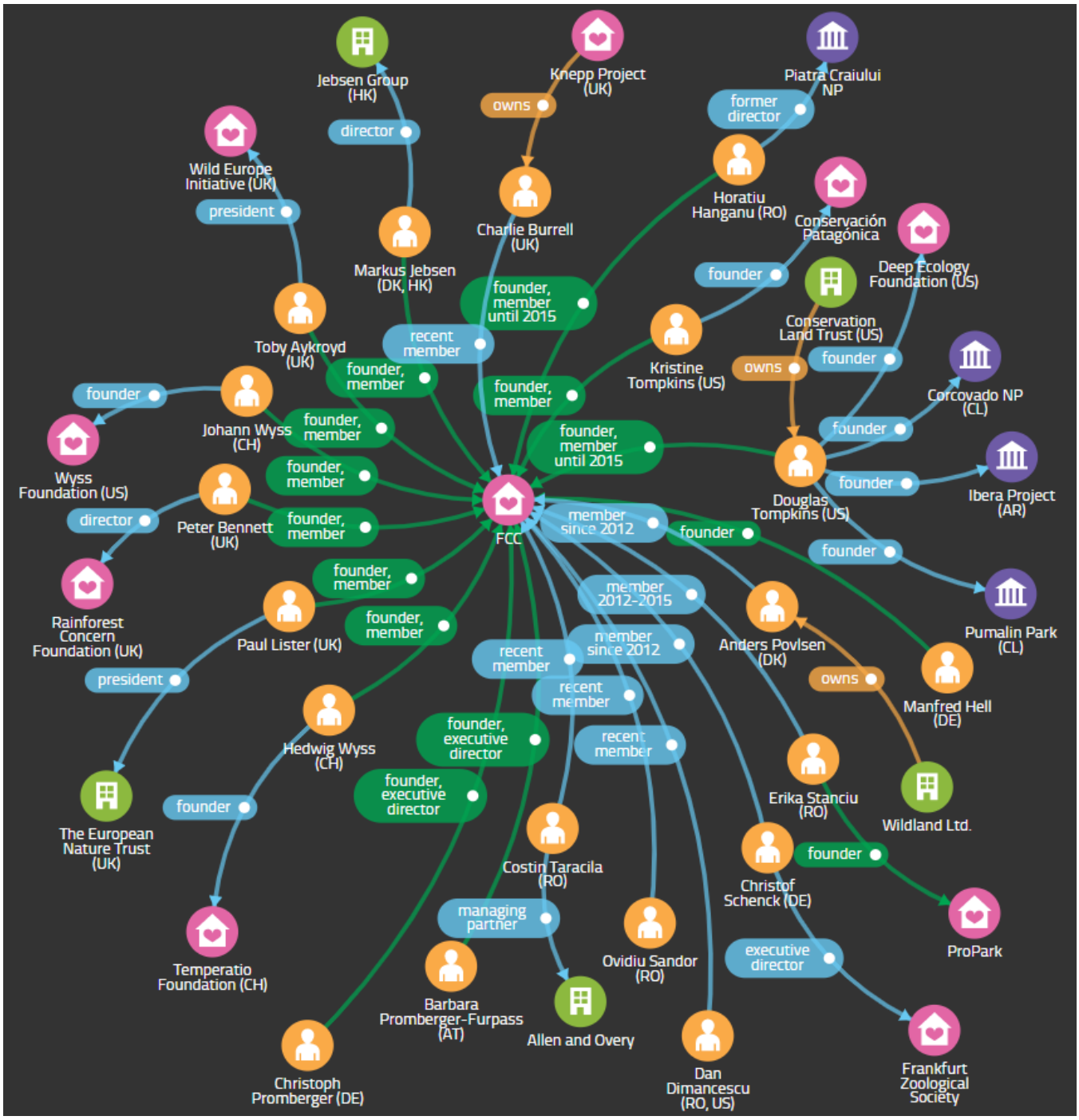


*Fig. 23 Foundation Conservation Carpathia Board of directors (own elaboration using VIS – Visual Investigative Scenarios)*

This short review of some FCC board members and their involvement in conservation work is important for understanding Carpathia as a focal initiative for some of the most important wilderness initiatives in Europe. All persons listed above are buying land for conservation on various continents and support financially through donations of other ambitious initiatives promoting the strict protection of nature. Through projects like Carpathia, their interests converge as Fig. 23 has visually shown.

Aside from the founding members, the board of directors also included briefly or for longer periods Romanian citizens: **Erika Stanciu**, the founder of ProPark left the board when she was appointed State Secretary in the Ministry of Environment in 2015, **Horațiu Hanganu**, former director of Piatra Craiului National Park (2004-2007), left after a public scandal related to illicit land restitution in Piatra Craiului area[51]. Others, like the diplomat **Dan Dimăncescu** and the entrepreneur **Ovidiu Șandor,** became board members more recently. It is important to notice that both locally and on social media, the foundation was accused of serving foreign interests, although being established under the Romanian law.

## 5.3 Wilderness conservation at work

### *Conservation efforts*

FCC's conservation work is an assemblage of practices and techniques that could be split into three main clusters: wildlife research and management, ecosystem restoration and rewilding, and human impact reduction. Absolute control over much of the target area allows for all three to happen hand in glove.

**Study of wildlife**

Having extensive previous experience in the study of wildlife, Barbara and Christoph Promberger and their team got involved in several campaigns to get a more accurate image of brown bear, wolf, otter, lynx and chamois populations present on FCC's properties. In Romania clear information about the size and dynamic of most wildlife

[51] The journalist investigation aired on 21 September 2014 on Antena 3 as part of the „În Premieră" broadcast, an archived copy can be watched here http://inpremiera.antena3.ro/reportaje/jaf-cu-premeditare-partea-1-285.html

species is absent (Pop et al 2018, Popescu et al, 2019). International reports have decried the absence of aggregate reliable data about different species, and the situation seems unclear in other Eastern European countries as well (European Parliament, 2018). This can lead to inappropriate human-wildlife conflict management, excessive hunting and even poaching (Popescu et al, 2019). As mentioned previously, FCC controls two hunting areas, adding up to 24,000 hectares. Here they use non-invasive methods such as genetic monitoring from scat and fur samples, camera trapping with 50 fixed devices and the classic snow tracking and den counts (Promberger et al, 2018) for a clearer image of the existing wildlife. One of the frequently mentioned results of their campaign is that official estimates are far too optimistic, the number of individuals being sometimes even ten times smaller than what is declared by the central authorities (Promberger et al, 2018). Having an accurate image of the existing wildlife also aids the tailoring of eco-touristic services. FCC organizes frequently wildlife photo sessions with renowned photographers, tracking tours and wildlife watching from four hides built starting with 2015. The planned reintroduction of the European bison and the beaver will open new opportunities for both research and tourism.

**LIFE+**

Ecosystem restoration has been a central preoccupation of FCC from 2012 onwards. The foundation won several grants for doing it, among which the most substantial LIFE+ project implemented in Romania so far. LIFE+ is an instrument for funding projects related to climate and environment within EU member states and it is managed by two DGs of the European Commission (Environment and Climate Action).[52] FCC won in 2012 a five-year grant under the LIFE+ Nature and Biodiversity component, a line of action trying to implement Commission's commitment to halt the loss of biodiversity by 2010 and beyond.

The project *LIFE11/NAT/RO/823 "Ecological restoration of forest and aquatic habitats in the Upper Dambovița Valley, Făgăraș Mountains" (2012-2017)* aimed to undo some of the damage resulted from recent logging and inappropriate silvicultural approaches. The actions taken within this project assumed the illegal character of recent forest

[52] An official description of LIFE+ financing programme is available here: https://ec.europa.eu/easme/en/life , Last visited 15 July 2019

exploitation in the area and were presented as necessary reparatory attempts (Bucur – personal communication, 2015). The communication of this project showed how previously degraded landscapes (through illegal logging and illegal forestry roads) have been brought back to a natural state with great efforts. In total, 550 hectares of clear-cuts have been replanted with a mix of native species using volunteers and seasonal workforce (Tudoran & Zotta, 2018). For this purpose, several tree nurseries have been established in Sătic and Șirnea, offering further jobs for some locals. Alina Pop, responsible for the communication recounted in 2017:

> *„Through this project, we repaired what the irrational greed of previous owners has done. We have several nurseries here on the valleys where we carefully grow little fir saplings until they can be moved back on the mountain slopes to restore these extraordinary forests. This way we also create some jobs at the local level."*

Another significant action undertaken within this project was the reconversion of 400 ha of spruce monocultures. The Lerești and Upper Dâmbovița Valley were logged intensely during previous decades, and, like other regions in the country, were subsequently reforested with economically viable species like spruce (*Picea abies*). FCC's vision considers these monocultures as of lesser importance for biodiversity conservation (Bucur, personal communication, 2015). According to previous studies done in partnership with the Forestry Department of Transilvania University, the project allowed for the opening of small areas within the spruce which were planted with native species such as beech (*Fagus sylvatica*), rowan (*Sorbus aucuparia*), elm (*Ulmus glabra*) and yew (*Taxus baccata*), aiming to get closer to the natural forest composition (Bucur, 2018). The spruce logs have been left on the ground to rot and be consumed by fungi and insects. While visiting one of the project areas in Piciorul Iezerului in 2017 I met a local mushroom picker who shared his view about this practice: *"I don't get it, look at all this firewood left here to rot. It's everywhere you turn your eyes; it doesn't make any sense. Me and my people (țiganii noștri) have to procure this with great efforts, and they leave it there to rot (…)" (Marin, 2017).*

The 5.8 million euro grant, of which FCC co-financed half, allowed also for the acquisition of 1,600 ha of forests, including virgin and quasi-virgin ones and the restoration of 17 km of eroded forestry tracks.

Aiming to increase the visibility of their conservation work, during the implementation of LIFE+ project monthly reports were made available to the public on FCC's website in addition to several dissemination meetings that took place in Brașov, Lerești and Rucăr [53]. It is important to acknowledge the successful implementation of this project, as this positively affected the FCC's local and national image. The project created about 300 seasonal jobs and propelled the foundation among the leaders of Romanian conservation. Showing that they have the team and the necessary capacities to manage such a massive restoration project, helped them further to apply and win other European grant competitions.

**ECOSS**

Foundation Conservation Carpathia appeared in 2009 with the declared aim of protecting forests under stress from deforestation and illegal timber extraction. As the physical protection did not seem enough to diminish human impact at the local level, they applied for an EEA grant intending to address contingent social and economic problems.

The EEA and Norway grants are a financing mechanism aiming to diminish the gap between countries of the European Economic Area and are formed from contributions of Iceland, Lichtenstein and Norway. The scheme supports a different range of interventions from carbon capture and environmental protection to civil society and labour rights. During the 2009 - 2014 period Romania was the second EU country after Poland regarding the amount of the allocations, receiving over 305 million euro.[54]

Officially named *RO2015_3457_ECOSS "A study into the economic and ecological potential of conservation enterprises to enhance the local economy, ecosystem services, and biodiversity in the Făgăraș Mountains"* the ECOSS project was implemented by FCC between 2015 and 2016. The central idea of the project was to support conservation enterprises or 'green business models' that would develop the local communities neighbouring Făgăraș while decreasing the pressures on natural resources. The total grant offered for the project amounted to half a million euro. As I worked for six months in this project, I got an intimate understanding not only of ECOSS' aims but also on the

[53] A detailed overview of results can be accessed here: https://www.carpathia.org/life/ , Last visited 15 July 2019

[54] A synthetic overview of EEA grants allocation here https://www.regjeringen.no/en/topics/european-policy/norwaygrants/which-countries-benefit/id685572/, last accessed on 15 July 2019

project's daily developments. For an official and technical overview of the project, FCC's webpage is a valuable source.[55]

In order to develop conservation enterprises in the area two sets of information were missing: knowledge about the ecosystem services and information about the socio-economic context of Făgăraș. The **Norwegian Institute for Nature Research** (NINA) produced two reports containing evidence for the first set, while the second was the object of an extended field study in 28 administrative units bordering the mountains. The research involved a complex methodology including quantitative and qualitative tools: questionnaires, structured interviews, official statistics, and less formal discussions with farmers, cultural entrepreneurs, mayors, artisans and others. This assessment was the basis for a further development of green business plans in close collaboration with the second partner in the project – **Conservation Capital**. As this chapter aims to offer a more detached account of FCC conservation work and values, a critical assessment of the ECOSS project will be provided only in Chapter 5 which deals with local resistance and opposition.

In a public communication of the project FCC offered a synthetic definition of businesses that would fit within the development ambitions of their wilderness reserve: "*Conservation enterprises or "green" businesses, are economic initiatives that use mostly renewable resources, they are managed by local people, creates jobs for locals and especially, supports conservation and biodiversity of the Făgăraș Mountains."*[56] A confident promotional video about ECOSS was produced by the Dutch company Ateles Film and presented to the public towards the end of the project.[57] In addition to identifying appropriate local entrepreneurs and support their initiatives, the project aimed at building a multifunctional centre that could be used in the future for the park's management, environmental education and for other conservation purposes. Three years after the project ended one single conservation enterprise is fully operational – The Biodiversity Farm from Cobor village.

[55] A detailed overview of results can be accessed here https://www.carpathia.org/ecoss-project/, last accessed on 15 July 2019
[56] https://www.carpathia.org/ecoss-project/
[57] Available at https://vimeo.com/170759683, Last accessed 15 July 2019

**Cobor Biodiversity Farm**

We saw that the foundation tried to draw the lines for a new economic development of Făgăraș around ecotourism and low impact initiatives. To date, Cobor Biodiversity Farm is the best and only successful initiative following closely FCC's vision. Nestled between the hills of Hârtibaciu Plateau, Cobor is a remote Transylvanian village of no more than 200 inhabitants, mostly Hungarians. The farm includes several houses for guests, some stables for animals and around 1,000 hectares of land. Before Cobor became an iconic conservation enterprise, it belonged to Markus Jebsen, one of the philanthropists that established FCC in 2009. He decided to donate the facility to the foundation and since 2017 the farm started transforming into a model of green business. After studying the rich flora and fauna present on these lands, FCC decided to promote it as a biodiversity farm. Currently, it functions as a guesthouse catering to an environmentally conscious clientele, as a rehabilitation centre for horses, and as a venue where one can live a set of experiences sold under the generous banner of Transylvanian authenticity – brunches, local music festivals, bird and beaver watching and so on. Being in close vicinity to Viscri and other booming tourist destinations that commodify a Saxon heritage surely contributed to Cobor's recent success (Corsale & Iorio, 2014). For scaling up this initiative, it should be noted that Cobor is 120 km away from Rucăr, the village situated in the centre of Carpathia project, and even further from the communities that feel the impact of FCC the strongest.

Cobor is also increasingly sought by foreign tourists. A 2017 report published by FCC describes the experience of a group of German tourists:

> *"We organized at Cobor and in Poiana Tămaș camps for reconnecting with nature. We drove wooden carts across the surrounding hills and we camped in the forest around an open fire. (...) the participants spent 24 hours alone in the forest, in an isolated place chosen by them. This type of activities is spread in Western Europe, where urban life is almost completely decoupled from nature. Our location is perfect for this type of camps." (FCC Report, 2017:69 – own translation)*

In January 2018 the farm's managers decided to replace the recently introduced Black Angus cattle with a more charismatic but disappearing species – the Hungarian Grey

Cattle *(sura de stepă*). This way, the rewilding of abandoned or overgrazed pastures was added among the objectives of this biodiversity farm.

A generous advertorial published in April 2019 by Ziarul Financiar, Romania's leading financial newspaper, noted:

> *"Silence was invented in a Transylvanian village. (...) Hidden between meadows and hills covered with ancient oaks, Cobor is one of the last intact ecological areas of Europe. (...) Cobor is not only an ideal destination for nature lovers but also for those looking for an immersive learning experience" (*Ziarul Financiar, April 2019 – own translation)

**Recent Developments & Lobby**

As described so far, the FCC's conservation approach revolves around buying land for strict protection. Such a project based on steady land acquisition wouldn't have any chance of success in a region where forests have always been an important resource for locals unless constant attention is devoted to social marketing, lobbying and improving the relationship with the local community.

The central feature of FCC's social marketing campaigns was to show how eco-tourism can benefit local livelihoods. In Romania, the most powerful actor in the ecotourism industry is AER – Romanian Association for Ecotourism. AER connects public institutions and private actors who work together to develop 11 eco-touristic destinations across the entire country. Its 56 members have committed to develop low impact tourism with a special emphasis on nature protection. Christoph Promberger, FCC's executive director, is honorary member of AER since its establishment in 2003. Aside from his involvement with the foundation, Promberger, as already mentioned, owns Equus Silvania, a horse riding facility and guesthouse located in Șinca Nouă, on the northern side of Făgăraș Mountains. This business employs permanently nine locals and offers some seasonal work when it is needed (Promberger, 2015 personal communication). Their clients are almost exclusively foreigners seeking a peaceful environment and authentic experiences:

> *"…the views are stunning. Without roads, power lines, or antennas it is hard to tell in which century you are. The horse-carriages and the shepherds could be right out of medieval times"*[58].

In addition to the Cobor Biodiversity Farm examined above, the foundation set up four hides for wildlife watching located on the mountains. The first two, Bunea and Comisul, were inaugurated in the summer of 2016 and presented as another initiative inspired by ECOSS project. Journalists from *Another Escape*, an international outdoor and lifestyle magazine, visited them in 2017 and described the facility to an international audience:

> *"The cosy, luxury cabin is located in one of the wildest parts (…) more than 30km from the next settlement, where brown bears, wild boar, deer, foxes, and sometimes even wolves, regularly roam. Bunea Cabin was built for wildlife watching and wilderness experiences and aims to become an important model of sustainable tourism in the area."* (Another Escape, 2017: 99)

Both guesthouses (Cobor and Equus Silvania) but also the hides are regularly given as successful examples of local development. FCC hopes that locals will embrace and reproduce this type of business and reduce thus the pressures on the environment. For the time being, this has remained an economy of expectations, no initiative of this kind has been developed in the project area apart from those set up by the foundation. AER still has no registered members in the region, and none of the eleven promoted eco-touristic destinations overlap with the conserved area.

If most locals still need to be convinced to change their views, important political figures already showed their support for the wilderness reserve. This peaked in 2016 when Romania was ruled for about one year by a cabinet of technocrats led by the former EU Commissioner for Agriculture and Rural Development Dacian Cioloș. The support of different governments for this conservation initiative contributed to a great extent to its success and visibility.

Previously, in February 2014 FCC received for the first time confirmation that their project is backed by the central authorities. The liberal Lucia Varga, holding office at the Ministry of Environment and Climate Change signed a collaboration protocol with the

[58] https://equus-silvania.com/, last accessed 18 July 2019

foundation offering them full technical support for stopping the illegal logging and developing the conservation initiative in Făgăraș. In less than a month, FCC acquired two hunting lodges on Dâmbovița Valley, previously owned by the state.

Towards the end of 2015, an unpredictable change of executive power took place in the country. The social democrats led by Victor Ponta resigned in the middle of a massive corruption scandal which triggered large public demonstrations. President Klaus Iohannis invited the non-affiliated Dacian Cioloș to form the government until the next parliamentary elections. Two of FCC board members were appointed as state secretaries in the Ministry of Environment. Both Erika Stanciu and Viorel Traian Lascu announced an interruption of their role in FCC for the period of their appointment.

Two months after her appointment minister Pașca-Palmer went on an official visit over Făgăraș accompanied by Promberger. The trip, supported by FCC, also included Wild Carpathia documentary presenter Charles Ottley and several other national celebrities involved in environmental campaigns. Subsequently, both the minister and FCC posted on social media pictures of deforested mountain slopes, endless virgin forests, and reminded their followers once again about the urgency to save these wonders by building the European Yellowstone.

Over the summer the Prombergers further popularized their plans on several occasions including the international virgin forest mapping camp organized by Greenpeace at Cumpăna, an event described in Chapter 3. In the middle of September, the government announced publicly that a new memorandum for establishing the Făgăraș Mountains National Park has been proposed for public consultations. Although being an independent document produced by the central authority, within the pages of this memorandum one could find the very familiar rhetoric previously used by FCC in various press releases and on their website. The very first page of this official document referred to the proposed park as Europe's own Yellowstone:

> *"Thus, Făgăraș Mountains National Park could become the most important national park of Europe regarding its rich biodiversity and extended area, a veritable 'European Yellowstone'" (Guvernul României, 2016:1).*

The public consultation, on the other hand, did not go as expected, so that the 2020 milestone year for making the park operational remained an overly enthusiastic target. As

we will see in the next chapter many unexpected episodes marked the public consultations on all sides of the Făgăraș Mountains.

**Wild Aesthetic**

An efficient political lobby doubled by consistent social marketing proved great tools to further the conservation work in Făgăraș, but FCC's efforts did not stop there. From the first years of existence, the foundation tried to make its efforts visible through wildlife documentaries, photography camps and several other media productions. The targeted public, predominantly urban or affluent foreigners responded positively. In an interview featured in the Wilderness Issue of *Another Escape* magazine Barbara Promberger condenses this rising interest in conservation:

> "*People are rediscovering their country. They are being inspired by foreign tourists*", to which Christoph adds:
> *"The people in Romania were locked up, first for political reasons and then for economic reasons, and they didn't even realize how beautiful their country is. (…) Once they ventured out and saw how the rest of the world is, they came back and appreciated it much more"*. (Another Escape, 2017:99)

Besides outdoor magazines and traditional media outlets with environmental sensibilities, FCC was featured extensively in an article by Jeremy Paxman published by the Financial Times in November 2015. Like most invited journalists Paxman has also been flown by helicopter over Făgăraș to witness the wild beauty and the scars left by illegal deforestation:

> "*You feel reconnected with some primeval sense of how the continent was before the Habsburgs and Napoleon, before even Greece and Rome. Yet, shockingly, this natural wilderness is being plundered. (…) One day Romania may become the Costa Rica of Europe" (*Paxman, 2015)

The foundation organized regular visits for invited local journalists, bloggers and social media influencers so that their efforts we constantly spotlighted. More important than mass media coverage was the publicity done by the BBC wildlife documentaries known

as the *Wild Carpathia* series. Each of the four episodes presented by Charles Ottley introduced different dimensions of Romania as an unexplored ecotourism destination deserving more international attention. FCC was presented in each of the four episodes, directly for their conservation work, or indirectly through its team members working to solve problems such as illegal deforestation, wildlife management or development of poor rural areas. *Wild Carpathia* has been presented worldwide, the first episode alone being screened in more than 120 countries[59]. It featured celebrities like the Prince of Wales or HM Margaret Custodian of the Romanian Crown, and while the Romanian government contributed financially to episode 2 and 3, the entire effort has been financed generously by TENT, whose director, Paul Lister, is a founding member of FCC.

Currently, the foundation collaborates with the Coldhouse Collective, an UK based company, to produce a long movie dedicated solely to the creation of Carpathia as a 'world-class wilderness reserve'. TENT will be again the main financial supporter.

In light of this entire PR campaign, Carpathia has emerged as an innovative project aiming to restore the harm done by previous land-users. Where pastures were overgrazed now the European bison is invited to roam free, where locals irresponsibly cleared the ancient forests a new autonomous nature is left to follow its own rules. Formerly poached wildlife now prospers and constitutes an important asset for ecotourism initiatives. Ecotourism becomes the only development alternative to bring prosperity to local communities. Each of these degradation narratives become an important opportunity for the conservation project. But the only risk-free way to restore and rewild these mountains is to secure them through exclusive ownership.

## 5.4 Towards the European Yellowstone

### *Building alliances*

Foundation Conservation Carpathia started as a private initiative aimed to put the basis of *Carpathia* – a private reserve large enough to allow evolutionary processes to happen undisturbed. One decade after its establishment we find FCC leading the process of

[59] All episodes are available for free online http://www.wildcarpathia.tv/, Last accessed 27 July 2019

declaring Făgăraș Mountains a national park of European importance. No doubt that the support enjoyed under the short technocratic government contributed greatly to this change of vision. A legitimate question to ask would be what other type of actors sought FCC to involve in the process? In the following paragraphs, I will briefly explore some of the alliances established by the foundation outside of the conservation sphere, a world frequently referred to in the recent literature as *conservationland* (Kiik, 2018). EU politicians, scientists and national entrepreneurs are the groups approached over the last three years and asked to cooperate in building the European Yellowstone.

The EU Committee of the Regions and Wild Europe organized in September 2017 at the European Parliament an event to discuss the protection of the last surviving old-growth forests. The '*Conference for protection of old-growth forests in Europe'* gathered for two days EU officials (Commission and Council), representatives of Conservation Capital, Client Earth, UNESCO, EUROPARK, delegates from national and local governments and many other environmental organizations. The event resulted in a draft strategy for the protection of old-growth forests and a set of practical recommendations aiming to raise the profile of these valuable ecosystems among EU policymakers. Toby Aykroyd, coordinator of Wild Europe Initiative, and founder of FCC led the discussions. Christoph Promberger presented his efforts to protect Romania's last wild areas as a wilderness reserve during a dedicated gala even ahead of the main conference dinner[60]. During the following day, Erika Staciu, former member in the FCC board of directors also gave a presentation of the current level of virgin forests protection in Romania, commending the efforts done by FCC in Făgăraș.

One year after this event during which the highest UE policymakers were introduced to the ambitious plans around building the European Yellowstone, FCC gathered the scientific community at the Romanian Academy for an international conference. The event organized together with the Institute of Biology of the Romanian Academy was entitled '*Făgăraș Mountains – An inventory towards a new National Park'* and extended

[60] An overview of the conference can be consulted here https://www.wildeurope.org/index.php/17-home/114-old-growth-forest-conference-launches-key-elements-for-protection-strategy, last accessed on 16 July 2019

over two days in early December 2018[61]. The participants included biologists, geologists, meteorologists, botanists and wildlife scientists who presented over 70 papers and posters containing arguments relevant for the protection of Făgăraș as a national park. Being present on both days in the conference venue I remarked that only five locals were present. They were representing, as elected presidents, some of the historical associations of owners *(obști)* found everywhere around this mountain range. While the distinguished academics served local delicacies during the lunch breaks, they had the chance to appreciate a photo exhibition displaying Carpathia's charismatic wildlife and scenic views. A misty landscape was featured on the promotional materials accompanied by the motto "*Rediscover Făgăraș Mountains*!" (Regăsește Munții Făgăraș!). This motto goes hand in glove with the narrative about abandoned landscapes too frequently used in legitimizing rewilding projects but also reaffirms FCC's ambition of presenting a new approach in conservation. The word choice is also very telling and should be connected with the national celebration of one century since the Great Union, a series of events which peaked around the date of the Conference. The project of declaring Făgăraș Mountains a national park should be the big unifier bringing together conservationists and scientists, policymakers and politicians.

Erika Stanciu, founder of ProPark, former state secretary and FCC member moderated the event. Mihai Zotta, FCC's technical director presented the efforts of restoring the degraded landscapes left by previous owners. He started his presentation by reminding everyone that *'Nature needs half*!' and further argued for expanding their strict conservation model beyond the Făgăraș Mountains. The European significance of the future park was stated repeatedly and included in the official book of abstracts:

> *"The Făgăraș Mountains can become a flagship for biodiversity conservation and sustainable development! As wilderness and virgin areas disappear from Europe, the Făgăraș Mountains have the potential to become the wildest and largest National Park in Europe – a vital role!"* (FCC, 2018:11).

[61] I was present during both days of the conference, as the event was open to a large audience upon registration.

Having involved the scientific community in the public debate towards the end of 2018, FCC continued in 2019 to establish alliances with the business community.

In mid-May 2019 in Poiana Brasov, one of the most renowned Romanian ski resorts, they hosted the national conference "*Rediscover Romania*". This event was organized by ProPark, Natura 2000 Coalition and FCC aiming to join conservation leaders with representatives of the private business sector. The two-day event was sponsored by the Swiss Temperatio Foundation; whose head is also one of FCC's founders (see Fig. 23). The main topic around which the discussions revolved was the establishment of durable partnerships with the business sphere in the light of recent political developments. Previously, the Romanian government issued in the summer of 2018 an ordinance that suspended the right of NGOs to act as custodians and administrators of protected areas, this responsibility was passed to a newly created public agency[62]. Important actors from the logging and furniture industry, banking sector, retail and energy were among the invited guests. Within the workshops chaired by FCC team and during the plenary sessions, a great effort was dedicated to finding financial mechanisms to compensate private forest owners whose properties are included in strict protection areas. In this way, the conference aligned with international discussions proposing economic incentives and monetary allocations for forest owners who pledge to conserve their forests, but it also fits perfectly in the current debate on nature-based solutions to mitigate climate change[63].

## *Făgăraș Mountains National Park – an inescapable destiny*

Having gained the support of the EU policymakers, the academic community and the private sector, the European Yellowstone gets day by day closer to be a fully operational national park defined by charisma, uniqueness, monumentality and rewilding.

[62] Through the Emergency Ordinance 75/2018 the government eliminated the notion of ‚custodianship' of Natura2000 protected areas. The newly established National Agency for Protected Areas would be the only entity responsible with the administration of all categories of protected areas. The text of the ordinance can be consulted here (in Romanian) https://sgg.gov.ro/new/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/OUG-3.pdf?fbclid=IwAR1Gq3s5iaw7w_rTZ8vbl2tDLuwBbRpYuDAyA75LAPFsYRM4l4u3YmOiZ8U

[63] 2019 is marked by a new approach in climate change mitigation, a new promise of dealing with the impedig environmental disaster while continuing to sustain capitalist economic growth. A detailed presentation is available here https://www.naturebasedsolutionsinitiative.org/, Last accessed 27 July 2019

These are the features for which Carpathia has been recently awarded a 5 million USD grant within the *Endangered Landscapes Program* (ELP). Being strongly oriented to the future ELP is a program of the Cambridge Conservation Initiative, financed by the Arcadia Fund. In line with the next 2020-2030 European Union strategy centred on ecosystem restoration, the initiative *"supports work that gives space back to nature, in turn allowing ecological processes to recover, ecosystem services to flourish and species' population to grow, for the benefit of local people and generations to come." (ELP, 2019).* In early March 2019 ELP representatives announced the first 11 projects to be funded for a period of five years. Rewilding Europe, Rewilding Britain, BirdLife International, Frankfurt Zoological Society and Foundation Conservation Carpathia are among the organizations that will benefit from this generous support. One of ELP's chairs in charge also with the projects selection is John Lawton, who inspired the rewilding movement with his widely known report *"Making Space for Nature*" (2010). A close look over the winning projects shows us where nature will be given space next: Romania, Ukraine, Georgia, Belarus, Turkey, Portugal, Scotland and Wales – all usual suspects of the greater European wilderness momentum.

During the inaugural event Barbara Promberger, co-director of FCC declared that

> *"we urgently need to restore as well as protect Europe's landscapes. Funding from ELP is, uniquely, provided at a level and over a time-frame that will allow us to bring the ecosystem to a positive tipping point and lead to the recovery of the area's rich wildlife."*

A total of 5 million USD will be used by FCC to continue their restoration work and reintroduce charismatic species as European bison and beaver (2 million USD), to prevent human-wildlife conflicts (1.5 million), to continue to promote green businesses (0.5 million) and to conduct an extensive sociological study of the entire project area (1.5 million). ProPark and Conservational Capital as traditional partners of FCC will be joined by Memorial University of Newfoundland who will gather the sociological data necessary to support the initiative further.[64]

[64] A detailed budgeting of the entire grant can be read here https://www.carpathia.org/massive-international-support-for-fagaras-mountains/

Although not directly mentioned in the official presentation brochure, the future of Făgăraș Mountains National Park is wild. More wilderness resulting from further ecosystem restoration and reintroduction of missing species may seem to foster further conservation enterprises (i.e. ecotourism), but will also advance a further separation of nature from local communities who centre their development imaginations around ski resorts and an increasing flux of tourists.

## 5.5 Summary of the argument

This chapter described how wilderness protection is put to practice by tracing the recent development of a wilderness conservancy from the Southern Carpathian Mountains. While trying to understand how strict protection works on the ground I aimed to answer the following questions: which has been the leading vision in establishing an iconic protected area? How was this vision influenced by similar projects around the world? What is the relevance of the presented study case for the larger discussion around protecting nature as separate and untouched?

I showed that Foundation Conservation Carpathia was established a decade ago in a moment when the valuable forests of Făgăraș Mountains were menaced by illegal exploitation and that a dozen international philanthropists backed the project since its infancy. Over a decade the strict protection of both forests and wildlife was achieved through a series of mechanisms from buying the land, and leasing hunting rights to gaining the custody of some local Natura2000 protected areas. Once the territory was secured, ecosystem restoration and rewilding became the main focus of the conservation enterprise. While trying to diminish the impact of traditional land-use practices, the foundation put great efforts in reorienting the local economy to less impactful businesses.

As the foundation assumed the leading role in advancing the process of declaring Făgăraș Mountains a national park of European importance, new alliances outside the conservation industry were established. EU Policymakers, scientists and private companies were co-opted to advance FCC’s vision of building the European Yellowstone.

However, the securitization of Europe's most iconic national park has only been described in this chapter from a rather detached position. I consciously chose the distanced observer hat in order to make the narration more coherent. Albeit its alleged urgency, the strict conservation project faced strong local resistance. By securing virtually all local natural resources, the foundation has become a powerful actor reshaping the local livelihoods to an unprecedented level. These transformations constituting the other side of the coin will be examined in the next chapter.

# Chapter 6 Resisting the European Yellowstone

> "*No one ever came to give us mountain people ('munteni') anything. Everyone came to take something. We will protect the bear, the lynx and everything else you want, but let's not forget about the people, otherwise, all these villages will remain deserted."*
> (Ilie Spinu, president of Padureni Commons, 2019)

> *"Romanian people, because they live in a post-communist country, don't believe that conservation can contribute to their wellbeing, it's quite the opposite, they only see restrictions. We are trying to change the economic situation from an extractive to non-extractive use of resources. We try to improve their situation."*
> (Barbara Promberger, NG Explorers Festival 2019)

## 6.1 Introduction

This chapter gives voice to the local communities that saw over the last ten years their environment becoming part of narratives of untouched nature. Based on ethnographic data, I discuss here the main forms of resistance against the impacts of developing a large private wilderness reserve. The project affected so far more than a dozen villages disproportionately and it forged numerous mobilizations and negotiation strategies among the locals. The chapter also uses archival materials, oral histories and local monographs to reconstitute past connections of local communities to the environment. These relations were not only transformed over the recent period but were also used as strong arguments for claiming rights across the study area.

The ethnography presented here is a result of fieldwork conducted intermittently between 2016 and 2018. Whilst being there, I tried to find answers to two main questions: *How does the conservation project impact local livelihoods? And, who contests the conservation project and why?* As the local communities are under no circumstances

homogenous, nor are they uniform in embracing environmental values, I came across very different positions towards the wilderness reserve. Albeit offering a detailed account on locals' views and responses to strict conservation measures, this chapter should be read together with the previous one where I explore the conservation project within its global connections.

An important part of the discussion here is devoted to FCC embodying various forms of power at the local level. By analyzing the ways in which conservation actors consolidate their local power as their projects develop, I suggest that wilderness preservation becomes a new frontier of land control. Beyond separating wild nature as virgin forests in a discursive and ontological manner (explained in Chapter 2), the strict conservation of this nature imposes material boundaries between the traditional and more recent uses and what is supposed to be preserved in perpetuity. Thus, this chapter proposes a different reading of wild nature and its production mechanisms, a reading from the other side of the fence.

Of great importance for my argument here is Ribot's and Peluso's classic understanding of access as 'the ability to derive benefits from things' (2003). In a highly popular article, the two political ecologists propose a new formulation for understanding why some actors profit from certain resources without owning them, recommending us to stop focusing on property rights alone. I take their recommendation and I will delve in this chapter in exploring Foundation Conservation Carpathia's mechanisms through which they derive benefits from local resources. I also go beyond understanding access only as related to drawing benefits and I include in this notion the issue of control. In my reading, FCC becomes a bundle of powers not only by *getting access* to resources but also by *controlling other's access* to them.

In this light, the wilderness conservation project is a veritable new frontier of land control. While enclosures have a long history in Europe and elsewhere, this specific enterprise stands out through its mechanisms. Peluso and Lund appreciate that what is different in this new wave of enclosures is the alliances backing the project, as well as its general logic (2011). The conservancy allegedly takes nature out of an extractivist commercial logic and includes it in a non-extractive circuit (for ecotourism, contemplation). In other

words, the Carpathia Project is justified as an attempt to repair the harm done by humans and to give the land back to nature. This new way of drawing boundaries between the human and the wild is seen here as a *territorialization* process (Peluso & Lund, 2011: 668). As this process includes dispossession, rights transfer and securitization of resources, its losers end up being pushed towards what Sassen interpreted as a *systemic edge*, a point where expulsion from the economic, social and biosphere system is so extreme that it becomes invisible (Sassen, 2015).

The chapter opens with a few thoughts about the environmental history of the area, the property regime and the most important institution that mediated locals' relation with their mountains over centuries. Having the context laid down I will map out the ways in which access control starts reshaping the livelihoods of particular groups down in the valleys. Hereafter, I will devote some attention to FCC's attempts to gain control of the resources held in common by locals. The chapter will conclude with an examination of resistance and mobilization attempts that reaffirmed local solidarities and a sense of pride.

## 6.2 Context

In the introductory chapter, I mentioned that the focus of my analysis is the project of creating a 'world-class wilderness reserve'[65], a phenomenon that I interpret as a materialization of recent European debates about protecting untouched nature. Thus, by following this particular process I scrutinize a vast territory within the Southern Carpathian Mountains extending over 300,000 ha. As FCC oriented for the first ten years their conservation efforts on the eastern half of this territory, most of my attention was directed to the area bordered by Iezer-Păpușa Masif to the west, Piatra Craiului Massif to the northeast and Leaota Mountains to the east. No less than ten administrative units are contained within these limits varying from 950 to 5700 inhabitants. Since the conservation project impacted disproportionately the people here, I concentrated my research on those groups that are more dependent on natural resources (grazing, wood, NTFP, landscape) and felt the impact the most: local farmers, foresters, tourism

[65] I use this wording as it is the official formula promoted by the Foundation, more details here https://www.carpathia.org/, Last accessed 29 July 2019.

entrepreneurs and other categories more dependent on forest resources. Among these, stand out seven Roma communities totalling up to around 6,000 people which draw important income from the exploitation of timber and other non-timber forest products (NTFP). All of them are located at the margins of the administrative units, close to the forest, sometimes being organized in self-standing villages, oftentimes in hamlets. Few of these settlements have running water and asphalt roads, almost all are connected to electricity (legally or illegally) and none has gas or sewage infrastructure. None of these villages have a clear property regime: while some have been given land titles from the local administration, others occupy lands belonging to the local commons or are passed between neighbouring administrative units since they are located on the border. Unemployment rates are extremely high, making them dependent on forest exploitation for timber, mushrooms and different berries during the summer months. These people have felt the impact of FCC's conservation project the hardest.

Historically, the region is known as Muscel and its main city Câmpulung is traditionally recognized as the first capital of the early medieval state of Walachia. Nowadays it is part of the bigger Argeș county, one of the 41 administrative units of Romania. The north-eastern part of Muscel, our focus here, has always been particularly well-off due to its vast forests and rich pastures. The first documented name for the region is Pădureț, literally meaning a forested but also remote area (Pârnuță, 1972). The main customs office on the border with Transylvania was located in Rucăr for most of its existence, making the area a prosperous one since the 15th -16th century (Pârnuță, 1972). Early maps depict the village as surrounded by thick forests, situated right on the most important commercial route linking the Romanian principality of Wallachia with Brașov[66].

[66] Detail from *Descritione delli Principati delle Moldavia, e Valachia tolta da Giacomo Cantelli da Vignola*, Giacomo Giovanni Rossi, 1686

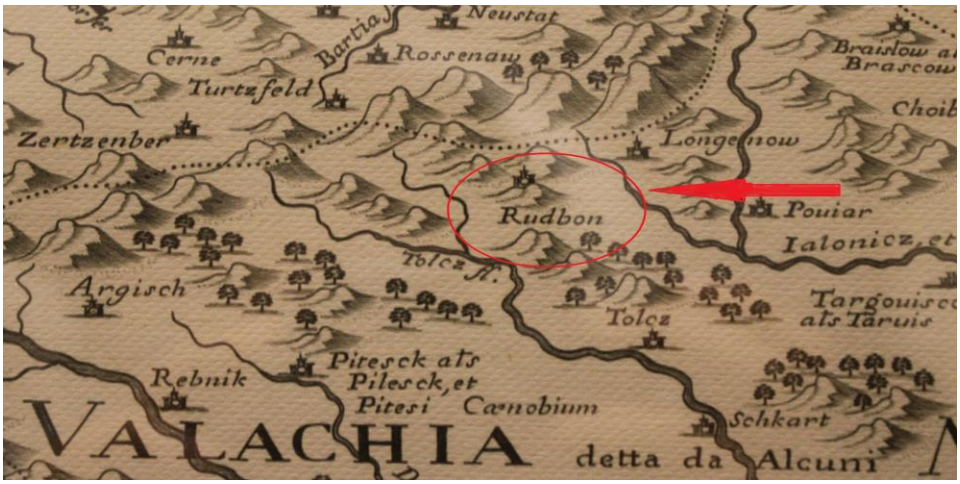

*Fig. 24 Rucăr (Rudbon) in a map dated 1686*

Starting with the early 20th-century timber exploitation witnessed an important development. Few dozen sawmills were opened only in Rucăr and many locals were skilled raftsmen using the waters of Dambovița to transport logs from the upper valley more than 40 km away among the white tall gorges. Fragments of the rafting installations were still visible in the early 1970s when the state opened up the Upper Dambovița Valley for forestry trucks and began building Pecineagu Dam. After almost three decades of intense logging, the area was reforested with spruce (*Picea sp.*) like most other mountainous regions of Romania. Since the land was too scarce for agricultural crops, forestry industry used to be the main employer for the men of Rucăr and the surrounding villages, while the women were taking care of the household and worked from home for the Artizans Cooperative in Campulung (Iordăchescu, 2014). This very short historical background only takes a gander at locals' connections with their environment, more details being offered as the chapter unfolds.

During state socialism, all forests were state's property, but collectivization did not reach most of the villages under our attention because the terrain was so rugged that it was considered unsuitable for collective or state farms. Villagers from Dâmbovicioara, Rucăr or Dragoslavele were forced in return to give away yearly quotas of milk, eggs, poultry and meat. In the past, these villages were famous for the wild log floating along the waters of Dâmbovița, for its lime kilns and for its flocks of sheep and cows. However, today is mostly forgotten the fact that until the collapse of socialism most men in the area worked in the logging and local wood processing industry. The factory in Rucăr used to

be considered one of the biggest in the country, offering more than 3000 jobs for the local men. In the mid-60s large forestry roads reached the deepest ends of the Dâmbovița valley, and the entire industry flourished. Most villagers worked as woodcutters, teamsters or skilled workers, some of them coming home from the logging areas only during weekends. In the first years after 1989, the factory began to fell apart, so everyone was laid off.

The post-socialist forests' restitution triggered massive social and economic transformations in these valleys offering to some unexpected opportunities to make fortunes while others got tangled up in patronage relations that brought them benefits for a shorter time as described by Dorondel who did research in the area in the early 2000s (Dorondel, 2016). He shows how people connected to the local administration made fortunes from forest exploitation and further started business in the tourism industry, mineral waters production and farming.

Today, almost 30 years after the restitution process has started, local Roma people, who call themselves *Rudari*, are still landless, sometimes living in poor huts on public lands. The biggest majority of non-Roma villagers own a few acres around their houses and other pastures, orchards and small agricultural plots around the villages. Few monasteries took back their formerly nationalized forests and lands, and two of them (Nămăiești and Dragoslavele) are part of the local collective association of owners.

For most family of Rudari life is always uncertain. They rely on finding daily jobs in the village, picking berries and mushrooms during the late summer months and minimum social income for which they are vilified in an endless criticism from the wealthiest groups.

Currently, almost 50% of forests are state-owned, the rest being part of private or collective property regimes. A country-wide survey showed that 24% of these non-state owned forests are governed by collective associations of owners, called *Obști* or *Composesorate* (Associative Environmentality, 2016)[67]. Around Făgăraș Mountains collectively owned forests are by far the largest form of property. Here all these commons are kinship-groups or groups of descendants from common ancestors who were

[67] AE database was created in the project „Romanian Mountain Commons". More information on methodology at: http://romaniacommons.wixsite.com/project

given or recognized privileges over land since medieval times (Stahl, 1998; Parnuta, 2005; Caramelea, 2015). These rights have been passed through generations and constitute the basis of many locals' relation with the forests and the mountains. Some of the oldest commons here appear for the first time in the written records as far as the 16th century: Obștea Nămăești (1550), Obștea Ilinești-Iacobești (1556) and Obștea Moșnenilor Slăniceni (1600), while others have a more recent origin: Obștea Moșnenilor Mățăoani (1912) and Obștea Moșnenilor Drăghiceni (1936). Figure 25 offers a glimpse into the commons' dispersion around the Făgăraș Mountains, the red dots mark their headquarters, but their properties extend up to the alpine highlands.

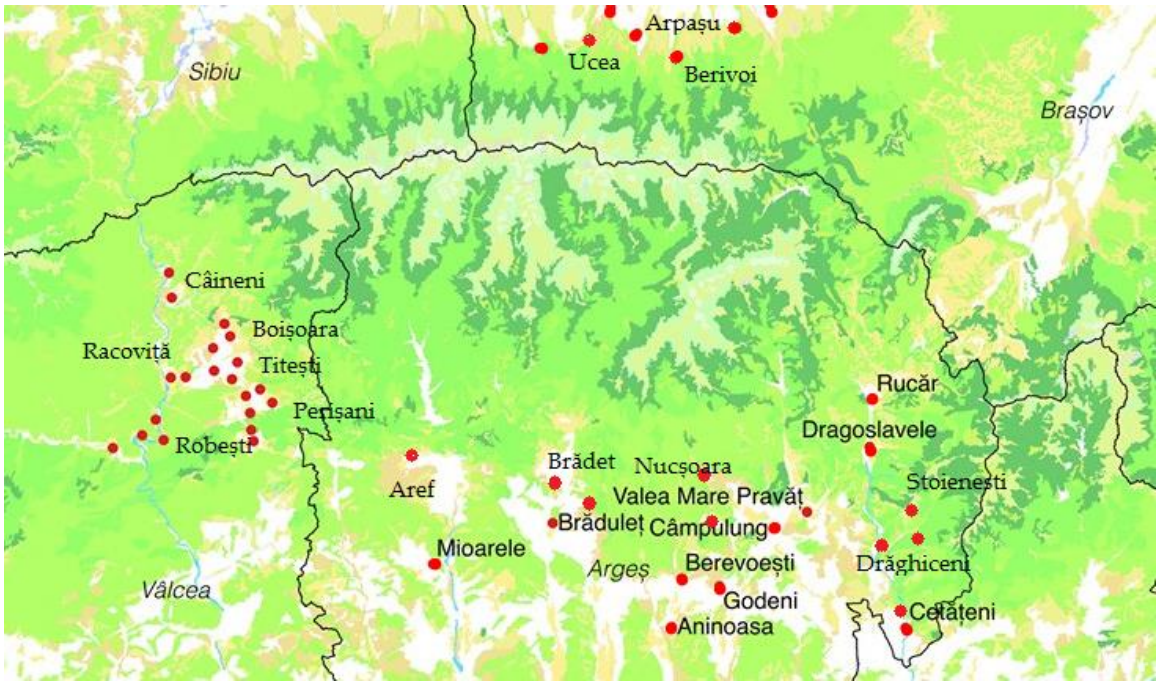


*Fig 25. Commons around Făgăraș Mountains studied within the Romanian Mountain Commons Project (2016-2017), own elaboration*

Since the commons have been restituted only beginning with 2000 (under Law 1/2000), these communities of rightsholders still fight for regaining former nationalized forests, or contemporary enclosures of different kinds. All of them are organized under the Romanian law as legal entities and are considered historical heritage under the Forestry Code (Law 133/2015). These entities comprise not only the members but the territory as well, all being governed according to democratically negotiated bylaws. Commons model of governance include a general assembly made of all members, an elected council of

representatives and an elected president. Although this governance is independent, the forests are managed together with the official recognized forestry districts which can be state-run or private. The size of their territories range from 50 hectares (Obștea Moșnenilor Mățăoani) to 8400 hectares (Obștea Moșnenilor Dragosloveni) while the number of their members, calling each other *moșnean* (commoner), range between 45 (Obștea Moșnenilor Drăghiceni) to 1600 (Obștea Moșnenilor Dragosloveni). Locals derive different benefits as members of the commons: a fixed yearly quota or firewood, the right to graze a certain number of cattle on the common pastures and cash dividends from the total profit made by the association from timber exploitation or other commercial activities such as leasing the pastures. These benefits are derived according to the number of rights/shares each member has, one such share being called *dram* (pl. *dramuri*). These rights are expressed usually as an area of forest or pasture, but one right in one commons is not the same as one right in another commons. For example, a *dram* in the commons of Berevoești corresponds to 7 hectares, but a *dram* in the commons of Dragoslavele corresponds to 20 hectares. Their distribution among members is very unequal as a result of historical or current transactions, donations and acquisitions among the members. In most commons in Muscel, the number of *dramuri* one member has equals also the number of votes the same member can express when important issues are discussed during the general assemblies. Amongst the commons investigated in the north of Muscel, no Roma member could be found. This is a direct result of the commons restitution process when only persons who have been a member or descended from an existing member of the commons prior to the nationalisation process were given back the rights to the collective forests.

This very short overview of commons as historical institutions mediating locals' relation with their forests and pastures aims to contextualize the source of the current contention about conserving Făgăraș Mountains as a wilderness reserve promoted as the last refuge of 'untouched nature' in Europe. For complex analyses of the Romanian commons re-establishment and functioning the work of Monica Vasile is paramount (2008, 2015, 2018a). Among all local *obști*, detailed attention will be given in this chapter to the Rucăr case that fell under the FCC's control for the last five years.

## 6.3 FCC's constellation of power

So far, I have detailed the local context of the area where one of the boldest European conservation projects started to unfold. This section is dedicated to the exploration of power and access mechanisms used by Foundation Conservation Carpathia to secure a vast territory with the intention of building Europe's most iconic national park. In tracing this securitization process I go beyond analyzing the 'property' issue alone, as seen by Verdery to be a cultural, social and political set of relations (2003). I do not consider FCC's ownership of the land as an end in itself, but part of a bigger process of securing the territory for strict protection. This process also includes custodianship of protected areas, holding the hunting rights, becoming a member of the local commons and controlling the production of knowledge about wildlife and touristic potential of the area.

A more encompassing concept to describe this phenomenon is *access*. Understood as the ability to benefit from things (Ribot & Peluso, 2003), access includes other mechanisms aside from property rights alone. I argue that FCC ensures access to benefit from local or extra-local resources but at the same time control others' access to these resources. In doing so the foundation becomes a 'bundle of powers' with a full grip on the material and ideological processes evolving on the ground. Wildlife management, ecological restoration, production of touristic commodities, allocation of firewood, etc. come all under their exclusive control. Figure 26 offers a synthetic image of FCC's constellation of power. This figure expresses in a clear visual way FCC's relation to local resources and indirectly the impact of the Carpathia Project on the local livelihoods.

I identified four main power positions which are concomitantly assumed by the foundation: the owner of the land, custodian of the protected areas, holder of the hunting rights and member in the local commons. All these positions, except the last, will be detailed further by referring to discrete events that I came across while doing fieldwork. It should be noted, however, that the foundation is registered under the Romanian law as a not-for-profit entity and cannot assume certain roles by itself. Over the last decade, FCC has established or controlled, through its representatives, other types of institutions or actors more suitable for certain roles. For example, in 2011 it established the *Piatra Craiului –Făgăraș Conservation Hunting Association* for conserving and managing the wildlife in the targeted area, or it set up the *Carpathia Forestry District* in 2015 to

manage the forest and timber exploitation on its properties independently from other state structures. An independent journalist investigation authored by Bianca Felseghi from *Pressone* offered important details about a dozen other subsidiaries of FCC involved in the local economy (Felseghi, 2016). These were used for a large variety of lucrative enterprises from land transactions to timber exploitation.

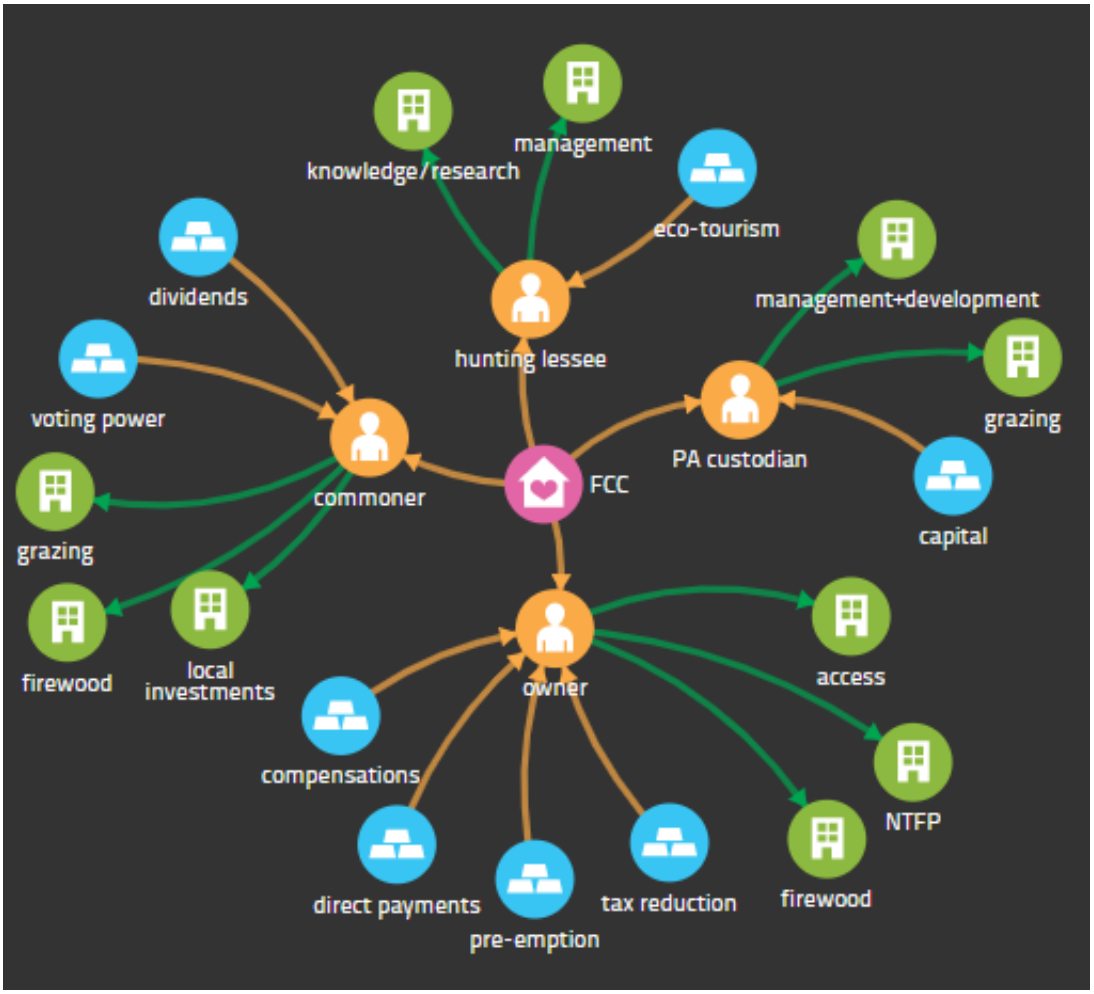


*Fig 26. FCC's constellation of power:* ***green arrows*** *=ability to benefit from access,* ***orange arrows*** *=ability to control access*
*(own elaboration using Visual Investigative Scenarios)*

**Ownership**

The previous chapter detailed at length the conservation vision of FCC. Part of a global neo-protectionist approach to conservation, FCC's supporters and administrators argued

that the only efficient way to protect wild nature is by buying as much of it as it is possible. Having the experience of a long history of local enclosures (Pârnuță, 2005) and massive conflicts over land ownership (Dorondel, 2016), locals from Rucăr and the nearby villages expressed a reserved attitude towards FCC's forest acquisitions and found the plans of Neamțul rather suspicious (*Neamțul – The German guy* for the locals)[68]. Historical sources show how the collective land has been repeatedly enclosed for long periods of time and ransomed with great efforts in the early 17th, late 18th and mid-19th century (Pârnuță, 2005). When not accused directly for cutting the forest or mining for rare minerals, some villagers considered that the foundation served hidden interests like cutting the forest for profit:

> *"They lure us with stories about wilderness and wildlife, but what they actually want is to log it off in a couple of years. Others have done the same in the past, and look at these mountains now!"* (Anca, 43)

As shown before, FCC's board is predominantly made of rich foreign philanthropists, but the entity is registered under the Romanian law (Ordinance 26 of 30/1/2000). Nevertheless, during the first years after its establishment FCC did not buy directly individual forest plots but through one of its subsidiaries – **SC Sănătate și Natură SRL**. The company connected to Hansjoerg Wyss, one of FCC's founders was established in 2006 and administered by the Promberger himself. Surprisingly, during that time Romania adopted a set of laws regarding the management of protected areas (Law 345/2006 and Ordinance 57/2007). Both laws stipulated that those owners whose lands were included in protected areas should be offered monetary compensations for not being able to properly exploit their properties or realise profit from potential economic activities. Compensations were to be offered to private or commercial actors, but not to not-for-profit entities as foundations or NGOs (Art 15, respectively Art 26 (1-2)). It could be that the initiators of the conservation project foresaw the opportunity and prepared the conservation strategy accordingly. This theory has not been confirmed during the interviews with members of the FCC, but brought up often by locals:

[68] Everyone in the area refer to Christoph Promberger, executive director of FCC as 'Neamțul' due to his German origin

*"They are very cunning (șmecheri), the state did not give us any compensations for our forests in the park, but the EU will give the state money for that. It is just a matter of time, but it's our right to receive them (e dreptul nostru)!" (Silviu, 52)*

From its establishment to 2019 the foundation acquired directly or through subsidiaries a total of 22,000 hectares of forests and pastures, the most valuable being those included in the strictly protected area of Piatra Craiului National Park (PCNP):

*"Of course, our most valuable forests are those in the strict protection core of the national park. We have tried repeatedly to include other forests that we own in this core area, but there was no political will to do that" (Zotta, FCC's Technical Director, 2018)*

**Sănătate și Natură** has not been the only company to buy land in the area. **Romfor Sustainable Forestry**, registered in 2010 and currently owned by the Danish magnate Anders Holch Povlsen is another proxy used for this purpose. '*Danezul*' (*the Danish guy*) as locals refer to Povlsen had acquired by 2014 at least 3,600 thousand hectares of forests in Leaota Massif, south-east from the core FCC area, managed also for strict conservation. Povlsen has been part of the FCC board since 2012 and supports similar conservation projects in different parts of Europe, he is also the largest landowner in Scottland (The Guardian, 2019).

The problem with these mass land acquisitions in the north of Făgăraș arrises only after we check the context of the entire process. An independent investigation of the national television Antena 3 exposed in 2016 that some of these acquisitions were mediated by Horațiu Hanganu, not only a former director of Piatra Craiului National Park and founder of FCC but also working as local topographer for the mayor's office of Dâmbovicioara (Antena 3, 2016). The journalists proved that significantly large forested areas have been restituted unlawfully and immediately acquired by FCC in the early years of their activity. Foundation's representatives claimed that they acquired the forests without knowing about the conflict, dismissing any involvement of Hanganu, who previously had privileged access to information related to land tenure in the area. Curiously, as the business was exposed by the journalists, Hanganu stepped back from his role in the FCC's board of directors. During the fieldwork, I got no details about this matter, but

some locals from Podu Dâmboviței, Sătic and Dâmbovicioara offered me more information about the context in which they sold their properties:

> *"I sold it (the forest)! I sold it because I couldn't do anything with it. It is that one right there (pointing above the gorges), in the strict protection area. No firewood, no access, how could I benefit from it?"* (Anton, 72).

> *"I fought a lot with my brothers because we owned the forest together and I didn't want to sell. But Neamțul pressured us all the time. We even stopped talking to each other because of this transaction. Eventually, we split and they sold it all."* (Simion, 43)

Many locals not willing to sell their pastures or forests saw their access restricted. In 2016 when I started the fieldwork in Podu Dâmboviței this was the main point of contention. In the attempt of dealing with the illegal timber felling and transportation on local forestry roads, FCC's rangers installed barriers on many valleys in Piatra Craiului and Leaota limiting thus the circulation on some of these roads. Under Romanian law, these are administered by the forestry district that manages the nearby forest and are not open to the public except for cases of public safety. Not only carts were thus forbidden, but also ATV and other motorized vehicles. Since the law mentions nothing about touristic or sports events on these roads, FCC never felt obliged to facilitate the access of such third parties. Locals repeatedly reported that some decided to sell as they were not being able to reach their properties nor to draw other economic benefits since the park toughened the protective measures:

> "*What to do with it? If I wanted to bring some wood home, the park wouldn't let me. If I wanted to go with the cart and bring fallen branches Neamțul wouldn't let me. There are barriers everywhere now, it's better that I got rid of it"* (Ion, 38).

Another contentious issue related to FCC's exclusive ownership over a thousand hectares of forest was the decrease of the quantity and quality of firewood available for the local population. With the exception of Rucăr and Lerești, no other village is connected to the gas grid here, so everyone relies on wood to heat their homes, sometimes even for cooking. Even in these two villages, not all households are connected to the grid, and the situation is even worse for the hamlets where Roma groups live. Firewood crises are common in Romania, manifesting with different intensities for years in a row. The general causes are many and I will not go into the details here. Locally, these crises were probably the outcome of different factors: strengthening of controls and sanctions against illegal logging, the temporary incapacity of commons to provide their members with sufficient firewood, the disappearance of many local middlemen and the concentration of private properties. FCC activity is connected with most of these causes. As they acquired many of the small private forests, former owners faced a situation in which they would no longer dispose of free timber for the winter. While the foundation adopted a strict protection approach, the quantity of firewood available on the local market decreased in the last years.

> *"These villages will remain deserted in a couple of years. People don't have jobs, can't heat their homes, what do you want them to do? Everyone will leave for Spain or England; is this what you want?"*
>
> (M. owner of a small sawmill, during a public consultation in May 2019)

In 2017 FCC made available indeed about 350 cubic meters of firewood to the locals at a lower price. The actual locals' need, as one official from the local administration declared, was around 15,000 cubic meters each year as every household consumes usually between 7 and 10 meters during the winter.

During my fieldwork, I went three times to log, haul and bring timber from the forest with various locals, and I participated twice in the firewood distribution organized by the local commons. In order to be allowed to bring firewood home, each forest owner needs a special permit from the forestry district, a document that will mention a certain quantity and quality of timber according to the size and the biogeographical location of the plot. In one of the cases, the villager I have accompanied in the spring of 2017 was allowed to fell 3 cubic meters for each hectare, and an employee from the forestry district came and

marked those trees with a special hammer. While in the forest, I noticed that there is actually room for negotiation and my host managed to convince the forester to mark trees that were closer to the road and easier to fell. He chose threes that were leaner and thus allowing for multiple uses, not just to be burned for heating. When choosing which beech to mark, my host showed me how an opening in the canopy will allow for hundreds of saplings to grow faster and enjoy the sunlight. The trees were cleaned off of minor branches, were loaded in a cart drawn by two of his horses and brought home. This process would be repeated each year, as the forest is considered plentiful.

But not everyone finds themselves in such a fortunate situation. As expected, the most affected were the communities of Rudari since most of them cannot afford buying the wood on the market, are not members in any of the local commons, nor own any forests. For many years, as the businesses with timber flourished in the region, many Rudari worked for small sawmills, as truck drivers, as loggers or cartmen. Around the mid-2000s, almost all families of Rudari owned at least one horse that was used daily in the forest. Additionally, they were hired in the village to bring hay, corn or potatoes from the fields to the households of the Romanian villagers. Through formal or informal arrangements, everyone used to be able to procure the needed firewood for their own consumption. In the meantime, some members of the community with closer ties to the local politicians benefited more than others, so that they started operating their own sawmills and associated businesses. As the access to timber became restricted and the legality of businesses operated by Rudari more frequently controlled by central authorities, many were forced to find other sources of income or to emigrate.

Rudari felt some other limitations as well. While very few of them have a stable income or are able to find daily work in the village, they rely on picking mushrooms and berries for 4 - 5 months during the summer and early autumn. Even if the price offered by mushroom collectors fluctuates according to the quality and the available quantity within a day, each family of Rudari manage to earn as much as 1,000 - 1,500 euro per season:

> *"We make good money with the mushrooms. The period has been very good so far and we will be able to get a pig for Christmas and buy all the necessary things to send the little ones to school."*
> (Ileana, 32)

Ileana is a mother of three and lives in a small brick house with her husband and parents. Titu, her husband worked for 15 years as a guard at the cement factory in Campulung but was among the first ones to be laid off when a foreign company bought the factory in the early 2000s. As he doesn't have formal education he was unable to find another job ever since and started working as a daily worker for different people in the village.

> "*I worked the whole day painting someone's house for 30 lei (roughly 8 euro) when I used to go to pick mushrooms (la bureți), I had something to put on the table and feed my kids, but now it is harder."* (Titu, 43)

During the picking season, many Rudari moved on the Upper Dâmbovița Valley to pick porcini (*Boletus aedulis, Boletus aestivalis),* honey fungi (*Armillaria mellea)* and many other species. They used to set camps and work for two weeks without returning back to the village. Each day before lunch and in the evening dealers driving white vans came, sorted the mushrooms and paid an unpredictable price. The best quality of *boletus* would range from 60 lei (13 euro) to less than 20 lei (3.5 euro) depending mostly on the yield. When mushrooms were hard to find, the dealers offered a decent pay for blueberries, raspberries and other forest fruits.

The mushrooms were then transported to local processing factories located in Rucăr, Slănic, or Stâlpeni. The entrepreneurs operating these factories had annual agreements with the private owners and the presidents of the local commons to lease the picking rights. The entire production was exported to Spain, Italy and other Western countries fresh, dried or in brine. These factories also employed permanently people from the village to work all year round in cleaning and preparing the mushrooms. As an example, the largest processing point in Slănic offered 30 permanent jobs and 50 more during the peak season.

*Fig 27 Sorting mushrooms in Nămăiești, 2016*

Starting with 2014 and 2015 FCC decided no to make such an agreement and suspended the foraging activity in Pegineagu area on the Upper Dâmbovița Valley. Some of Rudari remember how they were repeatedly evacuated from their camps by gendarmes in the middle of the night or early in the morning while they were already on the mountains in search for boletus:

> *"The masked gendarmes (mascații) came with those huge cars of theirs before dawn and started the evacuation. Some of us had already left to pick mushrooms, as we usually did. They put our tents to the ground and we could not even recover what we had inside. Our people became very angry and we started shouting but they kept telling us that we need to leave. Few men have been taken to Campulung and fined." (Marin, 34)*

As Rudari were left without an important source of income, the processing companies had to adjust their businesses. Ilie, one of the local entrepreneurs I interviewed in 2016 told me that his production dropped by half within that year, loosing around 30-35 tons of good quality mushrooms. As some of the women he employed were laid off, he had to look for mushrooms in other areas a hundred kilometres away like in the Western Carpathians or in Maramureș up north.

Ilie came from Bihor to Muscel and opened his business together with his brother in early 2000. As that was a period in which coal mines were closing in the area, many people started to pick mushroom and ease their passage through unemployment. He hired mostly women as they were believed to be more skilled at sorting, cutting and packing mushrooms. Gina, a middle-aged woman from Berevoești worked at his factory for 3 years:

> *"He paid good money and it was a clean job. There were many women from the village working for him, and nobody ever complained. A car used to pick us up in the morning and bring us back home after work, and he was very understanding when we needed to take days off to take care of our lands. Now that the mushrooms are scarce (Nu mai sunt bureți), I am not sure what will happen."* (Gina, 42)

Promberger, FCC's executive director, thought that the conflict was not such a big deal and justified the expulsion of Rudari by declaring that they were loud and used to make a big mess around Pecineagu Lake (C. Promberger, 2016 - personal communication). A 'world-class wilderness' reserve promoted as the last place where 'untouched nature' can develop freely is no place for uncivilized Roma mushroom pickers yelling through the last virgin forests of Europe, it seems.

I had the occasion to go foraging for mushrooms many times during fieldwork, closer to the village but also deep on the valleys, with locals picking them as a pastime but also with Rudari picking them as a source of income. Oftentimes they made me promise I will not disclose the picking areas to other villagers, and I observed this secrecy even between brothers and neighbours. As this activity requires roaming over a big territory, starting before sunrise is mandatory. So is making sounds, whistling and singing constantly, habits that deter and prevent unexpected meetings with the bears feeding on the same mushrooms. Due to the features of the landscape, abundant in bushes and vines, picking berries requires constant vigilance and singing. This way, locals believe, bears will know that you are there and they will move away without being taken by surprise in case someone accidentally bumps into them.

We see that access to private properties, to firewood and to non-timber forest products (NTFP) was restricted as a result of land concentration for conservation purposes, but we should also wonder which could be the main benefits of securing these lands for strict protection. First, being the largest owner in the region comes with pre-emption rights for every single forest put on the market. This way the foundation was able to extend their possessions when the state did not use its own pre-emption right. Second, as the foundation controls hundred hectares of high-value alpine pastures, it receives a significant amount of direct payments under the European regulations for traditional landscape management and European Fund for Agriculture and Rural Development (FEADR). These payments vary according to the size of the plot, the management of the pasture and a set of other variables. In 2018 alone, a hectare of high-nature value (HNV) grazing land was subsidized with 142 euro (Agrointel, 2018).

Third, all lands included in the protected areas are under Ordinance 57/2007 provisions exempted from taxation, so FCC does not contribute to the local administration's budgets for their lands included in the Piatra Craiului National Park, nor for those part of the Natura 2000 protected areas (Felseghi, 2016). Moreover, the foundation attempted repeatedly and sometimes succeeded to include some of their plots within the strict protection zone of PCNP, enlarging thus the park's total surface. Connected to this is a fourth benefit – the compensations paid by the Romanian government for all lands part of strict protection zones within national or natural parks. Although Ordinance 57/2007 mentioned these financial compensations, they started being paid only since the second half of 2017. In this context should be read locals' willingness to sell their forests in the early years. They were not able to exploit them, nor received any compensation, so they saw it as an invaluable object and sold it to Neamțul. Neamțul now cashes on these lands:

> *"When the park was extended nobody asked me if I want my forests to be included in the strict protection area. Then they said I cannot cut my trees, nor graze my pastures with my own sheep. After more than ten years of frustration, I understood that I can forget about my lands"* (Sorin, 57).

**Custodianship of PAs**

Foundation Conservation Carpathia does not benefit from resources or control access only from the position of landowner. Being custodian of two Natura 2000 protected areas adding up around 15,000 hectares puts the foundation in another important position of power. Previous chapter detailed the conditions and implications of acquiring the custodianship of Râul Târgului-Argeșel-Rușor and Leaota protected areas under the provisions of Ordinance 57/2007. It is this position that allows FCC to have a say in issues related to land use and local development on properties that do not belong to them but are owned by the local administration or other private individuals within these protected areas. Gheorghe Mugurel, one of the local farmers and a big sheep owner in Lerești expressed his dissatisfaction about the way in which the foundation understands this custodianship:

> *"It is not normal! Each Spring I have to beg them to give me the documents necessary to apply for the direct payments. Since they got the custody it is harder for me to take all my sheep and graze them on my own alpine pastures. They even asked me to reduce the number of guarding dogs that I need at the sheepfold!"*
> *(Mugurel, 52)*

The locals have already a long history of contention with the national park whose administration repeatedly limited their grazing capacity, picking medicinal plants, harvesting firewood and accessing other resources as they used to do in a customary way, Thus, the new restrictions imposed by FCC reignited old conflicts. During the last public consultation on the elaboration of a management plan for Râul Târgului-Argeșel-Rușor protected area, locals voiced their total disagreement on the negotiations:

> *"We want to decide on what is happening with this Natura 2000 site, not only to be consulted"* (Nostra Silva, 2019c).

Often, the participation of local communities is considered seminal for the success of any development program with local impact (Irvin & Stansbury, 2004). Under the provisions of various EU regulations, this participation is not only recommended but also a condition for the financing of the proposed project (in this case a management plan for a Natura 2000 protected area). But as legal scholars have repeatedly observed, important

distinctions are between consulting the locals, and their actual involvement in the decision making and the accountability processes within the project (Averardi, 2015). In the case explored above, locals have voiced their discontent against the consultations were organized and their actual problems dismissed as unrelated to the ecological orientation of the discussion.

**Holder of hunting rights**

A third power position assumed by FCC is that of holder of hunting rights on two local hunting grounds. Previous chapter detailed the conditions and reasons for which the foundation leased these rights. The position is an important one since it helps the foundation not only to promote a strict protection of wildlife but also to produce valuable knowledge about the species' population size and density. This knowledge is not only valuable for other wildlife scientists but it is also a political one. Based on the collected data the foundation adapts their management plans for the protected areas that they have in custody, propose measures to mitigate human-wildlife conflict and most important of all, legitimate claims over the importance of their conservation enterprise. Connected to the last issue, the foundation proposed and supports conservation enterprises through which the local charismatic species are commodified within a developing ecotourism industry. They already established a network of wildlife watching facilities and they plan to expand this business model to the entire area. But strict protection and hunting-free zones also accentuate the conflicts between an increasing population of bears and wild boars and the locals living on the valleys. These conflicts will be given attention in a separate section towards the end of the present chapter.

This rather extended analysis showed how Foundation Conservation Carpathia became a bundle of powers, assuming different position from which it can draw benefits from local resources. I expanded the original proposal of Ribot and Peluso (2013) and included in this analysis of access the issue of controlling others' access to the same resources. In the next section, the attention will be devoted to another mechanism through which the conservation project advanced their securitization of the territory – the enclosure of local commons.

## 6.4 Enclosing the Commons

After discussing how FCC draws benefits from local resources and controls others' access it is time to take the analysis one step further and examine another manifestation of this green grab – the enclosure of common lands. Although the term 'green grabbing' may seem a bit exaggerated for this situation, I argue that it is not. The way in which the foundation attempted and ended up controlling one of the largest and oldest *obște* in the region is a textbook example of green grabbing (Kelly, 2011; Peluso & Lund, 2011; Holmes, 2014). Green grabbing has been described by political ecologists as enclosures serving conservation aims, be it for carbon storage, protection of biodiversity or genetic prospecting. Big corporations, not-for-profit actors, and even intergovernmental alliances are recreating conditions of accumulation by justifying and legitimizing new enclosures of collectively owned natural resources (Corson & MacDonald, 2012). The purpose used to legitimise the enclosure differentiates green grabbing from other large scale acquisition by big companies. While in the case of land grabbing the development of industrial agriculture, mono-crops or financial speculations are the aims of the enterprise (Margulis et al, 2013, Liberti, 2013), in the case of green enclosures, the land is supposedly taken out of extractive processes and used for conservation purposes as protected areas, wildlife sanctuaries and different climate change mitigation schemes.

This section will recount the process of enclosing the commons of Rucăr starting with 2012.

*Obștea Moșnenilor Rucăreni și Dâmbovicioreni* is one of the most illustrative examples of a traditional land governance institution resisting and recovering after waves of enclosures since the early 17$^{th}$ century to the present moment. It had been seized by the Wallachian ruler Michael the Brave (Panaitescu, 1964) and split between his daughter and two other boyars when the commoners regained their freedom and lands by paying ransom in 1633 and 1641 (Pârnuță, 2005). The effort of gathering such an amount of money led to increasing inequalities between commoners. In 1797 the locals decided to split the common forest according to lineage system so that they could offer their rights-quotas (*dramuri* in local language) as guarantees and gage when engaging in risky commercial activities. Throughout the 19$^{th}$ century, the forest was still governed

collectively, but each member knew exactly how many shares from the common good she/he possesses. As the timber became highly demanded on the global market where it was needed for infrastructure development and war industry, new local private enterprises proliferated (Stahl, 1998). These merchants possessing important capital attempted to grab the shares of those who could not repay their loans or pay their taxes (Pârnuță, 2005). When a new forestry code was adopted in 1910 each common had to formalize their governance model by adopting bylaws, compiling tables of members and establishing governing bodies such as the council and the president (Vasile, 2018a). Going through this process the commons of Rucăr lost 23 of their 30 mountains to the descendants of 19th-century grabbers who were at that time among the local intellectual elite (Pârnuță, 2005). Shortly after the commoners managed to get their properties back, the entire obște was nationalized by the first Romanian communist government in 1948. In 2000, 52 years after, under a new restitution law (Law no.1/2000) on April 7th, the commons of Rucăr was registered at the local court[69]. All former commoners and their descendants became members of the new association (Art. 15). As stipulated also by past bylaws and in accordance to Article 26 of Law 1/2000, no other third party could become part of the association, and rights could have been sold or donated only to other members, never to third parties.

In 2016 while doing research within the Romanian Mountain Commons Project I had the chance to talk with some Council members and other commoners. Back then Obștea Moșnenilor Rucăreni și Dâmbovicioreni (OMRD from here on) owned seven mountains comprising of 5,400 hectares of mixed forests and 3,770 hectares of grazing lands and pastures. This entire property was governed collectively by 1,600 members whose rights represented 41,319 *dramuri*. A *dram* (pl. *dramuri*) represents an abstract measure of the common property (Vasile, 2018a). As membership in the OMRD is based on lineage, the number of *dramuri* each member possesses can vary greatly, so does the number of votes each member can express during general assemblies. In addition to yearly firewood quotas, members received cash dividends from the profit made during the previous year. The amount of these dividends rose from 1 euro per *dram* in 2014 to 5 euro in 2015 and

[69] Câmpulung Court's decision No. 1278bis/07.04.2000

30 euro in 2016. As an illustrative example, on commoner who held 1340 *dramuri* got cash dividends of 1340 euro in 2014 and 6700 euro one year after. As the revenues were scarce in the first year of functioning, those commoners who held just a couple of *dramuri* were the less interested in taking part in the governance process. The firewood quota remained constant over the years though, so that people were still holding on to their rights.

After the commoners got their lands back and became the biggest forest owner on the Dambovita Valley, they put the basis of an alliance including ten other commons in the region (*Asociația Obștilor Muscelene*) and established their own forestry district. Things changed after the Foundation Conservation Carpathia started buying lands through its many commercial enterprises. Locals appreciate that by 2012 FCC managed to acquire almost all private forests available on the market. **Sănatate și Natură** (literally *Health and Natur*e) was one of the subsidiary companies that had bought almost 12,000 ha by the end of 2012. Belonging to Hansjoerg Wyss, one of FCC's founders, the company was administered since it was established in 2006 by Christoph Promberger.

In September 2012 **Sanatate și Natură** filled in a request to become a member of Obștea Moșnenilor Rucăreni și Dâmbovicioreni, as its lands were neighbouring the forests of the commons. This request was analyzed in the next sessions of the general assembly on 21 and 28 April 2013 and rejected by the majority of the present members who acted according to the law that forbade any transaction outside the association. As the commons' president convened again the members in August, the request was again rejected. Since it was clear that the OMRD leaders will continue to push for **Sanatate si Natura**'s admission as a member, over the next few months some of the most important commoners established a resistance group called *Grupul de Inițiativă*. The strongest local businessmen, the mayor of Dâmboviciora and other important local figures lead this initiative that soon gathered over 70 members. In October 2013 the commons president announced a new meeting scheduled to take place in December to discuss **Sanatate si Natura**'s request. Two subsequent meetings in December were cancelled as only few commoners showed up.

In April 2014 **Sănătate și Natură** resubmitted the request to become a commoner. In the meantime, locals remember that Neamțul evaluated the entire commons at 10 million euro and offered for each dram ten times the price for which it used to be exchanged before within the members. At the same time, Neamțul also sent official letters to each commoner detailing his intentions. During the first week of April, the general assembly adopted a series of Amendments to the official bylaw (*Statut*). Article 6 was very important for the subsequent developments as it modified a historical tradition of not admitting external actors as members:

> *"The membership to OMRD can be granted, upon submitting a request to the Administration Council that has to be approved by the General Assembly, to juridical persons, institutions or public authorities who can support the commons' activity"*
> (own translation).

Another amendment referred to the maximum percentage of shares one member can own; the previous threshold of 10% was extended to 30%. Immediately after, the resistance group took the commons administration to court and contested these amendments but lost the case. One month after, on 18 May the commons' general assembly was convened again to discuss **Sănătate și Natură**' request, for the third time since the beginning of 2014. Locals remember the event as very heated, and the local press reported the presence of 11 armed gendarmes at the meeting (Jurnalul de Arges, 2014). As the members of Grupul de Initiativă walk out of the assembly, Sănătate și Natură got admitted to the commons under the provisions of article 6 of the Amendments to the bylaw with more than 21,000 votes of 133 commoners. As it was described previously, there is a big inequality between the members with regards to the number of shares each possesses, respectively the votes she/he can express.

During the next months, the company received an infusion of capital of 4.648 million euro from its founders (Bizbrasov, 2014). After it became full member, Sănătate și Natură started buying other members' shares reaching soon the threshold of 30% of all commons' dramuri. Thus, after more than two years of struggles, the FCC managed through one of its commercial subsidiaries to control a third of the most important commons in the area. Aside from the important decision power gained through this move,

the financial gains should not be ignored. As one dram was worth 5 euro in 2015 (OMRD President – personal communication), means that **Sănătate și Natură** received over 82,000 euro as cash dividends from the commons in that year alone. One angry commoner from Podu Dâmboviței remarked: *"It is very surprising that the commons council redistributed after Neamțul became a commoner (a intrat în obște), five times more money for a dram than a year before. This is serious business!" (Silviu, 46)*

What does this mean and why is it important for our discussion? Being the biggest shareholder within a commons meant that through its votes the company could decide on all internal affairs. As stated in the bylaw, each dram represented a vote during the general assemblies. Before Sănătate și Natură became the biggest member, the Council alone did not total more than 10% of the votes, and no other member reached this threshold. From this new position, Sănătate și Natură alone could decide who gets to graze on which of the common pastures, how much of the annually allowed timber quota is to be exploited, how will the cash dividends be distributed and which other activities will be funded from the budget of the common. Even if the other commoners would have attempted to reach another 30% of the votes to counteract the power of the company they would have failed as the attendance criteria had been rarely met before.

At the end of April 2017, FCC made another move towards increasing their power over the commons. Months before, Dinu Dumitrescu [70] a wealthy Romanian-American entrepreneur and diplomat became member of FCC's board of directors. Coincidentally, his ancestors were before the nationalization some of the largest forest owners in the area and important members in the commons of Rucăr but left the country during the communist period. During the general assembly in April 2017, Dumitrescu announces that he decided to donate 783 dramuri (shares/rights) to a commercial company called Yeti, of which nobody from the assembly heard of before. Since the topic had not been mentioned on the meeting's agenda, many commoners did not accept to discuss the proposal. Eventually, the proposal was voted in favour, with 14,525 votes out of which Sănătate și Natură had 12,394. Few knew back then that **SC Yeti SRL** was a company

[70] This is a pseudonym

established since 2005 by another future founder of FCC, and that it was also administered by Promberger. Through this move, the foundation had green light to buy another 30% of the commons' shares, if only other members were willing to sell.

Two weeks after, one commoner took the entire association to court. Grigore Boian claimed that the decision was against certain provisions of the bylaw which stated that the general assembly cannot decide on topics not included in the meeting's agenda and announced in due time. As the judges from Câmpulung were deciding on the case, Sănătate și Natură asked to intervene in the court file from their position as the most significant member of the commons. In January 2018 the court's decision declared that the vote on 30 April previous year infringed the commons' bylaw and thus, Yeti cannot become part of the commons. The final decision also annulled the amendments to the bylaw adopted in 2014, particularly Art 6 who changed the conditions of admissibility and the threshold of rights owned by a single commoner.[71] Resulting from this, Sănătate și Natură had no right to be a member any longer, but the judges made no reference to this within their ruling.

In March 2018 some members of the Administration Council changed, and the interim president took advantage of this situation and decided not to appeal court's decision and suspended the voting rights of Sănătate și Natură until the file would be closed. On the other hand, Sănătate și Natură appealed the court's decision, but the tribunal from Pitești rejected it. In the meantime, another group of commoners following the decision from January asked the court of Campulung to decide on the illegality of admitting Sănătate și Natură as a member back in 2014 in the light of the recent court's decision. In the coming months, the court ruled that indeed Sănătate și Natură became part of the commons under the provisions of an annulled document (the Amendments to the commons bylaw), so the company should lose this quality. After Sănătate și Natură appealed this decision, a final ruling of Pitești tribunal rejected in December 2018 the appeal and concluded that the company had no longer any rights in the commons of Rucăr.

This saga is for sure a very recent event. It is still hard to appreciate which will be the next course of events. Will the foundation attempt again to be part of the commons? Will it try to negotiate a gentlemen's agreement in service of their conservation visions? It is

[71] Civil Decision No 216/2018 of Câmpulung Court in the civil file no 2091/205/2017.

hard to tell. What is certain, is that FCC understood that by controlling the historical institution would offer it a better position to advance the conservation project by further securing resources otherwise inaccessible. During my meetings with other commons' representatives from neighbouring villages, I heard of no less than five other cases in which the foundation expressed its interest to become a commoner over the previous years. None of the associations responded positively.

Judged individually, FCC's attempt to control the commons of Rucăr may seem a marginal event. But when we put it in the context of its constellation of powers we see it as another attempt to secure the territory. Having bought almost all available private forested properties on the market, the only direction in which the foundation could strengthen its control was by enclosing the collectively owned properties. The state owns indeed large tracts of land in Făgăraș, but the Romanian constitution makes this land inalienable. Commons' forests represent the biggest enclaves or neighbours of FCC-controlled properties. Securing these lands will probably continue to be one of the main challenges for the project aiming to build the European Yellowstone, as the area is intended to be large enough for evolutionary processes to happen.

## 6.5 Human-wildlife conflict

Wildlife represents one of the most iconic features of the Carpathia Project. Subject of monitoring programs, main asset for ecotourism development and a valuable resource to be protected as part of the future European Yellowstone, the wildlife of Făgăraș Mountains is secured under a no-take zone extending over 34,000 hectares. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, FCC leased the hunting rights of two Hunting Grounds in the north of Argeș county (no. 21 and 22 as described in the previous chapter). Here no culling or hunting for trophy is allowed for any of the species making up the rich fauna: wolf, brown bear, wild boar, fox, lynx, otter, wild cat and so on. But these two hunting-free areas adding up to the strict protection regime of the nearby Piatra Craiului National Park appear in the recent years to spill over. Locals have voiced their discontent with the current strict protection of two particular species; the brown bear *(Ursus arctos*) who

wreaks havoc on cattle and other domestic animals and the wild boar (*Sus scrofa*) that destroys crops and pastures alike according to locals.

This section follows some of the recent local human-wildlife conflicts as they are connected to the process of building Europe's most iconic national park. Since these conflicts are under no circumstance a local peculiarity, I hint to other wider processes that I consider complementary. As suggested elsewhere, I see the current conflicts between locals and the two mentioned wild species as proxies for wider conflicts involving the locals' need for autonomy, respect and recognition as the conservation vision of FCC develops (Hill, 2017).

During state socialism brown bear was strictly protected in Romania, hunting remaining a privilege only for the highest-ranked state officials. While scientists were not encouraged to study this species, bear trophies made Nicolae Ceaușescu one of the most renown hunters in Eastern Europe (Georgescu, 2003). The state made considerable efforts to increase and improve the population of bears across the Carpathians and even contributed to restocking other mountain ranges in the region. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, military planes were used to transport bears to Bulgaria and the Stara Planina and the Rhodopes (Novak et al, 2014). In the north of Muscel, bears were raised in enclosed facilities in Berevoești and moved by helicopter to different areas where habitats were suitable. Locals still recall how important this facility was for the national fame of their village. The landing runway for the helicopters and some ruins of the former nursery are still visible in the northern part of the village, although it was closed down in the early 1990s.

From the early 90s until the accession to the EU, hunting was liberally allowed, being considered a highly lucrative business. Between its accession to CITES (1994) and EU (2007), Romania exported more than 1500 *Ursus arctos* trophies. Since becoming an EU member state Romania had to comply with new regulations under which brown bear was considered a strictly protected species of community interest (Annex IV of the Habitat Directive). Under Art. 16 culling was allowed only for problematic individuals *'if there is no satisfactory alternative'*[72]. Purportedly, these legal quotas were used to cover up

[72] Idem, Art 16

trophy hunting. A flip through the CITES database supports this argument[73]. From 2007 to 2016 Romania exported 832 brown bear trophies (including skins and heads) sourced from the wild.

In a surprise move, a new technocratic government declared a temporary ban for trophy hunting in the autumn of 2016, dismissing previously practised culling quotas. While exceptions became very rare and needed to be signed by the Ministry of Environment for each particular case, local authorities and hunting associations started voicing their disapproval. Subsequent data retrieved from CITES show only five *Ursus arctos* exports in the last two years (2017-2018). All ministers taking office after the short-lived technocratic government proposed new culling quotas. Each time massive mobilization from ENGO's pressured them to forgo. In the meantime, human-bear conflicts have become more and more frequent and visible in local and national media.

It has been recently suggested that most human-wildlife conflicts should be considered conflicts between humans over wildlife (Hill, 2017). Particularly the measuring of most species' populations seems a contentious matter which directly impacts efficient management and mitigation measures. With regards to the Upper Dambovița Valley, the foundation has repeatedly remarked that the official numbers are artificially inflated (Promberger et al, 2018). In 2018 the European Parliament's Policy Department for Citizen's Rights and Constitutional Affairs commissioned a study which analyzed the legal framework of large carnivore protection and current management in EU. With reference to *Ursus arctos*, the study highlighted significant gaps in properly measuring the Carpathian population (European Parliament, 2018). Being spread over four countries (Slovakia, Poland, Ukraine and Romania) the total number of brown bears are estimated to be around 8,000 individuals, unevenly distributed across the mountain range. For the time being, European environmental NGOs shared their suspicion toward the methodology used to estimate the bears in Slovakia, while a total lack of information for Ukraine has been widely condemned. Romania, being home to more than two-thirds of this population, declares the total number of brown bears by summing up figures, extrapolations and guesstimates reported by local hunting associations (Popescu et al, 2019). With very few exceptions, genetic sampling and camera trapping are not the

[73] CITES online database, info retrieved 15 June 2019, https://trade.cites.org/#

standard methodology used by the authorities. Scientists together with environmental activists have repeatedly blamed the state for failing to enact science-based policy (Popescu et al, 2019), while the later attack hunting grounds managers for over-reporting figures in order to sustain an illicit business. Same situation happens in other states from the region, where although strictly protected, brown bear population remained unchanged or declining in the last 20 years. FCC's claim seems to be grounded; a realistic population size and density is indeed a prerequisite of efficient strategies for conservation (Promberger et al, 2018). Recent studies have shown that the brown bear population is stable and not threatened drastically by habitat loss and fragmentation (Pop et al, 2012). The scientists have also found that females with cubs usually tend to stay away from settlements, while male adults do not show a preference in approaching nearby urban areas. As they usually need several hundred kilometres to feed, their movement patterns vary by season and within a large altitude range (Pop et al, 2018).

The Ministerial Order banning the hunting in 2016 was received with great enthusiasm by urban civil society and conservationists alike. The country had been on an ascending trend as a unique ecotourism destination catering to a growing Western public interested in experiencing wild adventures in the Carpathians. Under this industry a vast network of wildlife observatories mushroomed, part of them being converted from former hunting facilities. Switching from hunting to wildlife watching was embraced by nature lovers and conservation enterprises as a green and sustainable model of rural development. The foundation opened since 2016 four wildlife watching facilities, of which one offers to its visitors a luxurious experience. Other hides are a central attraction in the country of Harghita and Covasna, a region with a rich tradition of bear trophy hunting.

While all this time bears got accustomed to food provided by tour operators to satisfy Westerners' gaze, no solid proofs or real examples of local communities benefiting from these developments entered the public debate. On the contrary, properties or livestock damaged by bears make the daily headlines in the newspapers. In Rucăr, Dâmbovicioara and even in the outskirts of Câmpulung bears showed up, destroyed fences and stables, killed pigs, sheep and dogs and occasionally attacked humans. Catrina, teacher in one of the hamlets neighbouring Piatra Craiului woke up one early August morning to find 13 of

her beehives toppled down, broken and the bees killed. Similar attacks targeted pigs, cows, goats and even guarding dogs kept on a leash.

If over the past years attacks were heard of during late autumn when bears prepare to hibernate, in 2018 and 2019 the animals continued to return to the villages in search for food throughout the entire year. Unavoidably, locals blame the foundation for most of these problems ignoring the fact that the ban on hunting is a restriction imposed in the entire country by the government. In the recent past, people from Podu Dâmboviței have accused the park's authorities for bringing bears and other wild animals by helicopter from other areas, thus increasing the probability of conflict. While doing fieldwork, I have witnessed the relocation of one problematic bear female and her cubs from a Vidraru, a very touristic area, to Valea Largă, few kilometres upstream on Bratia river. This is an area devoid of tourists, thus considered wilder and more suitable to be a new home for the relocated bears, despite it being used by locals for grazing cattle during the summer.

As custodians of the Natura 2000 protected area, Râul Târgului-Argeșel-Rușor FCC is indeed responsible for avoiding such conflicts. Moreover, as the official holder of the local hunting rights, the foundation has all the necessary tools to ask for derogation from the ministry and relocate or cull the problematic individuals. So far the relocation of one single bear has been approved in late July 2019 (Ministry of Environment, 2019). Some developments are expected though, since FCC was offered in March 2019 an important grant under the Endangered Landscape Programme, some money being specifically allocated to the mitigation of human-wildlife conflict in the area by 2023.

Locals from Rucăr and other villages complain also with regards to changing the practices of feeding the bears to keep them far from the village, and turning to a more passive management. Some, even link this turn to the way hunting associations see feeding bears as an investment:

> *"Since they are not allowed to hunt them for trophy anymore, they stopped feeding the bears cord, sweets and carcases. But the bears were used to be fed regularly, so they came closer to the village looking for food"* (Aurel, 55)

On the other hand, bears have been mobilised constantly as the most threatened species by illegal logging and deforestation, and many big NGOs have linked the increasing bear

attacks to the proliferation of clear-cuts in their natural habitat. Locals from Bughea do not agree and claim that bears come closer and closer to the houses because pastures have been passively managed for conservation purposes or have been simply abandoned. Thus bushes have taken over creating the conditions for the bears to hide during the day and attack during the night:

> *"(...) everywhere you look around the village you'll see only bushes (tufe), birch, young alders and thorns. The bear doesn't have to go to the forest anymore, it stays there and watches over my cattle (îmi păzește vacile). They have to do something about those bears, we cannot get out of our houses!"* (Sandu, 68)

Wild boars (*Sus scrofa*) are another species considered problematic by locals in the last few years. Intensely hunted elsewhere, the boar is strictly protected within the two hunting grounds leased by FCC. Sometimes when the tourists do not get to see any bears from the comfort of Bunea hide, at least boars make for a decent consolation prize. Locals from Rucăr or Lerești appreciate that the number of wild boars fluctuates considerably, exploding during the mast years and diminishing in less favourable times.

> *"The hogs come in great number and destroy a year worth of work in just minutes. I have complained about this to our mayor, to Pitești, to APIA but everyone shook their shoulders because they are not responsible for the hunting grounds."*
> (Aron, 57).

When food is scarce in the forest, they try to find substitutes by raiding the crops or grubbing the pastures for roots and insects. Coteanu Aron, president of a local farmer's association showed me one of the pastures which, in his opinion, got destroyed in this way.

*Fig 28 Communal pasture from the Natura 2000 Râul Târgului – Argeșel- Râușor protected area, bearing the traces of wild boars in 2016*

He explained that the biggest disadvantage of wild boars digging up the rich grass is not the possibility of halting the grazing for a while but the probability of not receiving the direct payments for that plot if the personnel of the local agency for agricultural payments (APIA) comes and controls how the pasture is maintained. A pasture overgrown with bushes, anthills or grubs is formally disqualified from receiving direct payments since the owner or administrator is not able to keep it in good shape.

Although not present so far in the north of Muscel, African Swine Fever (ASF) is considered by the locals a real menace in the context of booming wild boar population. The fact that in 2018 this disease ravaged the countryside in most regions of Romania made it a serious security threat constantly present in daily discussions.

So far it seems that the strict conservation project proposed by FCC directly impacts the human-wildlife dynamics in the area. As charismatic species are considered an important asset around which conservation enterprises could be developed, locals seem rather

infuriated, blaming the foundation sometimes for problems that do not fall directly under its direct control.

For now, the so-called bear crisis continues to be marked by uncertainty, the Ministry of Environment submitted on June 2019 a new culling quota of 140 bears to public consultations and the ENGO's launched another online petition against it. Locals continue to feel insecure in their homes and expect every morning to find their livestock slaughtered. Isolated cases of villagers trying to trap and kill the bears are punished as poaching and the Wildlife Emergency Service proposed in 2016 remains only a promise. Within such a context, trying to convince locals to engage in conservation enterprises by opening up facilities for wildlife watching is doomed to fail. Hardly any of my interlocutors seemed convinced that foreigners would pay thousand euro to stare at a creature that walks freely through the village in broad daylight and for them is a huge nuisance.

As bears are currently spectacularised in an attempt to develop appealing ecotouristic destinations, much more could be done to explore the possibilities for coexistence within the relatively densely populated landscape of Făgăraș Mountains. The convivial conservation vision proposes a turn from such short term touristic voyeurism to a more long term democratic engagement. The way this prospect could work in the north of Muscel is to give locals a bigger role to play in the management and daily interaction with these large carnivores. Before the strict protection of brown bears was enforced (2016) people around Făgăraș have had various strategies to avoid conflicts. Feeding the bears far from the village, making noises while being in the forest, and even clearing the land of bushes while keeping a certain level of livestock proved efficient mechanisms to ensure coexistence. Currently, the local livelihoods are challenged by the presence of bears to such an extent that they have to go to great lenghts to ask for the relocation of the most aggressive individuals. As derogations for culling are almost impossible to get from a bureaucratic point of view, sometimes they are forced to take matters into their own hands and risk fines or even criminal sanctions. A conservation approach based on conviviality would restore previously valued traditional knowledge while keeping the democratic deliberation as a mechanism to find responses to present challenges.

## 6.6 Resistance

Over the last sections, I analyzed different aspects of a new territorialization process developing within the Carpathia conservation project. Securing and controlling the access to local resources, enclosing the commons and commodifying charismatic wildlife are facets of this attempt to draw strict boundaries between the wild and the human around the Făgăraș Mountains. The next paragraphs will be devoted to understanding how locals resisted and mobilized against this conservation initiative. I have mentioned a few times that not everyone felt their livelihoods impacted in the same ways by the strict conservation regime. Most of the villagers who privately own pastures and forests felt the arrival of FCC to a lesser extent while the Roma communities, calling themselves Rudari, who possess no land, have no stable jobs and live in precarious settlements felt the impact the most. Between these two polarized categories are the shepherds, farmers, foresters, guesthouse owners, hunters and many others who either had asked for their interests to be represented by the local authorities or opposed the foundation by themselves.

The example of 70 commoners from Rucăr who formed an initiative group and counteracted FCC's attempts to control their collectively owned land is rather an extraordinary case. In various other villages, an important opposition remained rather invisible and unacknowledged. James Scott has showed more than three decades ago how important is to uncover and understand such everyday forms of resistance of peasants, landless people and other disenfranchised classes (Scott, 1985). In my case, this resistance has been performed by Rudari.

In many hilly or mountainous regions of Romania, different groups of Roma or Rudari were engaged in patron-client relations around forest exploitation, agricultural work, scrap iron collection and other types of livelihoods that proliferated during the post-socialist period (Dorondel, 2012; 2016). In Muscel, these realities were not different from other rural regions of Romania. All of the seven communities of Rudari that I visited were far worse than the nearby villages in terms of infrastructure and public amenities. An unsure land tenure situation was doubled by precarious living conditions sometimes this involving a lack of safe drinking water or a probability of getting flooded with each

serious rain. Saskia Sassen has recently called such a complex expulsion 'the systemic edge' (2015).

In the hamlet of Valea Chiliei, there are several dozen households made of bricks, wood, clay or even cardboard. As they are locked between the steep lime walls of the mountain and the waters of Dâmbovița, their lives are always uncertain; they were flooded many times in the past, but they have also been threatened with the eviction. As many other hamlets where the Rudari live, they do not own the land under their houses, nor have any available plots for growing vegetables or raising animals. Their situation is probably the most precarious one, since the hamlet is situated at the border of two neighbouring municipalities, and both pass the jurisdiction over the community from one administration to another. I have found families in which one parent is registered in the upstream village, while another is registered in the downstream village, although both live in the same house, share the same household but the border between municipalities changed according to logics they cannot understand.

For many of the families with whom I discussed, their livelihoods got worse after their access to areas rich in mushrooms or to nearby forests that they customarily used had been restricted. It is here where everyday forms of resistance were most frequently performed. Rudari's weapons involved an entire set of actions from petty firewood stealing to breaking on a regular basis the barriers and fences installed by FCC. They see their actions as legitimate and share the frustration of others that have not been consulted when the conservation project came to this area:

> *"We are ignored by everyone (nu ne bagă nimeni in seamă), the land is not ours, the forest is not ours, we are poor and uneducated. But where can we go? We have always made a living from the forest, but now we can't even look at it... "* (Ionuț, 36)

*Fig 29. Rudari permanent settlement, 2018*

Many times they have been fined, often their carts, horses and chainsaws were sized and sometimes they have been beaten by gendarmes or even imprisoned. Most of the clashes were with the rangers employed by the foundation to patrol the valleys alone or accompanied by gendarmes. These clashes happened inside and outside of the forests. On the other side, one of the rangers interviewed in the first months of fieldwork told me how much he feared for his life and for the safety of his family since he had been working for the foundation. He would sometimes guard the access road to the forest during the night from his car, but fear that a group of Rudari would come and throw him and the car to the river.

Another ranger, working on the south-eastern side of Leaota Mountains also faced similar challenges with the Rudari from Moroieni hamlet. His young son became a professional ranger by the time the foundation extended the conservation project over that area so he was hired as a ranger to take make sure any illegal or informal practices are stopped. As his father had been working for decades for the former state forestry district and knew how things work, he offered to change his guarding area with the one his son was responsible. He admitted that this change was necessary since his son was not experienced enough to oppose the practices of Rudari.

When I worked for the foundation for a few months during the summer of 2015 and used to drive through the valleys in a vehicle inscribed with the logo of FCC I was also received with suspicion and sometimes threatened. By 2016 the conflict was boiling so intensely that a group of Rudari of different ages told me how they wish they knew where Neamțul (Promberger, the head of FCC) lives so that they could go and burn his house down. Another time, in a nearby village, while I was doing some interviews in a late September afternoon, people were so angry that they plotted to cut down the entire forest during the night as revenge for the frequent injustices they experienced:

> *"If only we know where he lives, we would burn his place! If this situation continues we will take a few lads with chainsaws and will need no more than a couple of hours to put this forest down completely. We are left with no other choice here. Tell me, what can we do?!"* (Mugurel, 29)

**Mobilization**

Aside from these forms of everyday resistance that never morphed into an organized violent revolt, were a different type of mobilization of local authorities and representatives in relation to the rumours of declaring Făgăraș Mountains a national park. The way in which the technocratic government put this topic on the public agenda in September 2016 has been described in the previous chapter. Although the government's memorandum mentioned that around Făgăraș Mountains live no less than 73,000 inhabitants in around 30 municipalities, it did not organize any consultation meetings prior or after the memorandum as been opened for public debate. Among others, the document's preamble read:

> *„The national park could attract over 500 million potential visitors from Europe. (...) through the establishment of Făgăraș Mountains National Park, the local communities surrounding the mountains have the unique opportunity of making it to the international map of tourism."(own translation - Guvernul României, 2016)*

As these words more infuriated than flattered the local authorities, in November 2016 a big meeting was organized in Șercăița, a village on the northern side of Făgăraș.

Representatives of 33 commons were joined by 12 mayors who discussed the memorandum and reaffirmed their opposition to FCC's plans to build a private protected area. Together they signed the **Resolution of Șercăița**, an official document that was submitted to the government. In only four points they asked the government to stop the process of declaring the national park and to respect their property rights as granted by the Romanian constitution. They also decided to fill in a complaint to the National Anti-Corruption Office (DNA) in which they accused the technocratic government of adopting a private conservation project as a state project of public interest.

After this set of events, during the next two years, Foundation Conservation Carpathia radically changed their public relation strategy towards more openness and inclusivity. They have been very active in promoting their plans at local folklore festivals and even organized a Forest Carnival for 300 guests in Rucăr in 2018. Regardless of these attempts, locals' mobilization against the project remained strong. As FCC started a set of consultative meetings in April and May 2019 on the future national park, people gathered in great numbers in Râmnicu Vâlcea, Sibiu and Brașov and expressed their concerns. Particularly farmers and the presidents of commons voiced a deep disagreement. On the western side of Făgăraș, as well as on the eastern side people have had a recent history of conflicts with the administrations of Cozia and Piatra Craiului National Parks, both established in the mid-2000s. The discussions during the meetings convened by the foundation in May revolved more around the future restrictions than around issues related to the value of wildlife and the ecosystem services offered by the future national park. As they have been reported by the local media, none of the meetings ended up in a constructive way (Nostra Silva, 2019a; 2019b).

As the summer started, Barbara Promberger, executive director of FCC, was invited to the National Geographic Explorers Festival in Washington. Here she spoke about how the foundation's puts great efforts to improve local communities' economic situation but finds nothing but suspicion and distrust[74]. In the meantime, back in the north of Muscel, FCC organized another consultation meeting to discuss the management plan of one of the protected areas under their custody. As the locals demanded to be included more

[74] All NG Explorers Festival's sessions can be followed online at https://www.nationalgeographic.org/events/festival/watch-explorers-festival/, Last accessed 22 July 2019

seriously in the management process and not only consulted, representatives of FCC left the venue unexpectedly leaving those present with a lot of unanswered questions (NostraSilva, 2019c).

It is for sure too soon to appreciate what the future has reserved for Carpathia. This dissertation does not aim to foresee the next developments, nor does it intend to paint the conflict between FCC and locals in black and white. What is certain is that the project of declaring Făgăraș Mountains a national park is here to stay. For the time being, it is also certain that most of the locals have voiced their concerns about the future park. They fear that timber will be scarcer, grazing areas less bountiful and the conflicts with wild animals will increase. As they are offered promises of significant gains from the development of ecotourism, they also have their own imaginations about how tourism should be developed in the area. Many locals, both persons with decision power but also guesthouse owners and small farmers believe that mass tourism and resorts with winter sports facilities would be more beneficial for the economy of their villages. The reply of Promberger during he conference FCC organised in December 2018 in Bucharest was that climate change will make such resorts obsolete, there will be not enough snow in the mid and long term future to operate properly considering the altitude of Făgăraș, where few peaks go above 2500 metres. In the meantime, local authorities struggle to develop small brands, reinvent traditions and commodify a sense of authenticity (Iordăchescu, 2014).

## 6.7 Summary of the argument

This chapter explored the impact of a wilderness conservation project on the local communities of Făgăraș Mountains. Concepts from political ecology were used to analyze the transformations brought by the new strict protection regime. As the impact of the project was felt disproportionately by different groups, so were the responses which included everyday forms of resistance and political mobilization.

At the local level, the foundation proposing the wilderness project has developed a large constellation of power through which access to resources is controlled for other traditional users. I interpreted this move as a securitization process and I identified four main positions from which FCC benefited from local and extra-local resources: landowner, protected areas custodian, holder of hunting rights and member in the local commons. I proposed to frame this process as territorialization because such total control allows the FCC to redraw material and discursive boundaries between the wild and the human.

Further, I investigated the foundation's attempt to control the local commons by becoming a member and I proposed to see this process as another step of enclosing collectively governed goods in the area. Besides strong internal opposition, one of FCC's subsidiaries was accepted as a commoner in one of the oldest historical associations of landowners in the area. After it became the most important member, the foundation attempted to get a total grip on the commons by using another subsidiary as proxy. Exemplary mobilization from the rest of the commoners counteracted this attempt and, helped by the law, regained their independence after two years of struggle.

Aside from the political mobilization against the project, an unobserved everyday resistance was performed inside the more disenfranchised communities. Groups of Rudari, who saw their access to mushroom picking areas and firewood limited or even restricted, expressed their opposition with the strict conservation approach by engaging in small acts of stealing or destruction. At another level, local representatives and presidents of the commons surrounding Făgăraș Mountains expressed their opposition towards declaring the area a national park and blocked the entire process for the moment.

All these forms of contention should not be seen as a rejection of nature protection or disinterest for environmental issues. People in the area feel a deep attachment to their mountains, and through the historical institutions of commons, natural resources have been used and managed in a sustainable way across centuries. It should be rather interpreted as a disapproval of a strict conservation approach that attempts to save a nature which is unknown and unimaginable to the locals – the wilderness and its narratives of total separation from human use and history.

# Chapter 7 Conclusions

This research aimed at understanding how wilderness conservation has been implemented in Romania as part of a growing environmentalism throughout Eastern Europe. Based on an analysis of the development of virgin forest protection and the creation of a private wilderness reserve, it can be concluded that this conservation approach produces anti-political natures through a discursive separation that is enforced by law and material creation of barriers and borders which have strong impacts on the livelihoods of local communities. The analysis indicates that the creation of wilderness in the Southern Carpathian Mountains does not reflect the aspirations of local people, nor enriches their relation to the environment.

Several strands of scholarship ranging from political ecology to environmental history have been mobilised to understand which are the most important societal and political dynamics championing wilderness protection? How does a strict protection regime change rural livelihoods? And, how do local people mobilize against conservation projects aiming to strictly preserve an 'untouched nature'?

The dissertation looked at various conservation initiatives that have been recently implemented or are ongoing in various regions of Eastern Europe and showed how they connect to various political ecology classic themes (land abandonment, degradation narratives, role of hegemonic expertise). While exposing the ways these initiatives are linked the analysis indicated that post-socialist processes such as land restitution, rural depopulation or devaluing of traditional knowledge give a significant coherence to Eastern European wilderness momentum.

By looking closely at the vision, values and functioning of the first private wilderness reserve in Romania the research identified several securitization mechanisms at play. These have impacted the livelihoods of local people unevenly through various types of dispossession and a growing human-wildlife conflict.

Since the local communities around the Făgăraș Mountains are heterogeneous, their responses to the creation of a private strict wilderness reserve have taken multiple forms. The most disenfranchised groups responded with physical violence and other weapons of the weak, while the community of freeholders have used legal actions to counteract the enclosure of their common lands.

As the field of political ecology is rather underdeveloped in Eastern Europe, particularly with regards to conservation, the dissertation showed that there is great potential for further analyses. The dissertation proposed the term *The New Wild East* to be used as an umbrella denomination for various conservation initiatives aimed at protecting supposedly 'untouched nature' that are connected regionally through networks of political support or backed by international communities of experts. When analysing the creation of a legal framework for virgin forest protection in Romania, it has been showed that these transformations happen within a *regime of truth* where the state, the forestry agency and different bodies of experts and conservation activists negotiate the meaning of wild nature and situates it in opposition to other anthropized ecosystems. Another theoretical contribution of this dissertation is the idea that the securitization logic behind the creation of a private wilderness reserve involved the development of a *constellation of powers* aimed at controlling access to resource and at producing the knowledge necessary for the success of the conservation project.

Empirically, the dissertation has advanced the understanding of the multiple processes at play in the development of a legal framework for the protection of virgin forests. The engagement of civil society, the hierarchical functioning of the identification process or the spectacular production of these forests are all facets of the same movement and have been extensively presented. Aiming to produce a detailed description of the internal functioning of a conservation actor the dissertation uncovered the far-reaching networks supporting the Foundation Conservation Carpathia and its intricate relations with the highest political actors in the country. Ultimately, various empirical evidence showed that local resistance to a strict protection regime can take multiple forms from a revival of old types of collective action to direct confrontation.

This research has been approached from a political ecology perspective using an undisciplined methodology. While investigating aspects related to power, the role of expertise, strategies of controlling access and types of resistance I have deployed ethnographic techniques, discourse analysis, analysis of legal framework and archival research. The types of data under scrutiny included legal documents, photographs, online posts, local archives, transcripts and field notes, press clippings, land titles and various other documents. Doing this research has been an experience of joy and pain as my multiple identities as local, commoner, researcher and activist made the entire endeavour oftentimes challenging.

**The New Wild East**

A central claim of this dissertation is that various Eastern European conservation enterprises promoting a strict protection of nature are connected through networks of political support and scientific expertise. While proposing to call this growing interest in wilderness protection The New Wild East I showed how this momentum is related to Half-Earth proposals. In the analysis I have included not only initiatives directly promoting wilderness protection, but also rewilding projects and several restoration proposals as these have as the ultimate goal the recreation of wilderness conditions.

Chapter 2 showed in great detail the political negotiations at the European Union level where a well-defined group of conservation NGOs have lobbied for the development of a legal framework for wilderness protection on the continent. This platform is involved through its members in all major campaigns and initiatives promoting a strict protection of what is regarded as highly valuable 'untouched nature'. The use of a unified set of identification criteria, a widely agreed quality standard for certification and a coherent mapping methodology, makes the wilderness conservation in Europe a movement with great internal consistency, although it is not unitarily orchestrated.

The dissertation has identified a particular core-periphery dynamic within the current European wilderness momentum. While most of the projects are implemented in various peripheral areas of Eastern Europe, the granting authorities and the bodies of experts and their ideas come from Western countries. The Endangered Landscape Programme, the

workings of Rewilding Europe and the involvement of EuroNatur have been used as illustrative examples of this core-periphery dynamic.

What binds together all these projects are not only the strong political and ideological support but also the similar socio-economic local context that enable them. Local conditions such as declining rural population, actual or relative land abandonment, the demise of traditional land-use practices and cheap nature are all features of this new green internal periphery represented by the Eastern European wilderness frontier.

**Assessing virgin nature**

This dissertation questioned the complex process of separating wild nature by exploring how the state, the scientific practice and the spectacular work together within a truth regime. This truth regime should not be considered as timeless and coherent, but as a field where different types of expertise co-produce each other. Taking Romania as a study case I focused on the creation of the virgin forests as a legal category, on its protection and framing mechanisms discussing the multiple fractures that characterize this truth regime. While showing that the inscription of virgin forests as world heritage is part of a spectacular production of these ecosystems I questioned the exclusion of local communities and traditional ecological knowledges from the entire process.

A big part of the analysis was to investigate the aspects of power, negotiation and knowledge production associated with the protection of virgin forests. I described several public campaigns and the contentious politics of big environmental NGOs. The development of legal mechanisms as a response to raising public demands were scrutinized in detail and so it was the role of scientists in making legible this new untouched nature. I have shown that the state sees these forests as rows in a table (the Catalogue) and the activists reduce them to abstract numbers and charismatic features contributing to further environmental ignorance. Although these two practices are fundamentally different, they aim to a single objective – the strict protection.

Besides their depiction as laboratories for scientists and testimonies of Europe's postglacial landscapes, virgin forests are framed as natural, national or even international heritage. Chapters 3 and 4 have shown that even when large tracts of primary beech forests of the Carpathians have been included in a UNESCO serial property, the cultural

values associated to them locally have been not only ignored but also edited out. The dissertation argued that this selective remembrance of local memory does not pay tribute to customary protection mechanisms, folklore and local memory. While including them under a strict protection regime as untouched nature, a rich environmental history is obliterated.

I argued that this process has raised serious concerns about environmental and social justice. Having their traditional relations with the forest severed, locals are often considered and treated as poachers, trespassers and even criminals. Once strictly protected, the virgin forests allow for only two types of actions: scientific study and touristic visitation. The shepherds, the mushroom and berry pickers and other persons collecting medicinal plants or other non-timber products have no place within the new order.

The dissertation argued that the protection of virgin forests in Romania is a perfect case to understand regional and even international attempts to conserve wild nature under strict regimes. As it has been demonstrated, the abstraction of wilderness is a political project that changes constantly the geographies of conservation on the European continent, and the virgin forests, this dissertation argues, represent a proxy of this transformation. By tracing the complex production of virgin forests through legal documents, platforms, apps and documentaries this research constitutes a radiograph of this phenomenon as it unfolds on the ground.

**A new frontier of land control**

One particular manifestation of the current wilderness momentum is Carpathia Project, a private initiative whose vision is to create an iconic private reserve in the Southern Carpathian Mountains, Romania. A thick description of the functioning and operations of the Foundation Conservation Carpathia (FCC) uncovered that the project is built upon multiple enclosures and dispossessions of the local people. These actions are presented as a response to a crisis situation, namely the rapid disappearance of one of the last intact landscapes of Europe together with its charismatic virgin forests and wildlife. The analysis threated the Carpathia Project as a case of green grabbing and showed how this new frontier of land control disrupts the local livelihoods unevenly. The project has been

presented by various political figures and conservationists as a good practice that should constitute a model for other future initiatives in Eastern Europe, thus the present political ecology analysis comes out as timely.

As of 2009, the Foundation Conservation Carpathia laid down their plans to build a strict wilderness reserve in the eastern part of the Făgăraș Mountains initially aiming at 50,000 hectares where hunting, logging and other extractive practices would cease to allow evolutionary processes to happen. As the project became more visible and started enjoying strong political support, its ambitions extended to the entire mountain range, which would be turned into an iconic national park. Their conservation work so far included the restoration of clear cut areas and riparian habitats, the study of big carnivores in the project area, the reintroduction of missing species such as the European bison and the European beaver and the establishment of several ecotourism facilities.

This dissertation presented the Carpathia Project as a case of green grabbing, similar to other initiatives that have engaged in massive land acquisitions for conservation purposes in the worldwide. A recent tradition of political ecologists has analyzed the multiple manifestations of this practice in various locations of the Global South. By putting the spotlight on Eastern Europe, this research shows that green grabbing is a process that can take place in other geographies as well if certain local conditions are favourable. These include, as chapters 5 and 6 showed, a significant mass of land that has been cheapened, politically demobilized communities, high social and economic inequalities and a substantial change in traditional livelihoods. In the eastern part of Făgăraș Mountains, all these conditions were satisfied when FCC set its plans to turn the area into a private wilderness reserve.

This dissertation showed that the foundation embraced exclusive ownership of forests and pastures as the only risk-free mechanism that would help reaching its conservation goals. Along with buying all the land available on the market, the foundation became the administrator of two hunting grounds, the custodian of two Natura 2000 protected areas and the most important member in one of the local commons. All these roles have been shown to be part of a coherent securitization logic, according to which all local natural resources have to be directly controlled for the success of the conservation plan. This is what distinguishes this case of green grabbing from other cases that have been analyzed

by various political ecologists – FCC became not only the owner of a vast territory but also the manager of all wildlife, administrator of all forests and planner of the future economic development in and around the project area.

The analysis has shown that the project had an uneven impact on the local livelihoods as the communities around the Făgăraș Mountains are very diverse. Various types of dispossessions occurred and resistance of local people ranged from classical weapons of the weak to legal actions and political mobilizations. The dissertation analyzed the diversity of enclosures in relation to FCC's constellation of powers, following the recommendation of Ribot and Peluso (2003), who argued that the control of access should be at the centre of such inquiry. The fencing and fines approach described in relation to other conservation projects was also here at play, but the possibility to regulate access to natural resources for other actors has strengthened by the multiple identities of FCC operating through a large network of subsidiary companies.

As the data collection unfolded I noticed that another type of impact started producing quite a stir in the local communities from the north of Muscel – a growing human-wildlife conflict. A hunting-free zone larger than 28,000 hectares coupled with a significant shift in the legal status of brown bear populations have raised serious safety concerns in all villages around these mountains. The dissertation has detailed that the amplified attacks of brown bears are a result of an inconsistent approach to the conservation and management of this species and has offered a few points towards a more convivial proposal.

The political economy of Carpathia Project has only been sketched, this endeavour requiring a different level of engagement and considerably more resources. Hopefully, in the near future, the current analysis will be enriched with those insights. Nevertheless, this dissertation has shown that Foundation Conservation Carpathia has created an economy of expectations around their project. Ecotourism and green businesses constitute the core of this development, and the foundation has intensively promoted a set of business models for local entrepreneurs. Wildlife tracking, bear watching, cross country riding and luxurious experiences in dreamy cabins are not experiences familiar to local tourism operators. Certainly, no other local actor disposes of such an amount of land,

leveraging power and networks of support, as FCC does, so the initial illusion of ecotourism proved to be delusional.

But ecotourism development is not the only strategy considered by the FCC to finance their initiative in the future. Although the large forests and pastures have been supposedly taken out of extractive uses, they are still an important source of income. Direct payments for the high nature value of the alpine pastures, payments for ecosystem services and state compensations for the forests situated within the core areas of national parks add up to a generous amount. Moreover, while being a commoner in the *obștea* of Rucăr, the foundation cashed on significant amount of dividends from the profit of the association in which one of its companies owned a third of the total shares.

As intact landscapes, old-growth forests and strictly protected wildlands are considered an important element in many EU climate mitigation and biodiversity strategies (such as the New Green Deal), it is not far-fetched to speculate that the big owners of these territories will be the winners if new schemes for carbon sequestration, payments for ecosystem services and other financial schemes will be implemented within the Union. The exclusive ownership would probably be the winning strategy in such a scenario. A rigorous analysis of this accumulation by securitization prospect is highly necessary, but it was not the aim of this dissertation.

**Potential for Convivial Conservation**

While doing this research I have repeatedly asked myself how would a more inclusive conservation approach would look like in Făgăraș. How would a turn away from strict protection, the set of dispossessions, short term touristic visitation, and commodification of charismatic wildlife would change our relation to the environment in which we grew up and nurtured our livelihoods? Being a local, significantly attached to these forests and also having developed close relations with many farmers, commoners, mushroom pickers and foresters made this questioning highly personal. The proposals summed up within a new convivial conservation vision come as a direct answer to most of these questions. In clear opposition to the capitalist logic, the convivial conservation draws its strength from many emancipatory, indigenous and post-colonial movements around the world and proposes a transgression of the human-nature divide present or assumed in all

conservation initiatives mentioned in this dissertation. While the main tenets of this new vision have been mentioned in the introduction of this thesis, some of its applications have been signalled in various chapters.

The potential for convivial conservation in the Southern Carpathians and elsewhere in Eastern Europe is enormous considering the rich culturally layered landscapes of this region. It has been shown how different wilderness initiatives become more visible and develop into an Eastern European wilderness frontier by setting strict protection regimes for the rich local wildlife and ecosystems while turning into opportunities various socio-economic and political realities (depopulation, land abandonment). The social and environmental justice implications of all these projects could be curtailed if the barriers and fences, and the discursive borders between a supposedly autonomous nature and humans would be lessened and even replaced by approaches that celebrate the rich environmental history of the region.

If we take the case of virgin forests into account, we see how these ecosystems entered a strict protection strategy after going through a process of purification, abstraction and distillation operated by state officials, experts, partner scientists and environmental activists. Fully functioning complex ecosystems were turned into figures or bird-eye views. At the local level, on the other hand, many folktales, toponyms, aspirations and even ownership conflicts show that these forests are an important part of the community's identity and development ambitions. Most of them have survived as collective forests under the governance provisions of the local commons. A convivial conservation approach would celebrate these ecosystems not only for their rich biodiversity but would link this biodiversity to past and present land-uses, livelihoods and practices, accounting for their uniqueness in relation to various local histories of the environment.

Similarly, while the Făgăraș Mountains have always been an important place for the local history and the national ideology, they are turned now into 'untouched nature' and iconic wilderness by a private conservancy. As this mountain range is not an unpopulated desert, the social and environmental injustice inflicted by this project constitutes a serious argument for the adoption of a more convivial approach to conservation that would bring

positive transformations. Luckily, there are many actors that could support such a turn towards co-existence and celebration of human and non-human nature alike.

Historical forest and pasture commons have been re-established in the last two decades and have become efficient examples of decentralized governance of local resources to satisfy the needs of their members. Most of them could be considered veritable conservation actors similar to other institutions united under the *Indigenous Community Conserved Areas* umbrella term. They satisfy the tree features of ICCAs, namely a clear democratic governance system, a strong bond with the environment and have conservation and sustainable use of resources as a primary goal. These commons are spread across the Carpathians and function as safety-nets for the less privileged members of the community, invest part of their income in public infrastructure such as roads and power grids, support the functioning of local school, churches and even hospitals. Even if their governance model varies from one region to another, decisions are taken by democratic vote in general assemblies. A first step in building a more inclusive conservation for these mountains would be recognising the role that commons have played across centuries in shaping and enriching the landscape. Proper recognition, support and promotion of forest commons in the Carpathians as socially and environmentally just conservation examples would be high on the convivial conservation agenda in this region. Of course, so far these commons have not always been examples of equality and openness, particularly with regards to Roma and Rudari, but as they are living institutions this situation can change as one of the core values of convivial conservation vision is democratic deliberation.

I have intentionally given space in these final paragraphs to speculations about a radical alternative to the strict conservation of wilderness. The forest commons mentioned above trace their origin many centuries ago, they have survived medieval and modern enclosures, mid-20th century nationalization and now they are leading the fight against a project that promotes the strict protection of their nature as wilderness. But the context of this fight extends beyond the valleys and dark forests of Făgăraș and includes global challenges like declining biodiversity rates, climate disruptions and deepening

environmental injustice. As most wilderness conservation projects operating in Eastern Europe are already connected through networks of donors, experts and political support, maybe the time has come to invest all this energy, resources and passion into promoting a more realist conservation model that is already consistent to local aspirations, is socially and environmentally just and leaves more freedom to future imaginations.

# References


Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1991. "Writing Against Culture" from Richard G. Fox *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, pp. 137-154, Santa Fe: School of American Research Press.

Ackland, Robert.2013. *Web Social Science: Concepts, Data and Tools for Social Scientists in the Digital Age.* London: Sage.

Adams, William. 2019. „Geographies of conservaition III: Nature's spaces", *Progress in Human Geography*, published online https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132519837779.

Agrawal, Arun. 2005. *Environmentality. Technologies of the Government and the Making of Subjects.* Durham: Duke University Press

Antaki, Charles. 2011. *Applied conversational analysis: intervention and change in institutional talk,* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Archer, Margaret et al.2016. „What is critical realism?" *Perspectives 23 December 2016,* available online at http://www.asatheory.org/current-newsletter-online/what-is-critical-realism#

Averardi, Andrea. 2015. "Amministrare il conflitto: construzione di grandi opera e partecipazione democratica" *Revista Trimestrale di Diritto Pubblico* 65(4): 1172-1220.

Bandiu, Constantin et al. 1995. *Pădurea Secular*ă*. Cercetări ecologice în Banat.* Timișoara: Editura Mirton.

Bastin, Jean-Francois et al. 2019. „The global tree restoration potential" *Science* 365(6448): 76-79.

Bastmeijer, Kees. 2016. *Wilderness Protection in Europe.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Bastmeijer, Kees. 2016."Introduction" Pp 3-37 in *Wilderness Protection in Europe* edited by Kees Bastmeijer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

BBC. 2019. "Wolves move into Dutch national park", *BBC News 9 April 2019,* available online: https://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-news-from-elsewhere-47866510

Bellamy-Foster, John and Paul Burkett. 2016. *Marx and the Earth. An Anti-Critique.* Boston: Brill.

Benjaminsen, Tor and Ian Bryceson. 2012. "Conservation, green/blue grabbing and accumulation by dispossession in Tanzania." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 39(2): 335-355.

Benson, Etienne. 2010. *Wired Wilderness. Technologies of tracking and the making of modern wildlife.* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Berger, John. 1972. *Ways of Seeing*. London: Penguin Classics

Bignal, Eric & David McCracken. 1996. „Low-Intensity Farming Systems in the Conservation of the Countryside" *British Ecological Society* 33(3): 413-424.

Biris, Iovu A et al. 2016. "24.000 ha de paduri primare de fag, propunerea Romaniei pentru Patrimoniul Mondial UNESCO"

Biris, Iovu A. 2014. "Fagetele primare din Romania, o contributie la Patrimonial Mondial UNESCO" *Bucovina Forestiera* 14(1): 77-85.

Biris, Iovu A. 2016. „Amintirile unui amenajist", *Bucovina Forestiera* 16(2): 267-268.

Biris, Iovu Adrian & Peter Veen. 2005. *Inventory and strategy for sustainable management and protection of virgin forests in Romania.* Available online www.veenecology.nl

Blaikie, Norman & Jan Priest. 2017. *Social Research: Paradigms in Action*, Polity.

Blavascunas, Eunice and Agatha Konczal. 2019. "Bark-beetles and ultra-right nationalist outbreaks." in *Environmentalism under Authoritarian Regimes: Myth, Propaganda, Reality* edited by Stephen Brain and Victor Pal. New York: Routledge.

Blavascunas, Eunice. 2014. „When foresters reterritorialize the periphery: post-socialist forest politics in Białowieża, Poland" *Journal of Political Ecology*, 21(1): 475-492.

Blondel, J .2006. „The Design of Mediterranean Landscapes: A Millennial Story of Humans and Ecological Systems during the Historic Period" *Human Ecology*, 34:713-729.

Bondi, Elizabeth et al. 2018. „Biodiversity Conservation with Drones: Using Uncertain Real-Time Information in Signaling Games to Prevent Poaching." Working paper at the International Conference on Machine Learning AI for Social Good Workshop, Long Beach, United States.

Borrini-Feyerabend, Grazia & Rosemary Hill. 2015. „Governance of the conservation of nature" in *Protected Areas Governance and Managementi* edited by GL Worboys et al, Canberra: ANU Press.

Braun, Bruce .2013. „New Materialisms and Neoliberal Natures" 2013 Antipdode RGS-IBG Lecture.

Brândușă, Stefania. 2017. "Romania, victorie la UNESCO: Noua paduri virgine , incluse in Patrimoniul mondial UNESCO" *Active News 10 July 2017,* available online: https://www.activenews.ro/stiri/Romania-victorie-la-UNESCO-Noua-paduri-virgine-incluse-in-Patrimoniul-Mondial-UNESCO-144571

Brockington, Dan and Jim Igoe. 2006. "Eviction for Conservation: A Global Overview." *Conservation and Society* 4(3): 424-470.

Brockington, Dan. 2002. *Fortress Conservation. The Preservation of the Mkomazi Game Reserve, Tanzania.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Bucur, Daniel. 2018. „Ecological Restoration of forest habitats in the Dambovita Valley" paper presented at the *Conference Fagaras Mountains. An Inventory towards a new National Park,* Bucharest, Institute of Biology.

Burawoy, Michael. 2009. *The Extended Case Method. Four Countries, Four Decades, Four Great Tansformations, and One Theoretical Tradition.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Büscher, Bram & Jim Igoe. 2013. „'Prosuming' conservation? Web 2.0, nature and the intensification of value-producing labour in late capitalism" *Journal of Consumer Culture,* published online https://doi.org/10.1177/1469540513482691

Büscher, Bram & Robert Fletcher. 2019. „Towards Convivial Conservation" *Conservation and Society,* 17(3): 283-296.

Büscher, Bram and Stasja Koot. 2017. "Introduction. Nature 2.0: New Media, online activism and the cyberpolitics of environmental conservation" *Geoforum* 79: 111-113.

Büscher, Bram and Veronica Davidov. 2015. "Environmentally induced displacements in the ecotourism-extraction nexus" *AREA* 48(2): 161-167.

Büscher, Bram et al. 2012. "Towards a Synthesized Critique of Neoliberal Conservation" *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism 23(2):4-30.*

Büscher, Bram et al. 2017. "Half-Earth or whole Earth? Radical ideas for conservation, and their implications. *Oryx* 51:407–410.

Büscher, Bram. 2013. *Transforming the Frontier. Peace parks and the politics of neoliberal conservation in Southern Africa*. Durham: Duke University Press.

Büscher, Bram. 2015. "Reassessing Fortress Conservation? New Media and the Politics of Distinction in Kruger National Park" *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 106(1): 114-129.

Büscher, Bram. 2016. "Nature 2.0: Exploring, theorizing the links between new media and nature conservation." *New Media Society* 18(5): 726-743.

Callicott, Baird & Michael Nelson. 1998. *The great new wilderness debate*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Caramelea,Vasile. 2016.*Satul Berivoiești (Muscel). Obștea Moșnenilor.* București: Ars Docendi.

Carrier, James & Paige West. 2009. *Virtualism, Governance and Practice. Vision and Execution in Environmental Conservation,* New York: Berghahn Books.

Carver, Stephen and Steffen Fritz. 2016. *Mapping Wilderness. Concepts, Techniques and Applications.* Dordrecht: Springer.

Casini, Lorenzo. 2018. *Potere globale. Regole e decisioni oltre gli Stati*. Bologna: Il Mulino.

Chapman, Robert L .2006. „Ecological Restoration Restored", *Environmental Values* 15(4): 463-478.

Conea, Ion. 1935. *Țara Loviștei. Geografie Istorică*. București: Imprimeria Națională.

Corlett, Richard. 2016. "Restoration, Reintroduction and Rewilding in a Changing World" *Trends in Ecology and Evolution* 31(6): 453-462.

Corsale, Andrea & Monica Iorio. "Transylvanian Saxon culture as heritage: Insights from Viscri, Romania." *Geoforum* 52: 22-31.

Corson, Catherine, MacDonald, Keneth. 2012. "Enclosing the global commons: the convention on biological diversity and green grabbing" *The Journal of Peasant Studies,* 39(2): 263-283

Cronon, William. 1996. "The Trouble with Wilderness: Or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature" *Environmental History* 1(1): 7-28.

Crumley, Carole. 2017. *Issues and Concepts in Historical Ecology. The Past and Future of Landscapes and Regions.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

DeLuca, Kevin and Anne Demo. 2001. “Imagining Nature and Erasing Class and Race. Carleton Watkins, John Muir and the Construction of Wilderness” *Environmental History* 6(4): 541-560.

DeLuca, Kevin. 2007. „A Wilderness Environmentalism Manifesto: Contesting the Infinite Self-Absorption of Humans” in R. Sandler and P. Pezzullo (eds) *Environmental Justice and Environmentalism,* pp 27-56*, Cambridge MA: The MIT Press*

Demos, T.J. 2016. *Decolonising Nature: Contemporary Art and the Politics of Ecology*. New York: Sternberg Press.

Denevan, William. 1992. ”The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in the 1942” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 82(3): 369-385.

Dorondel, Stefan. 2009. “They should be killed. Forest restitution, ethnic groups and patronage in post-socialist Romania.” Pp 43-66 in *The Rights and Wrongs of Forest Restitution: “Restoring what was ours.”* edited by D. Fay and D. James. London: Routledge.

Dorondel, Ștefan. 2016. *Disrupted Landscapes. State, Peasants and the Politics of Land in Postsocialist Romania.* New York: Berghahn Books.

Drenthen, Martin. 2005. “Wildness as a Critical Border Concept. Nietzsche and the Debate on Wilderness Restoration.” *Environmental Values* 14:317-337.

Drenthen, Martin. 2009. „Ecological restoration and place attachment: Emplacing non-places?” *Environmental Values* 18(3).

Drenthen, Martin. 2015. “Layered Landscapes, Conflicting Narratives and Environmental Art” Pp 239-262 in *Restoring Layered Landscapes: History, Ecology and Culture* edited by Marion Hourdequin and David G. Havlick. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Drenthen, Martin. 2018a. “Rewilding in Cultural Layered Landscapes” *Environmental Values* 27(4): 325-330.

Drenthen, Martin. 2018b. “Rewilding in Layered Landscapes as a Challenge to Place Identity” *Environmental Values* 27(4): 405-425.

Driessen, Henk & Willy Jansen. 2013. “The Hard Work of Small Talk in Ethnographic Fieldwork” *Journal of Anthropological Research* 63: 249-263.

Duffy, Rosaleen. 2014. „Waging a war to save biodiversity: the rise of militarized conservation” *International Affairs* 90(4).

Eckers, Michael and Scott Prudhahm. 2017b. “The Socioecological Fix. Fixed Capital, Metabolism and Hegemony” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 108(1): 17-34.

Eckers, Michael and Scott Prudham. 2017a. “The Metabolism of Socioecological Fixes. Capital Switching, Spatial Fixes and the Production of Nature” *Annals of the American Association of Geographers* 107(6): 1370-1388.

Egerer, Herald. 2016. “Wilderness Protection under the Carpathian Convention” Pp 222-244 in *Wilderness Protection in Europe* edited by Kees Bastmeijer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Evernden, Neil .1992. *The Social Creation of Nature*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Fairhead, James, Melissa Leach, Jan Scoones. 2012. “Green Grabbing: a new appropriation of nature?” *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 39(2): 273-261.

Fairhead, James. 2018. “Technology, Inclusivity and the Rogue. Bats and the War against the invisible enemy” *Conservation and Society* 16(2): 170-180.

Fischer, Frank. 2000. *Citizens, Experts and the Environment: The Politics of Local Knowledge.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Fischer, Mark. 2009. *Capitalist Realism: Is There No Alternative*. London: Zero Books.

Fletcher, Robert & Bram Büscher. 2017. “The PES Conceit. Revisiting the Relationship between PES and Neoliberal Conservation” *Ecological Economics* 132: 224-231.

Fletcher, Robert. 2014. *Romancing the wild*. Durham: Duke University Press

Fletcher, Robert. 2017. “Gaming conservation: Nature 2.0 confronts nature-deficit disorder”. *Geoforum* 79: 153-162.

Fletcher, Robert. 2017. ”Environmentality unbound: multiple governmentalities in environmental politics” *Geoforum* 85: 311-315.

Fletcher, Robert. 2018. “Ecotourism after Nature. Anthropocene tourism as a new capitalist fix.” *Journal of Sustainable Tourism* 27(4): 522-535.

Foreman, Dave .2004. *Rewilding North America. A Vision for Conservation in the 21st Century*. Washington: Island Press.

Forsyth, Tim .2011. *Critical Political Ecology. The politics of environmental science*. London: Routledge.

Foucault, Michel. 2005. *Society Must be Defended. Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976*. London: Palgrave Mcmillan.

Foucault, Michel. 2008a. *Security, Territory, Population. Lectures at the Collège de France 1977-1978.* London: Palgrave Mcmillan.

Foucault, Michel. 2008b. *The Birth of Biopolitics*. *Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*. London: Palgrave Mcmillan.

Fox, Katy. 2011. *Peasants into European Farmers? EU Integration in the Carpathian Mountains of Romania* Zürich: LIT Verlag.

Franklin, Stuart. 2002. „Białowieża Forest, Poland: Representation, Myth and the Politics of Dispossession" *Environment and Planning A: Economy and Space*. 34(8):1459-1485.

Gammon, Andrea. 2018. "The Many Meanings of Rewilding. An Introduction and the Case for a Broad Conceptualisation" *Environmental Values* 27:331-350.

Gavrilut, Ines et al. 2016. "The interaction between FSC certification and the implementation of the EU Timber Regulation in Romania." *Forests* 7:2-13.

Georgescu, Mitica. 2003. *Vanatorile lui Ceausescu asa cum au fost.* Bucuresti: Corint.

Gheorghiescu, Paul. 2017. *Hidrocentrala si Barajul Vidraru – 50 e ani.* Bucuresti: Editura AGIR.

Goldman, Mara et al. 2011. *Knowing Nature. Conversations at the Intersection of Political Ecology and Science Studies.* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Gotiu, Mihai. 2013. *Afacerea Rosia Montana. Cluj-Napoca*: Editura Tact.
Graf, Heike. 2016. *The Environment in the Age of Internet: Activists, Communication and the Digital Landscape.* Cambridge: Open Book Publishers.

Gross, Michael. 2016. "Europe's Last Wilderness Threatened" *Current Biology* 26(14): R641-643.

Guha, Ramachandra. 1989. "Radical American Environmentalism and Wildernes Preseration" *Environmental Ethics* 11(1): 71-83.

Gzeszczak, Robert & Ireneusz Karolewski. 2017. "Bialowieza Forest, the Spruce Bark Beetle and the EU Law Controversy in Poland" *Versassungsblog* 27 November 2017, available online: https://verfassungsblog.de/bialowieza-forest-the-spruce-bark-beetle-and-the-eu-law-controversy-in-poland/

Haila, Yrjo. 1997. "Wilderness and the Multiple Layers of Environmental Thought" *Environment and History* 3(2): 129-147.

Halada, Lubos et al.2011. „Which Habitats of European Importance Depend on Agricultural Practices" *Biodiversity and Conservation* 20(1): 2365-2378.

Haraway, Donna. 1988. „Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Priviledge of Partial Perspective" *Feminist Studies* 14(3): 575-599.

Harding, Sandra.1986. „The Science Question in Feminism" *Hypatia* 3(1):157-168.

Harvey, David.2003. *The New Imperialism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Havlick, David. 2006. "Reconsidering Wilderness. Prospective Ethics for Nature, Technology and Society" *Ethics, Place and Environment* 9(1):47-62.

Heynen, Nik et al. 2007. *Neoliberal Environments. False Promises and Unnatural Consequences.* London: Routledge.

Hill, Catherine.2017. *Understanding Conflicts about Wildlife: A Biosocial Aproach.* New York: Berghahn Books.

Hintz, John. 2007. „Some political problems for rewilding nature"*Ethics, Place & Environment* 10(2):177-216.

Hochtl, Franz et al. 2005. „'Wilderness': What it means when it becomes reality – A case study from the southwestern Alps" *Landscape and Urban Planning* 70(1):85-95.

Holmes, George. 2014. "What is a land grab? Exploring green grabs, conservation and private protected areas in Chile" *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 41(4):547-567.

Horak, Jakub et al. 2018. "Winners and losers in the wilderness: response of biodiversity to the abandonment of ancient forest pastures" *Biodiversity and Conservation* 27(11); 3019-3029.
https://issuu.com/europeanwildernesssociety/docs/ews_special_journal_logging_hans_kn

Huff, Amber and Andrea Brock. 2017. "Accumulation by Restoration: Degradation Neutrality and the Faustian Bargain of Conservation Finance" *Antipode Online*, November 2017, DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.10745.98408

Iancu, Bogdan & Monica Stroe. 2016. "In search of eligibility: Common Agricultural Policy and the Reconfiguration of Hay Meadows management in the Romanian Highlands." *Martor* 21: 128-145.

Igoe, Jim and Dan Brockington. 2007. "Neoliberal Conservation: A Brief Introduction" *Conservation and Society* 5(4): 432-449.

Igoe, Jim. 2013. "Nature on the Move II: Contemplation Becomes Speculation" *New Proposals: Journal of Marxism and Interdisciplinary Inquiry* 6(1-2): 37-49.

Igoe, Jim. 2017. *The Nature of Spectacle: On Images, Money, and Conserving Capitalism* Tucson: University of Arizona Press.

Iordachescu, George. 2014. *Inventing Traditions for Whom? Commodification of Authenticity and Failed Rural Development in Capitalist Romania.* Unpublished MA Thesis, Central European University, Budapest.

Ioris, Antonio AR. 2014. *The Political Ecology of the State: The Basis and the Evolution of Environmental Statehood.* New York: Routledge

Irvin, Renee A & John Stansbury. 2004. "Citizen Participation in Decision Making: Is it Worth the Effort?" *Public Administration Review* 64(1): 55-65.

Jamieson,Dale .2008. *Ethics and the Environment. An Introduction.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Jørgensen, Dolly. 2015. "Rethinking Rewilding" *Geoforum* 65: 482-488.

Karper, Krista. 2006. "Wild Capitalism. Environmental Activism and Postsocialist Political Ecology in Hungary" *Anthropology Department Faculty Series* 81, https://scholarworks.umass.edu/anthro_faculty_pubs/81

Kelly, Alice and Megan Ybarra. 2016. "Introduction to themed issue: Green Security in Protected Areas" *Geofurm* 69:171-175.

Kelly, Alice. 2011. "Conservation Practice as Primitive Accumulation" *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 38(4): 683-701.

Kernbach, Victor.1989. *Dictionar de Mitologie Generala.* Bucuresti: Editura Albatros.

Kiik, Laur. 2018. „Conservationland: Toward the anthropology of professionals in global nature conservation." *Critique of Anthropology* 39(4): 391-419.

Kirchoff, Thomas & Vera Vicenzotti .2014. „A Historical and Systematic Survey of European Perceptions of Wilderness"*Environmental Values* 23(4).

Knapp, .2016. „Impressions of a Forest Excursion to Romania. Between virgin forest wilderness, rural idyll and forest destruction" *International Journal of Wilderness, Special Report.* Available online

Knapp, Hans et al, 2007. *Europaische Buchenwaldinitiative.* Bonn: Bundesamt fur Naturschutz.

Knorn, Jan et al. 2012. „Continued loss of temperate old-growth forests in the Romanian Carpathians despite increasing protected area network" *Environmental Conservation* 40(2):182-193.

Koivula,M. et al.2018. „Do Finns see the forest from trees? An Assessment of continous-cover forestry from recreational and aesthetic perspectives" Conference Paper 5th European Congress of Conservation Biology. 12th - 15th of June 2018, Jyväskylä, Finland

Koning, Jessica et al. 2014. "Natura 2000 and climate change. Polarisation, uncertainty, and pragmatism in discourses on forest conservation and marginalization in Europe." *Environmental Science and Policy* 39: 129-138.

Kopnina, Helen. 2016. "Half the earth for people (or more)? Addressing ethical questions in conservation" *Biol. Conserv.* 203:176–185.

Krenova, Zdenka & Hans Kiener. 2012. "Europe's Wild Heart – still beating? Experiences from a new transboundary wilderness area in the middle of the Old Continent". *European Journal of Environmental Sciences* 2(2): 115-124.

Kruiters, AT et al.2013. *Wilderness register and indicator for Europe.* Final report Alterra Wateningen, Wildland Research Institute, PanParks, available online https://ec.europa.eu/environment/nature/natura2000/wilderness/pdf/Wilderness_register_indicator.pdf

Kupper, Patrick. 2015. *Creating Wilderness: A Transnational History of the Swiss National Park.* New York: Berghahn Books.

Latour, Bruno. 1999. *Pandora's Hope. Essays on the reality of social science.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Latour, Bruno. 2009. *Politics of Nature.* Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.

Lave, Rebecca. 2012. "Neoliberalism and the production of Environmental Knowledge." *Environment and Society* 3: 19-38.

Lawrence, Anna & Alina Szabo. 2005. „Forest restitution in Romania: Challenging the value system of foresters and farmers", *Human Ecology Working Paper 05/01* Environmental Change Institute, University of Oxford.

Li, Tania. 2007. *The Will to Improve. Governmentality, Development and the Practice of Politics.* Durham: Duke University Press.

Li, Tania. 2010. "Indigeneity, Capitalism and the Management of Dispossession." *Current Anthropology* 51(3): 385-314.

Liberti, Stefano. 2013. *Land Grabbing. Journeys in the new colonialism*. London: Verso.

Linnell, John & Bjorn Kaltenborn. 2016. *An ecosystem services analysis of the Fagaras Mountains, Romania.* Norvegian Institute for Nature Research 1251.

Linnell, John et al. 2016. *Biodiversity assessment of the Fagaras Mountains, Romania.* Norvegian Institute for Nature Research 1236.

Loperena, Christopher Anthony. 2016. "Conservation by racialized dispossession: the making of an eco-destination on Honduras's North Coast" *Geoforum*, 69:184-193.

Lorimer, Hayden & Katrin Lund. 2008."A collectable topography: Walking, remembering and recording mountains" in Jo Lee Vergunst & Tim Ingold *Ways of Walking. Ethnogrpahy and Practice on Foot.* Aldershot: Ashgate.

Lorimer, Jamie et al. 2015. "Rewilding. Science, Practice and Politics" *Annual Review of Environment and Resources* 40(1): 39-62.

Lovbrand, Eva et al. 2015. "Who speaks for the future of Earth? How critical science can extend the conversation on the Anthropocene" *Global Environmental Change* 32: 211-218.

Luke, Timothy.1997. *Ecocritique: contesting the politics of nature, economy and culture.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Luke, Timothy.1999. *Capitalism, Democracy and Ecology. Departing from Marx*, Urbana: University of Illinois.

Lund, Gyde H. 2002. "Definitions of old growth, pristine, climax, ancient forests, and similar terms." Online publication, Manassas, VA: Forest Information Services, http://home.att.net/~gklund/pristine.html

Lupp, Gerd et al. 2011. "Wilderness. A Designation for Central European Landscapes." *Land Use Policy* 28: 594-603.

Lupp, Gerd et al. 2012. "Wilderness. Consequences of a mental construct for landscapes, biodiversity and wilderness management." *European Journal of Environmental Sciences* 2(2): 110-114.

Luyssaert, Sebastiann et al.2008. „Old growth forests as global carbon sinks" *Nature* 455:213-215.

Malm, Andreas.2018. „In Wilderness is the liberation of the world" *Historical Materialism* 26(3): 3-37.

Manzo, Kate .2009. „Imaging vulnerability: the iconography of climate change" *AREA* 42(1): 96-107.

Margulis, Matias et al. 2013. "Land Grabbing and Global Governance: Critical Perspectives" *Globalizations* 10(1), published online https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2013.764151

Marris, Emma. 2011. *Rambunctious Garden. Saving nature in a post-wild world.* New York: Bloomsbury.

Martin, Vance et al. 2008. "Wilderness Momentum in Europe."*International Journal of Wilderness* 14(2).

Masse, Francis & Elizabeth Lundstrum. 2016. „Accumulation by securitization: Commercial poaching, neoliberal conservation and the creation of new wildlife frontiers" *Geoforum* 69:227-237.

Masse, Francis and Elizabeth Lundstrum. 2016. "Accumulation for securitization: Commercial poaching, neoliberal conservation and the creation of new wildlife frontiers." *Geoforum* 69:227-237.

Masse, Francis. 2016. "The Political Ecology of Human-Wildlife Conflict" *Conservation and Society* 14(2):100-111.

Merchant, Carolyn. 2016. *Autonomous Nature. Problems of prediction and control since ancient times to the scientific revolution.* New York: Routledge.

Merckx, Thomas and Henrique Pereira. 2015. "Reshaping agri-environmental subsidies. From marginal farming to large-scale rewilding." *Basic Applied Ecology* 16:95-103.

Meyer, Till et al. 2009. "The Wild Heart of Europe". *International Journal of Wilderness* 15(3): 33-40.

Mihai, Elena. 2017. "24.000 de hectare de paduri virgine din Romania au intrat in patrimonial UNESCO" *Capital 10 July 2017*, available online: https://www.capital.ro/24000-de-hectare-de-paduri-virgine-din-romania-au-intrat-in-patrimoniul-unesco.html

Mitchel, Claudia.2011. *Doing Visual Research.* London: Sage

Mitman, Gregg et al. 2018. *Future Remains. A Cabinet of Curiosities for the Anthropocene.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Moore, Jason and Raj Patel. 2018. *A History of the World in Seven Cheap Things.* London: Verso Books.

Moore, Jason W. 2015. *Capitalism in the Web of Life: Ecology and the Accumulation of Capital*. London: Verso

Morton, Timothy. 2007. *Ecology without Nature. Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics.* Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.

Morton, Timothy.2018. *Being Ecological.* London: Penguin Books.
Nale, John & Leonard Lawler. 2014. *The Cambridge Foucault Lexicon.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Nash, Roderick. 1965. *Wilderness and the American Mind.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Navarro, Laetitia & Henrique Pereira. 2012. „Rewilding Abandoned Landscapes in Europe" *Ecosystems* 15: 900-912.

Nelson, Michael et al. 2008. *The Wilderness debate rages on: continuing the great new wilderness debate*. Athens: University of Georgia Press.

Neumann, Roderick. 2014. "Stories of Nature's Hybridity in Europe: Implication for Forest Management in the Global South" Pp. 31-44 in *The Social Lives of Forests. Past, Present and Future of Woodland Resurgence* edited by Susanna Hecht et al. Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Nichiforel, Liviu et al. 2015. *Forest Land Ownership Change in Romania.* COST Action FP1201 FACESMAP Country Report.

Nita, Mihai Daniel et al. 2018. "Widespread forest cutting in the aftermath of World War II captured by broad-scale historical Corona satellite photography." *Remote Sensing of the Environment* 204: 322-332.

Nixon, Rob. 2011. *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor.* Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press.

Nogues-Bravo, David et al. 2016. "Rewilding is the new Pandora's box of conservation" Current Biology Magazine 26:87-91.

Noss, Reed .2003. „A Checklist for Wildlands Network Designs" *Conservation Biology* 17(5): 1270-1275.

Nowak Carsten et al. 2014. "Molecular evidence for historic long-distance translocations of brown bears in the Balkan region" *Conservation Genetics* 15: 743-744.

O'Lear, Shannon. 2018. *Environmental Geopolitics. Human Geography in the Twenty-First Century: Issues and Applications.* New York: Rowman and Littlefield.

Oelschlaeger, Max. 1991. *The Idea of Wilderness: from prehistory to the age of ecology*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Ojeda, Diana. 2012. "Green Pretexts: Ecotourism, Neoliberal Conservation and Land Grabbing in Tayrona National Park in Colombia." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 39(2): 357-375.

Ojha, Hemant et al. 2019. "Rescuing Forests from the Carbon Trap" *Forest Policy and Economics* 101:15-18.

Panaitescu, Petre P .1964. *Obstea taraneasca in Tara Romaneasca si Moldova.* Bucuresti: Editura Academiei Republicii Populare Romîne.

Parenti, Christian. 2016. "Environment-Making in the Capitalocene: Political Ecology and the State" in Jason W. Moore (ed) 2016. *Anthropocene or Capitalocene? Nature, History and the Crisis of Capitalism*. Oakland: PM Books

Pasca, Emilia .2010."Gold culture and the history of industrial heritage in Romania"*Review of Historical Geography and Toponomastics* 5(9-10):81-96.

Paxman, Jeremy. 2015. „Jeremy Paxman on Europe's last wilderness" *Finantial Times 13 November 2015.*

Pârnuță, Gheorghe. 1972. Rucăr – Monografie Sociologică. Bucuresti: Editura Academiei Republicii Socialiste Romania.

Pârnuță, Gheorghe. 2005. *Obștea Moșnenilor Rucăreni și Dâmbovicioreni.* Campulung: Editura Semne.

Peet, Richard and Michael Watts. 1996. *Liberation Ecologies. Environment, Development and Social Movements.* New York: Routledge.

Peet, Richard et al. 2011. *Global Political Ecology.* London: Routledge.

Pellis, Arjaan and Rutger de Jong. 2016. *Rewilding Europe as a new agent of change? Exploring the governance of an experimental discourse and practice in European nature conservation.* Report of the Wageningen University, Environmental Sciences Department, 47p.

Peluso, Nancy Lee and Christian Lund. 2011. "New frontiers and land control: Introduction." *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 38(4): 811-836.

Pereira, Henrique and Laetitia Navarro. 2015. *Rewilding European Landscapes.* Dordrecht: Springer.

Perreault, Tom et al. 2015. *The Routledge Handbook of Political Ecology*. London: Routledge.

Pop, Ioan Mihai et al. 2012. "Land use and Behavioral Patterns of Brown Bears in the South-Eastern Romanian Carpathian Mountains" *Procedia Environmental Sciences* 14: 111-122.

Pop, Ioan Mihai et al. 2018. "Movement ecology of brown bears (Ursus arctos) in the Romanian Eastern Carpathians", *Nature Conservation* 26:15-31.

Popescu, Viorel et al. 2019. "Romanian carnivores at a crossroads" *Science* 364: 6445: 1041.

Porpora, Douglas .2015. *Reconstructing Sociology. The Critical realist Approach.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Prior, Jonathan and Kim Ward. 2016. "Rethinking rewilding. A response to Jørgensen" *Geoforum* 69:132-135.

Promberger, Barbara and Christoph Promberger. 2015. "Rewilding the Carpathians. A present-day opportunity." Pp. 242-249 in *Protecting the Wild: Parks and Wilderness, the Foundation for Conservation* edited by George Wurther et al. Dordrecht: Springer.

Promberger, Barbara et al.2018. „Obtaining reliable density estimates for large carnivores in the Southern Carpathians, Romania" paper presented at the *Conference Fagaras Mountains. An Inventory towards a new National Park*, Bucharest, Institute of Biology.

Prozorov, Sergei and Simona Rentea. 2016. *The Routledge Companion to Biopolitics.* London: Routledge.

Ranciere, Jacques. 2009. *Aesthetics and its Discontents.* Polity

Ribot, Jesse and Nancy Lee Peluso. 2003. "A Theory of Access" *Rural Sociology* 68(2):153-181.

Richards, Morgan .2014. „Are wildlife documentaries contributing to environmental ignorance?" *Animal People* available online https://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/archived/animalpeople/wildlife-documentaries-and-environmental-ignorance/5700890

Richards, Morgan.2013. „Global Nature, Global Brand: BBC Earth and David Attenborough's Landmark wildlife series" *Media International Australia* 146(146): 143-154.

Robbins, Paul. 2000. „The Practical politics of knowing: State Environmental Knowledge and Local Political Economy" *Economic Geography* 76(2):126-144.

Robbins, Peter. 2012. *Political Ecology. A critical introduction*. London: Wiley-Blackwell

Robertson, Morgan M. 2006. "The nature that capital can see: science, state and market in the commodification of ecosystem services" *Earth and Planning D: Society and Space*, 24:367-387

Rozylowicz, Laurentiu et al. 2011. "The potential of large carnivores as conservation surrogates in the Romanian Carpathians" *Biodiversity Conservation* 20:561-579.

Rutherford, Stephanie. 2011. *Governing the Wild: Ecotours of Power*. University of Minnesota Press

Saarinen, Jarkko.2015. „Wilderness use, conservation and tourism: what do we protect and for and from whom?"*Tourism Geographies* 18(1): 1-8.

Saarinen, .2005. „Tourism in the northern wildernesses: Wilderness discourses and the development of nature-based tourism in Northern Finland."

Samojlik, Tomasz et al. 2013. „Quantifying Historic Human Impacts on Forest Environments: A case study in Bialowieza Forest, Poland" *Environmental History* 18(3): 576-602.

Sandbrook, Cris. 2015. „The Social Implications of using drones for biodiversity conservation" *AMBIO* 44(S4): 636-647.

Sassen, Saskia. 2015. "At the Systemic Edge" *Cultural Dynamics* 27(7):173-181.

Sayer, Andrew . 2000. *Realism and Social Science.* London: Sage

Schleicher, Judith et al. 2019. "Protecting half of the planet could indirectly affect over one billion people." *Nature Sustainability,* 2:1094-1096.

Schumacher, H .2008. „More Wilderness for Germany: Implementing an important objective of Germany's National Strategy for Biodiversity"*Journla for Nature Conservation* 42:45-52.

Schwartz, Katrina. 2006. *Nature and National Identity after Communism. Globalizing the Ethnoscape*. Pittsburg: University of Pittsburg Press.

Scott, James. 1985. *Weapons of the weak.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Scott, James. 1998. *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed.* New Haven: Yale University Press.

Singh, Nera. 2015. “Payments for Ecosystem Services and the Gift Paradigm: Sharing the Burden of environmental care.” *Ecological Economics* 117:53-61.

Singh, Nera. 2018. “Introduction. Affective Ecologies and Conservation” *Conservation and Society* 16(1):1-7.

Smith, Neil. 2007. “Nature as Accumulation Strategy” *Socialist Register* 43: 16-36.

Smith, Neil.2008. *Uneven Development. Nature, Capital and the production of space.* Athens-Georgia: University of Georgia Press

Soulé, Michael & Reed Noss, 1998. „Rewilding and Biodiversity: Complementary Goals for Continental Conservation” *Wild Earth.*

Spence, Mark David. 1999. *Dispossessing the Wilderness. Indian Removal and the Making of the National Parks.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Swyngedow, Eric. 2013. “The Non-Political Politics of Climate Change” *ACME* 12(1):1-8

Stahl, Henri. 1998. *Contirbuții la Studiul Satului Devălmaș.* București: Cartea Romaneasca.

Stanciu, Erika. 2015. “From the Retezat National Park to Europe’s Yellowstone” *Annals of Faculty of Engineering Hunedoara* 7(2).

Stanciulescu, Cristian D. 2013. *Făgetele virgine din România în context european sub influența schimbărilor climatice.* București

Stapp, William. 1994. *Framing the West. The Survey Photographs of Timothy O’Sullivan*, Smithsonian Museum Exhibition Catalogue.

Stăncioiu, Petru T. 2008. *Padurile cu valoare ridicata de conservare si reteaua ecologica Natura2000.* Bucharest: WWF Danube-Carpathian Programme.

Stănciulescu, Stanciu & Ion Stănciulescu. 2006. *Aref. Monografia Satului.* Curtea de Arges: Editura Arefeana.

Stupariu, Ileana et al. 2013. “Using forest history and spatial patterns to identify potential high conservation value forests in Romania” *Biodiversity and Conservation 22: 2023-2039.*

Suciu, Suciu. 2017 “Padurile virgine ale Romaniei au intrat in patrimonial UNESCO. Defrisarile sunt interzise.” *Adevarul 9 July 2017* available online:- https://adevarul.ro/locale/brasov/padurilevirgine-romaniei-intrat-patrimoniul-unesco-defrisarile-strictinterzise-1_5961f9aa5ab6550cb8ef5c56/index.html

Sullivan, Sian. 2009. “Green Capitalism and the Cultural Poverty of Constructing Nature as a Service Provider” *Radical Anthropology* 3: 18-27.

Sullivan, Sian. 2017. “Noting some effects of fabricating Nature as Natural Capital” *The Ecological Citizen.* 1(1):65-73.

Sullivan, Sian. 2018. “Making nature investable: from legibility to leverageability in fabricating ‘nature’ as a ‘natural capital’” *Science and Technology Studies* 31(3): 47-76.

Szulecka, Julia and Kacper Szulecki. 2017. “Polish Environmental Movement 1980-2017.” *ESPRi Working Paper.*

Tănăsescu, Mihnea. 2017. “Fieldnotes on the Meaning of Rewilding” *Ethics, Policy & Environment.* 20(3): 333-349.

Tănăsescu, Mihnea. 2019. “Restorative Ecological Practice: The case of the European Bison in the Southern Carpathians, Romania” *Geoforum* 105 doi 10.1016/j.geoforum.2019.05.013

Tudoran, & Mihai Zotta. 2018. “Spruce monocultures alder galleries in Sud Eastern side of the Fagaras Mountains, Facts, Experiment and Follow up in management Planning for Natura 2000 Sites” paper presented at the *Conference Fagaras Mountains. An Inventory towards a new National Park*, Bucharest, Institute of Biology.

Turner, James M. 2012. *The promise of wilderness: American Environmental Politics since 1964.* University of Washington Press.

Turnhout, Esther et al. 2016. “What does policy-relevant global environmental knowledge do? The Case of climate and biodiversity” *Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability*. 18: 65-72.

Turnhout, Esther et al. 2019. *Environmental Expertise. Connecting Science, Policy and Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Turnhout, Esther. 2018. “The Politics of Environmental Knowledge.” *Conservation and Society* 16(3): 363-371.

Urban, Sergiusz. 2016. “Wilderness protection in Poland” Pp:409-431 in *Wilderness Protection in Europe* edited by Kees Bastmeijer. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vasile, Monica. 2007. “Decentralisation as an aid to enhancing corruption in Romanian Forests” in *Proceedings of the Conference of American Anthropological Association* Washington, DC, 29 November-3 December 2007.

Vasile, Monica. 2008. "Nature conservation, conflict and discourses on forest management: communities and protected areas in Meridional Carpathians" *Sociologie Românească* 3-4:87-100

Vasile, Monica. 2009. "Corruption in Romanian Forestry. Morality and local practice in the context of privatization" *Revista Romana de Sociologie* 20(1-2):105-120.

Vasile, Monica. 2015. „The Role of Memory and Identity in the Obștea Forest Commons of Romania" in *Patterns of Commoning* edited by David Bollier and Silke Helfrich. Amherst (MA): The Commons Strategies Group

Vasile, Monica. 2018a. „Formalizing the commons, registering rights. The making of the forest and pasture commons in the Romanian Carpathians." *International Journal of the Commons,* 12(1):170-201.

Vasile, Monica. 2018b. „The Vulnerable Bison: Practices and Meaning of Rewilding in the Romanian Carpathians" *Conservation and Society* 16(3): 217-231.

Vasile, Monica. 2019. *Forest and pasture commons in Romania. Country Report*, ICCA Consortium.

Veen, Peter et al. 2010. "Virgin forests in Romania and Bulgaria: results of two national inventory projects and their implications for protection" *Biodiversity Conservation* 19: 1805-1819.

Verdery, Katherine. 2003. *The Vanishing Hectare. Property and Value in Postsocialist Transylvania* Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Vesalon, Lucian. 2017. *Ecologia Politica a Postcomunismului.* Timișoara: Editura Universității de Vest.

Vijulie, Iuliana et al. 2013. "Forest Management in the Piatra Craiului National Park between economic benefits and ecosystem services." *Conference volume: The 5th Symposium for research in protected areas,* Mittersill, Austria.

WCPA. 2016. *Wilderness Protected Areas: Management guidelines for IUCN Category 1b protected areas*. Best Practice Protected Area Guidelines Series No.25 available online https://portals.iucn.org/library/sites/library/files/documents/PAG-025.pdf

White, Ben et al. 2012. „The New Enclosures: Critical Perspectives on Corporate Land Deals." *The Journal of Peasant Studies* 39(3-4): 619-647.

WILD10. 2015. *Vision for a Wilder Europe. 2nd Edition.* Available online https://rewildingeurope.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/WILD10-Vison-for-a-Wilder-Europe-2015.pdf

Wilson, Edward O. 2016. *Half-Earth. Our Planet's Fight for Life*. NewYork: Liveright Publishing Corporation.

Zotta, Mihai. 2018. "Natural forest ecosystems – conservation and recostruction" paper presented at the *Conference Fagaras Mountains. An Inventory towards a new National Park*, Bucharest, Institute of Biology.