

SIGHISOARA- TÂRNÂVA MARE

EXPLORING PEOPLE'S VIEWS AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES OF THE NATURA 2000 PROTECTED AREA

SURVEY RESULTS

2024



FULL REPORT

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INTRODUCTION

The Natura 2000 site Sighișoara-Târnava Mare (ROSCI0227) is located in Romania's Centru region and spans about 893 km² within the Continental biogeographical region. It was first proposed as a Site of Community Importance in 2007 and formally confirmed in 2009, with its latest Standard Data Form update in 2020. The site is protected under the Habitats Directive and represents one of the largest designated conservation areas in Romania.

The area is highly diverse, supporting 36 species of European conservation importance. These include amphibians like the yellow-bellied toad and crested newt, mammals such as the wolf, otter, beaver, brown bear, and several bat species, as well as reptiles like the European pond terrapin. Notable invertebrates include the stag beetle, Marsh and Scarce fritillaries, and the Thick-shelled river mussel, while rare plants such as lady's-slipper orchid, *Angelica palustris*, and *Iris aphylla* ssp. *hungarica* are also safeguarded.

In addition to its fauna and flora, the site protects 17 habitat types of community interest. These range from wetlands, lakes, and river galleries to semi-natural grasslands, steppic habitats, and a rich variety of forests such as beech, oak-hornbeam, and alluvial woodlands. Together, these ecosystems form a mosaic of landscapes that support high biodiversity and preserve traditional land-use patterns, making Sighișoara-Târnava Mare a key area for nature conservation in Central Romania.

METHODS



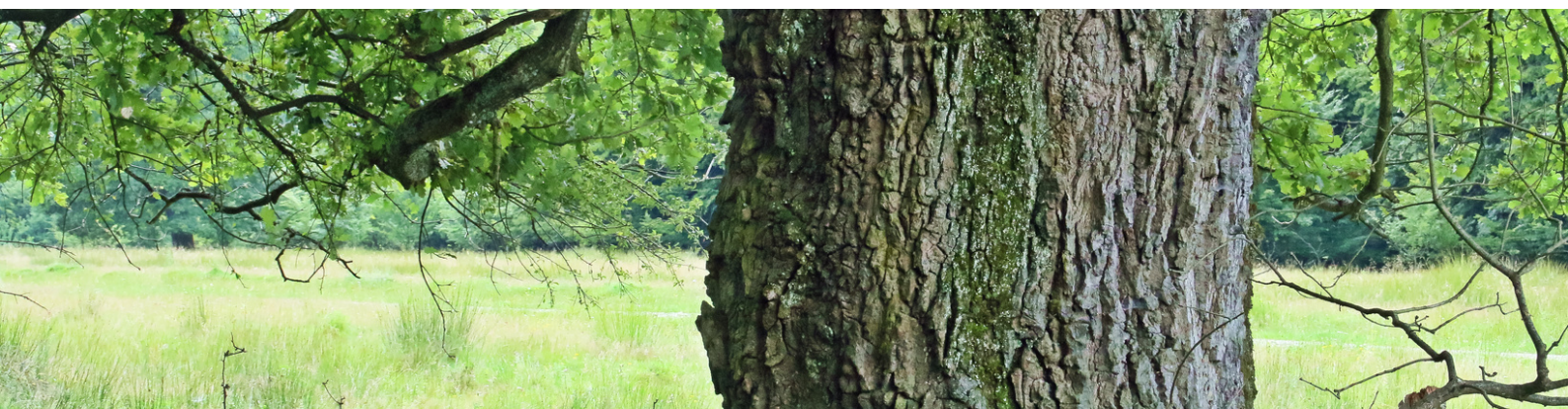
In order to explore people's views on Sighișoara-Târnava Mare, we used the Social Impact Assessment Tool for Protected Areas (SOCIAT), which has been developed by researchers at the University of Warwick and the University of Cambridge in collaboration with several park authorities across Europe. This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

The questionnaire was distributed initially in 2019 to local communities living near the protected area. The distribution of the questionnaires was conducted by colleagues from the local NGO Fundatia ADEPT in Romania, who are familiar with the protected area and had conducted social research work in the past. The questionnaire was mainly distributed face-to-face and was subsequently coded in an Excel spreadsheet. A second round of the SOCIAT survey was conducted in 2023 to explore the change of perceptions through time. The questionnaires were distributed to the same individuals by Fundatia ADEPT.

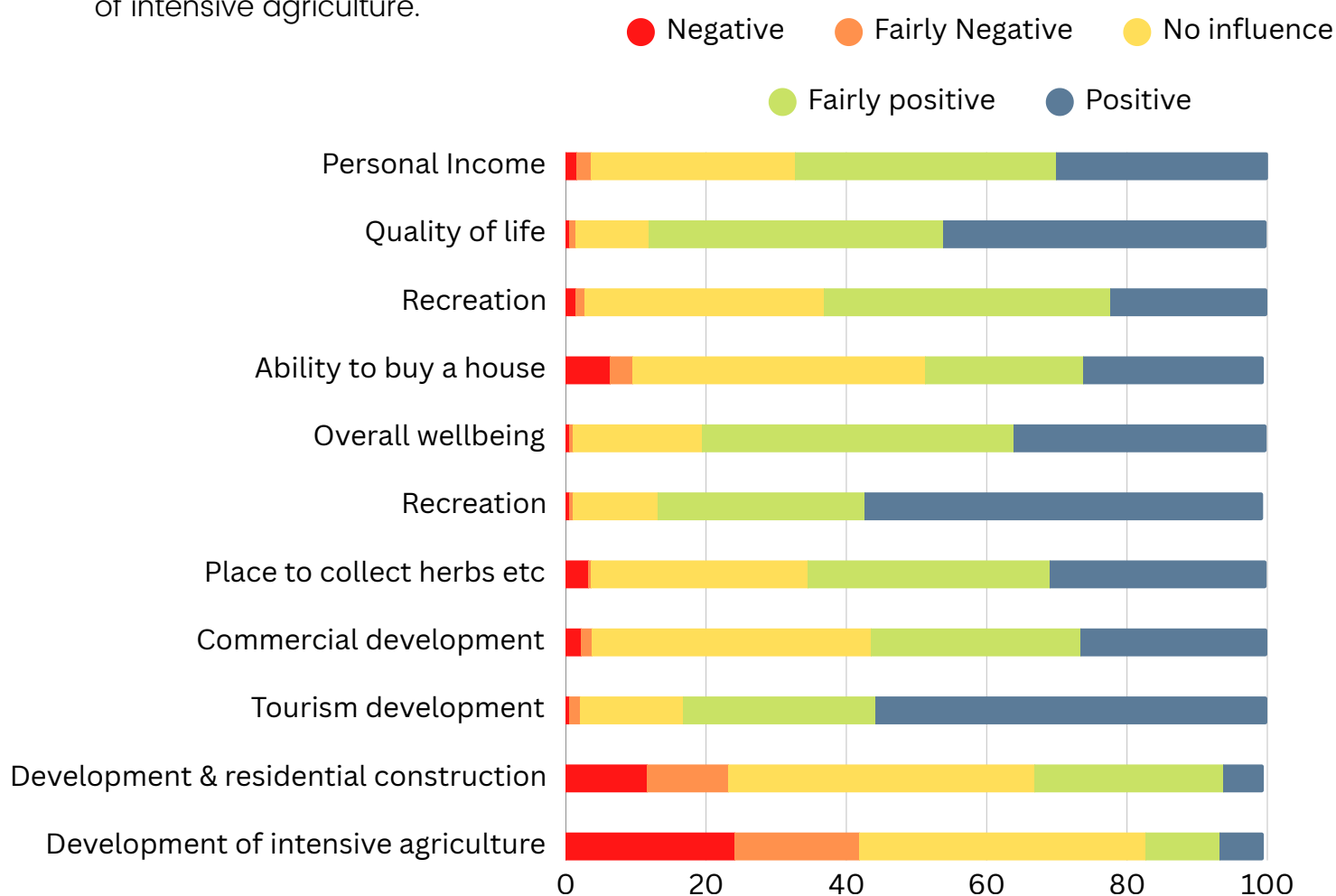
In total, 200 responses were received in both surveys. Demographics in the 2019 survey were as follows: 91.8% of respondents were permanent residents and 2.6% owned holiday homes. 48.2% of respondents were female and 51.8% male. 4.1% had completed primary education, 55% had finished secondary school and 27.6% had finished higher education. The age groups breakdown is: 10.5% (18-25), 19% (26-35), 22% (36-45), 25.5% (46-55), 9.5% (56-65), 12% 66-75 and 1.5% was over 76. 86% of respondents stated in the initial survey that they were planning to stay in the area.

RESULTS

SOCIAL OUTCOMES



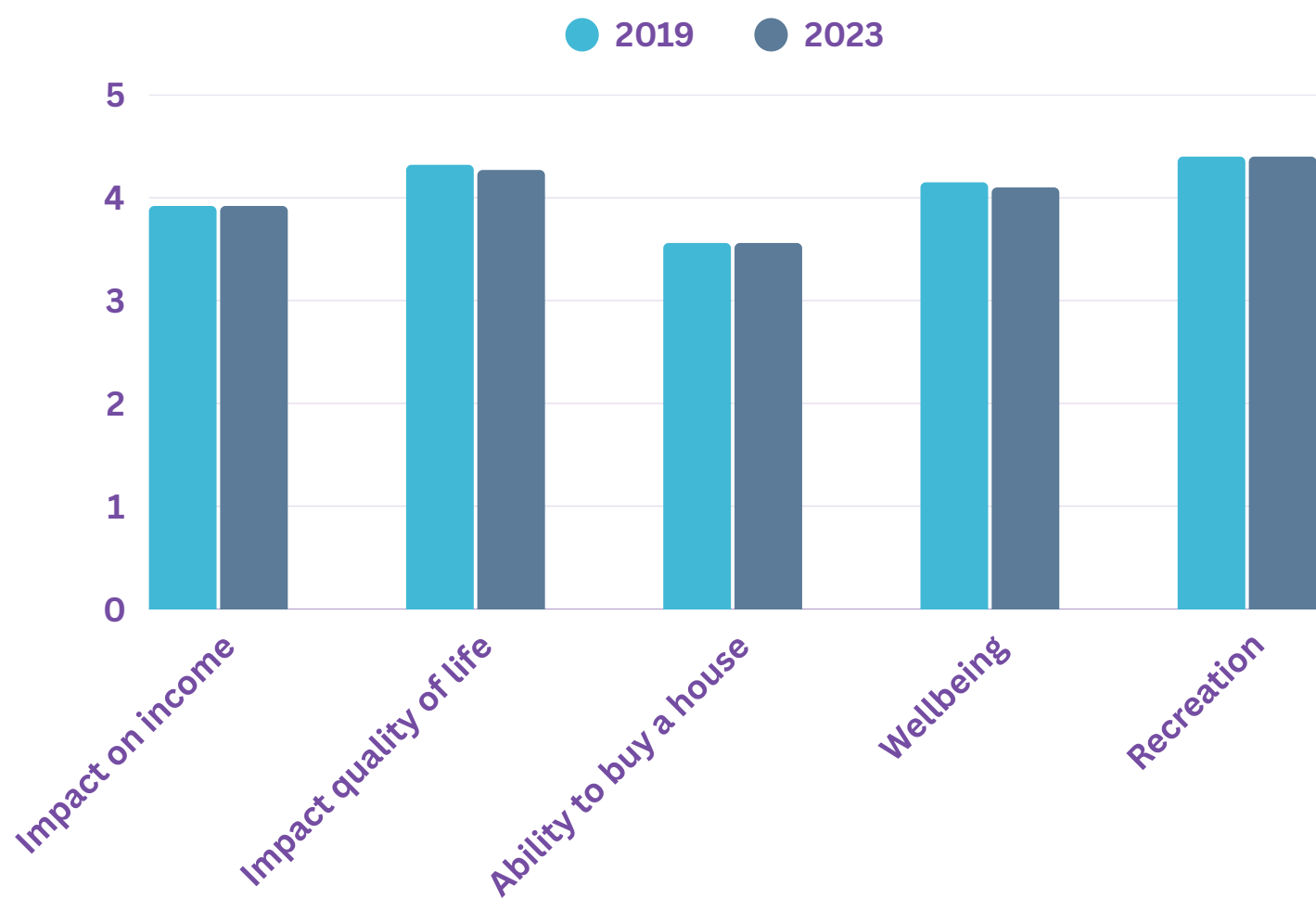
Several outcomes from the protected area were deemed significant by the participants. Notably, recreation, tourism development and quality of life were highlighted, with around 50% of the sample indicating a positive or fairly positive influence from the protected area on these aspects. More neutral impact is noted on residential construction while it is notable that the impact on personal income is considered positive or fairly positive by more than half of the sample. The most negative impact was considered by respondents on the development of intensive agriculture.



CHANGE OF SOCIAL OUTCOMES THROUGH TIME

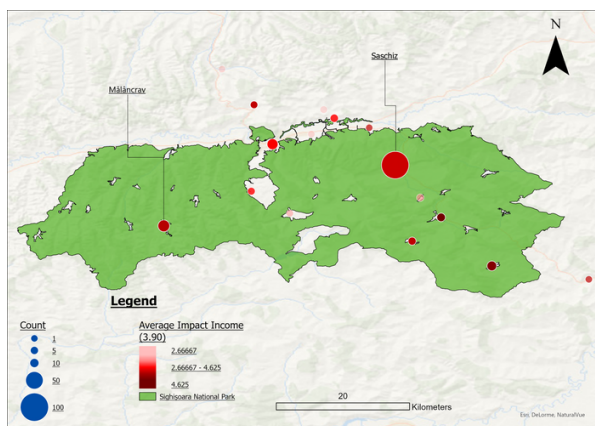


When comparing some key categories of impacts between the 2019 and the 2023 surveys, no major changes are noted in the responses of the participants. Perceptions of all social impacts remained the same, and no statistically significant differences were noted.

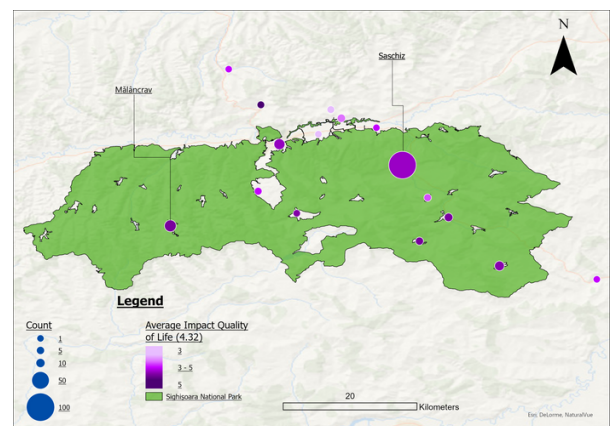


DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL OUTCOMES

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

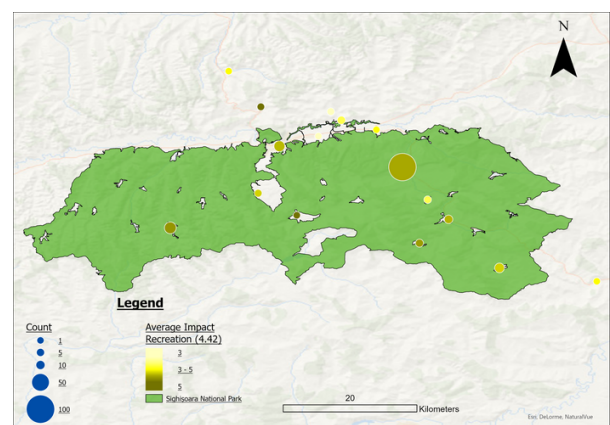


Spatial distribution of impact on personal income



Spatial distribution of impact on quality of life

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

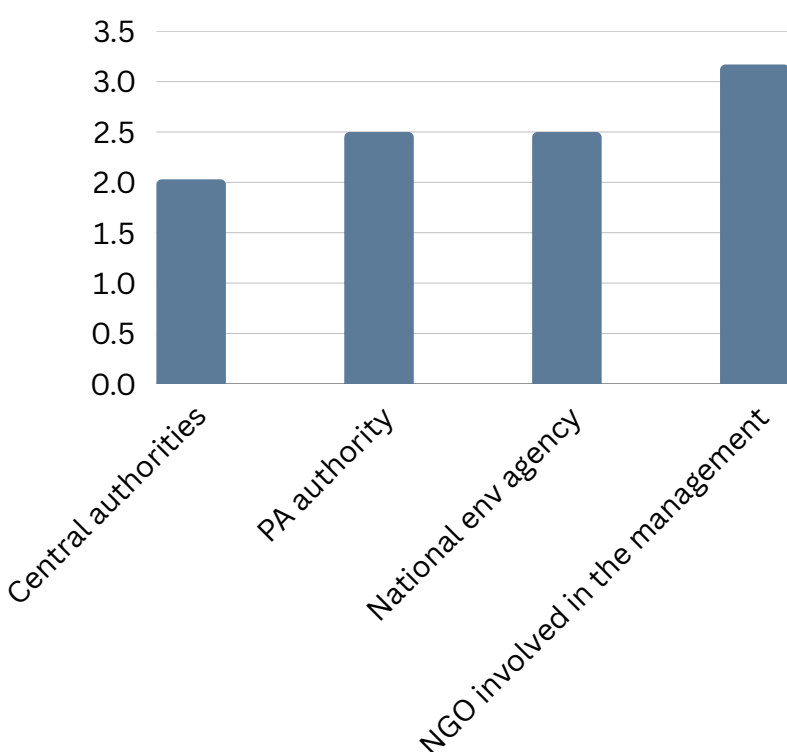
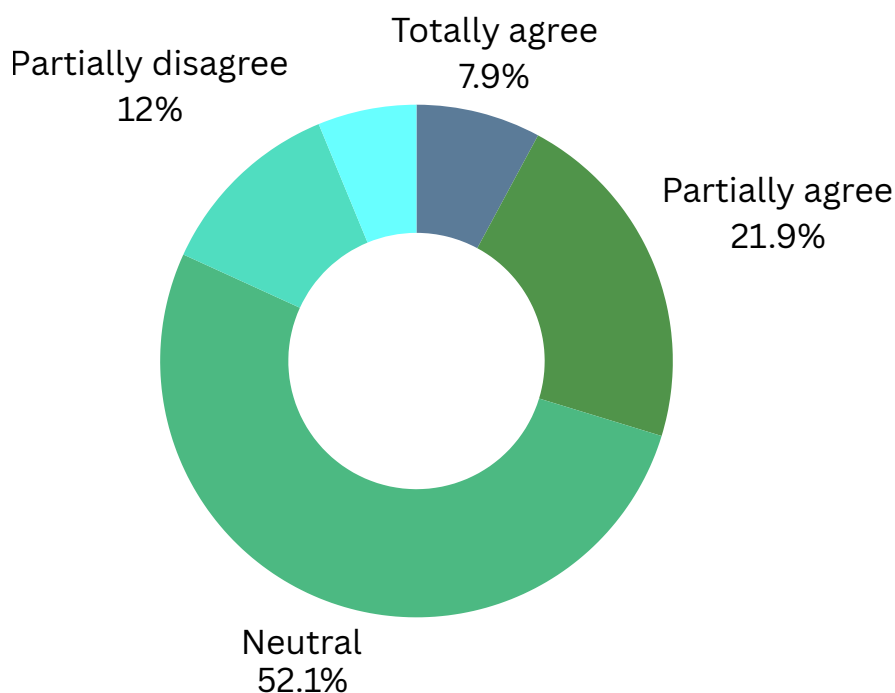


Spatial distribution of impact on recreation

GOVERNANCE & TRUST IN INSTITUTIONS

Around 20% of respondents mentioned participating in an activity in the past two years, helping to conserve the biodiversity in the protected area. Participants were also asked about their availability of time, financial resources, and opportunities to participate in protected area-related initiatives. About 50% expressed a neutral opinion, with 20% of the sample saying that they have sufficient resources to engage in these activities.

Level of agreement: I have enough time, money and opportunities to support the NATURA 2000 protected area

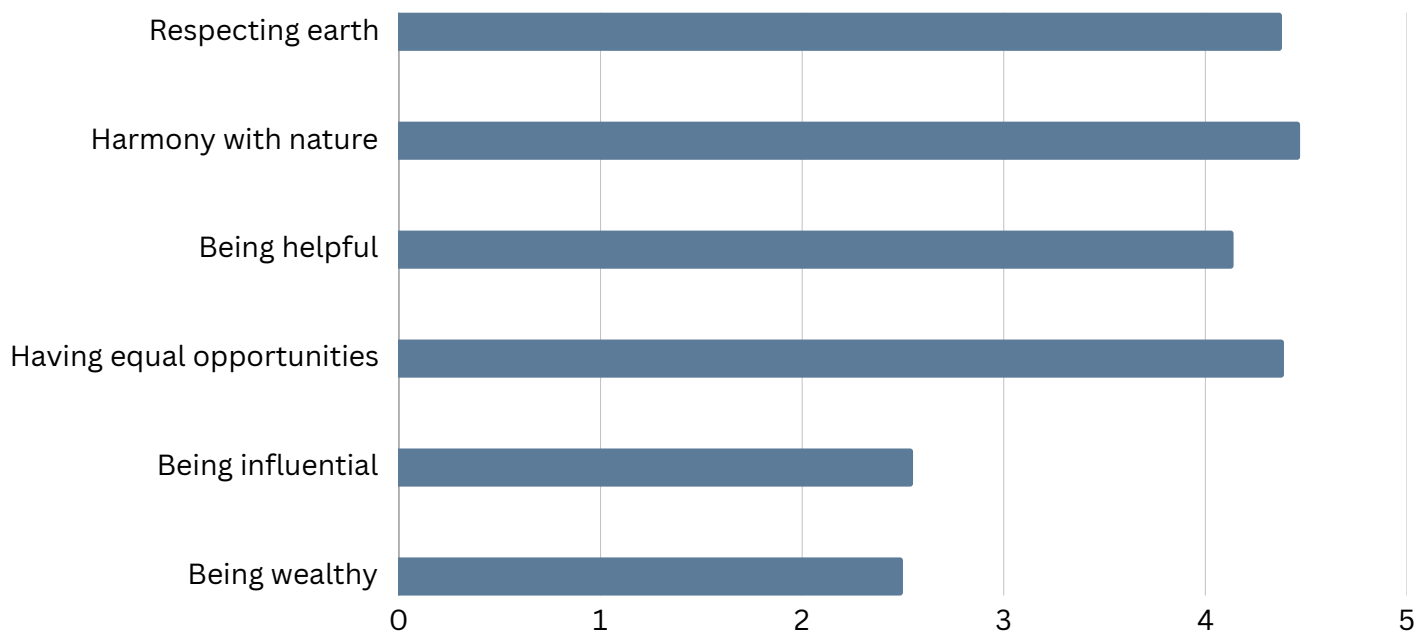


Participants were also asked about their level of trust in four institutions linked to the management of the protected area. They rated their trust on a Likert scale, with 1 indicating the lowest and 4 the highest level of trust. The central government received relatively lower trust ratings, while NGO involved in the management of the Protected Area (PA) received the highest.

SOCIAL, ENVIRONMENTAL AND PLACE VALUES

A set of questions explored social, environmental and place values of local communities in the Sighișoara-Târnava Mare area. These questions were measured on a 5-point Likert Scale with 5 representing the highest agreement. Relatively high environmental values were recorded, with the mean score for the importance of respecting the earth being 4.38 and living in harmony with nature being 4.47. Being helpful and having equal opportunities also had high scores (4.14 and 4.39, respectively). Egoistic values, such as being influential and being wealthy, were considered less important by respondents.

Approximately 70% of participants said that the area of Sighișoara-Târnava Mare means a lot to them (strong place attachment)

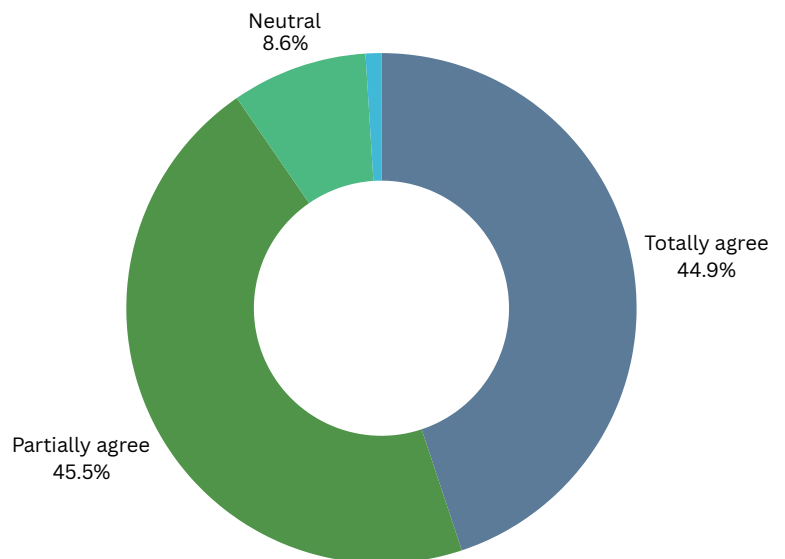


PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR SIGHIȘOARA-TÂRNAVA MARE PROTECTED AREA

Respondents were asked how much they agree with the existence of the protected area. 44.9% totally agreed with the existence of the NATURA 2000 area, and 45.5% partially agreed. Only 1% of respondents stated that they fully disagree with the existence of the area.



**Over 80% of
participants support
the existence of the
Sighișoara-Târnava
Mare NATURA 2000
protected area**



CONCLUSIONS

The report on Sighișoara-Târnava Mare explores how local communities perceive the social outcomes of the Natura 2000 protected area, drawing on surveys conducted in 2019 and 2023 as part of the project FIDELIO. Using the SOCIAT tool, researchers assessed a number of impacts, including quality of life, income, recreation, and intensive farming. The survey also captured environmental values, trust in institutions, and levels of public support to understand further the context within which social outcomes are perceived.

Results show that the protected area is widely valued, with more than 80% of respondents supporting its existence and nearly 90% agreeing, either totally or partially, with its importance. Respondents identified positive influences on quality of life, recreation opportunities, and tourism. The strongest negative perceptions are related to restrictions on intensive agriculture. Importantly, there were no statistically significant changes in perceptions between the two survey years, suggesting stable views across time despite the significant events that happened during this period (most notably the Covid-19 pandemic).

In addition to social outcomes, the study highlights the role of governance and trust in shaping attitudes toward the protected area. Trust levels were highest in NGOs involved in management, while central authorities were rated lower. A significant proportion of respondents reported strong attachment to the area, and values emphasizing harmony with nature and environmental stewardship were rated highly. However, only about one in five respondents had actively participated in biodiversity conservation activities, and roughly half felt neutral about their available time, resources, or opportunities to contribute more. This indicates both a willingness to support conservation and a gap in enabling participation more effectively.

The findings suggest that building on the local support for Sighișoara-Târnava Mare, future efforts could focus on deepening community engagement, strengthening trust in institutions, and linking conservation more closely with local economic opportunities. Encouraging participation through volunteer programs, co-management initiatives, and public engagement events could improve a sense of ownership and shared responsibility. Careful planning will be essential to balance conservation goals with economic development, ensuring that any further tourism development avoids overuse and remains sensitive to the site's ecological capacity and local cultural context.

SIGHIȘOARA- TÂRNAVA MARE

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