



Tourism Management

Brown Bear Conservation in Slovakia: Tourism Opportunity or Threat?

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ABSTRACT

Brown bears are beneficial to ecosystems around the world. However, brown bear populations are declining and conservation efforts are needed to conserve bears. In Slovakia, stable and slightly expanding population prolong negative attitudes toward these species. In many cases, tourism efforts have led to improving attitudes and species viability and these examples suggest that bear tourism has a potential to conserve bear populations while providing social and economic benefits to local people in Slovakia. The paper focuses primarily on a thorough research related to the conservation of brown bear and bear tourism in Slovakia. Special attention has been paid to ecotourism, wildlife watching tourism and recreational hunting tourism. Literature review of the research adopts an existing definition of both, consumptive and non-consumptive wildlife tourism, summarises the ecological importance of brown bear species and provides an overview of the existing wildlife tourism initiatives. Information based on examples of bear conservation initiatives which using tourism to change attitudes toward bears is presented and some existing examples of destinations which are attracting tourists to view bears are discussed. The result suggest that existing demand for bear tourism in Slovakia needs further development and support at regional and national level.

Keywords: tourism, brown bear, ecotourism, wildlife watching, recreational hunting, conservation, recreation

1. INTRODUCTION

Brown bears are charismatic species; however the conservation of brown bears is difficult and expensive business in our modern, crowded world. The past decade has seen uneasy relationship with bears due to the conflicts with human interests (Linnel, Salvatori and Boitani, 2008). The brown bear is a species with large spatial requirements, low reproductive rates and is very sensitive to habitat loss and to human disturbance especially in the winter (Selva et al., 2011). In Europe, infrastructure projects such as road construction, land privatization and tourism development like ski resorts threaten the important ecosystems (Wildlife Extra, 2008). Large Carnivores such as brown bears are central species for conservation effort and are managed for their fundamental ecosystem value. Their presence protects all key species, bigger and smaller, flora and fauna. They even safeguard our wellbeing as the quality of nature provides oxygen and we cannot live without it (Muskwa Wild, 2011). Consequently, in recent years there has been an increasing interest in brown bear conservation by many researchers. To promote education and raise public awareness, national parks and some non-governmental organisations help to spread the knowledge about bears (Klenzendorf and Vaughan, 1999). So far, however there has been little discussion about brown bear conservation in Slovakia and tourism programmes. Large carnivores are already used by some conservationists as powerful symbols to promote conservation and to attract visitors. Wildlife tourism has been described as one of the form of relationship between humans and animals and connections with the natural world (Newsome, Dowling and Moore, 2005). Fennel (2008) writes that wildlife tourism is often represented in the context of its economic contribution to conservation initiatives as well as to communities.

1. 1. RESEARCH AIM

The aim of this paper is to examine wildlife tourism in Slovakia and to determine how the presence of bears can be turned into a benefit for local communities through the development of wildlife tourism. The research tries to explore this tourism niche market, to identify benefits and limits of the activity and set some principles and guidance to the sector, in order to reduce environmental impacts and maximise benefits, both to the communities and the conservation of species. In the areas of conservation ecology and wildlife management are ongoing tensions, however, it is worth considering value of both, consumptive and non-consumptive wildlife tourism.

1. 2. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The primary objectives of this paper are to research the theme of brown bear conservation in Slovakia and tourism opportunities within this activity.

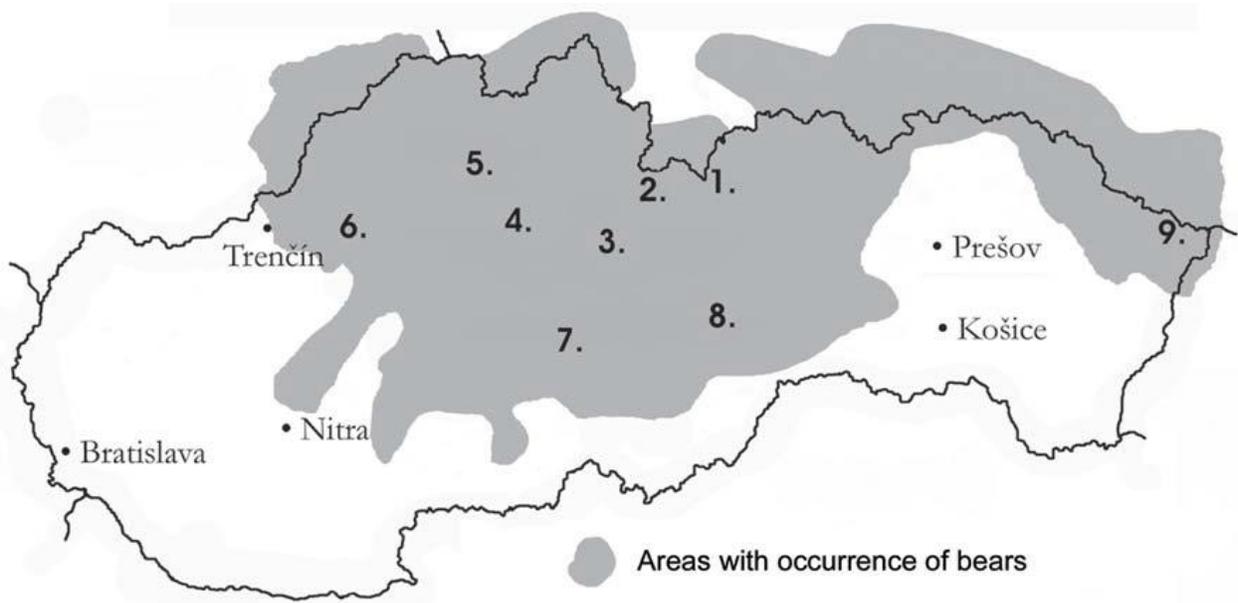
- How big is potential for specialist wildlife watching holidays in Slovakia? Is the demand growing or declining?
- Can tourism activities of this type contribute to the conservation of brown bear?
- Is there an opportunity for recreational hunting tourism?

To answer these questions, the first section of this paper will review the theme of wildlife tourism, its definition and forms, and will find examples of successful wildlife tourism undertaken elsewhere and potentially applicable to Slovakia. The methods used in this research include examination of the literature, with a particular focus on brown bear conservation and tourism activities. The researcher used interviews with existing bear tourism initiatives in Slovakia to examine the current state of demand for and supply of bear tourism in Slovakia. By collecting and analyzing primary and secondary data the main purpose is to understand the relationship between bears and local communities residing in bear habitat and also find out how already existing organisations working to promote benefits of carnivore tourism to local people. Finally, the results of this research

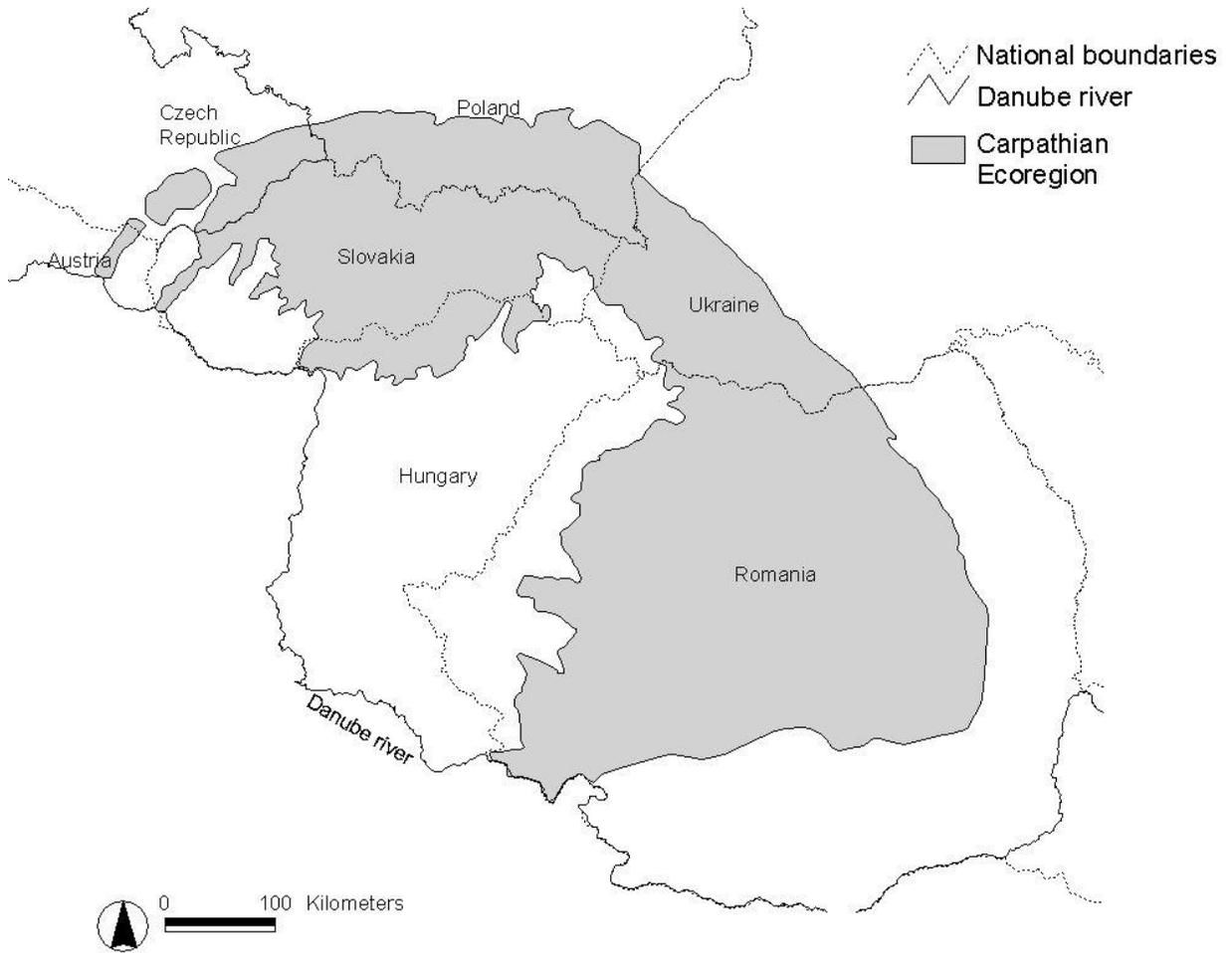
will help to make recommendations such as how wildlife tourism programme could be introduced in Slovakia.

1. 3. STUDY AREA

The area of the study is Slovakia and Carpathian Mountains. The Carpathians are the largest chain of mountains in central-eastern Europe. They spread from the Danube River area of Slovakia, northwest of the capital city Bratislava to the Iron Gate on the Romanian Danube at their south-eastern end, covering an area of approximately 200,000km² (Salvatori, 2004). In addition, the Carpathians is a unique ecosystem with exceptionally high biological diversity where the largest forested territories of Europe can be found and 44 percent of the mammal species of Europe live here. Also a rich presence of a number of flora and fauna elements and variety of traditional architecture makes the Carpathians vulnerable and endangered (Herianova, Hodge and Kralovicova, 2009). Of the three large predator species in the Carpathians, bears have the most contact with humans. In some parts of the Carpathians the bear density is approximately one bear in every 10km² (Wildlife Extra, 2008).



(Source: Betkova and Rigg, 2006)



(Source: Salvatori, 2004)

This paper will review the research conducted on brown bear tourism in Slovakia and its tallest mountains High Tatras. The National Park is situated in the north of the country and became the most interesting in central Europe (Slovakia.travel., 2012). According to Styles (2011), High Tatras National Park is one of the last places where the visitors can be faced with chamois – a critically endangered species of antelope along with brown bears, marmots and ample bird species. The Tatra National Park provides excellent opportunities for eco-tourists, with its outstanding scenery, wildlife, wilderness, beautiful lakes, rivers and forests.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. THE IMPORTANCE FOR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION

One of the most significant current challenges in wildlife protection and management is to find a solid, rational justification for why nature should be protected from human actions. Most conservationists argue that biological diversity is valuable and that the extinction of species should be avoided (Paterson, 2006). The author analyses different value approaches for wildlife conservation. The detailed examination of instrumental-anthropocentric value is explained that wild species are only good inasmuch as they are "good for something". Such value may be economic value for tourism, hunting and live sale, or aesthetic value in that they contribute to the diversity and beauty of the planet. Furthermore, European Commission (2011) in its EU Biodiversity Strategy 2020 states, that nature-based innovation and action to restore ecosystems and conserve biodiversity can create new skills, jobs and business opportunities. Milton (2002) in her major study about meaning of the nature asked a question why non-human animals should, or should not be considered important. The author made a valid point, claiming that non-human nature matters because we depend on it for our own survival and well-being. This point leads us to intrinsic value in wildlife. The nature and wildlife provokes a deep sense of well being, contributing to spiritual fulfilment and psychological health (Curtin,

2009). Kellert (1994) in table 1 describes basic wildlife values which broadly influence how people perceive a particular species.

Table 1: Basic wildlife values

TERM	DEFINITION
Aesthetic	Primary focus on the physical attractiveness and symbolic appeal of animals
Dominionistic	Primary emphasis the mastery and control of wildlife, typically in sporting situations
Ecologicistic	Primary focus on strong affection for individual animals such as large wildlife species and natural habitats
Humanistic	Primary focus on strong affection for individual animals such as large wildlife species with strong anthropomorphic associations
Naturalistic	Primary emphasis on the direct experience of wildlife in an outdoor recreational setting
Negativistic	Primary orientation an avoidance of wildlife due to indifference, dislike or fear
Scientistic	Primary focus on the physical attributes and biological functioning of animals
Utilitarian	Primary emphasis on the practical value of wildlife or the habitat associated with wild animals

(Adapted from: Kellert, 1994)

2. 2. WILDLIFE TOURISM

Today, tourism marketing sees wildlife as a niche market and the modern tourism experience. As stated by Tapper (2006) in the the study of the United Nations Environmental Programme, wildlife watching tourism is a significant source of income and employment for a growing number of communities. Sanderson (2006) also points out, that animals provide non-consumptive economic benefits to people. Wildlife is seen as a provider of tourism opportunities which contribute to local and national economies by generating revenue directly from user fees, guide services, food sales and accommodation rentals.

Ecotourism and wildlife watching tourism is favoured particularly in developing countries with emphasize on the value of conservation. However, many European countries facing the problem of ecosystem loss and species decline. As the study suggested, it is vital for destinations to protect their natural environment where well planned and effective

management is needed to protect wildlife resources. In the late 1980s the world became aware of sustainable and global ecological practices (Coria and Calfucura, 2011). The definition of ecotourism emerged from this recognition. Hill and Gale (2009) highlighted three main criteria of ecotourism:

- Attractions are predominantly nature-based
- Attractions are focused on learning and education
- Management of the attractions follows principles and practices associated with ecological, socio-cultural and economic sustainability

According to Newsome, Dowling and Moore (2005) wildlife tourism is generally nature based which involves ecotourism's key principles. However, Reynolds and Braithwaite (2001) in their framework for wildlife tourism listed wider range of wildlife tourism composed of:

- Nature based tourism with wildlife component – wildlife as a key but incidental part of the product
- Locations with good wildlife opportunities – some accommodation establishments are located in close proximity to wildlife-rich habitat
- Artificial attractions based on wildlife – species is kept in captivity, and may even be trained
- Specialist animal watching – such tours cater for specialist interests in species or group of species
- Habitat specific tours – tours are based on a habitat rich in wildlife and usually being accessed by a specialised vehicle or vessel
- Thrill-offering tours – the exhibition of a dangerous or large species attracted in spectacular behaviour in the wild by the operator
- Hunting-Fishing tours – consumptive use of wildlife in natural habitat, semi-captive or farmed conditions

During the past 20 years much more information has become available on sustainable development in tourism sector, which purpose is to sensitively use and conserve resources in order to maintain their long-term viability (Weaver, 2006). In addition,

sustainable tourism is based on criteria which are ethically and socially equitable for the local communities. Therefore, ecotourism and wildlife tourism refers to a segment within the tourism sector, while sustainable tourism should be applied to all tourism sectors, according to the author. Higginbottom and Tribe (2004) made a valid point that wildlife tourism is essential not only to the conservation of the animals but also to the sustainability of business involved, that the effects of tourism on wildlife are not negative. However, critics have also argued that tourism has also negative impacts on wildlife such as displacement, accidental killing and disruption of feeding and breeding. Some examples, such as case of Bengal tiger in India showed that unregulated tourism was as much threat to the tiger as hunting. Furthermore, there is no estimate on what tourism sector has contributed to conservation of the species (Goodwin, 2011). Despite this, wildlife watching directly involves tourists as well as operators in wildlife management or research. In recent years there are a growing number of organisations, principally not-for-profit organisations offering conservation holidays (Valentine and Birtles, 2004). Fennel (2008) mentions non-government organisations (NGOs) as important aspect in the development and delivery of ecotourism. According to the author, these groups are more education or ecology centred rather than profit centred when compared to the private sector. However, as stated by Reynolds and Braithwaite (2001), conservation is only as strong as its community support. Therefore, if indigenous people are given opportunities to benefit directly from the biodiversity, they presumably have a motivation to stop external threats to the biodiversity (Coria and Calfucura, 2011).

2. 3. THE CONSERVATION OF BROWN BEAR AND TOURISM

The brown bear (*Ursus Arctos*) is the most widespread bear in the world with a distribution in Europe, Asia and North America traversing from northern arctic tundra to dry desert habitats (Swenson et al., 2000). Biologically, bears are large-bodied members of the mammalian order Carnivora, family Ursidae (Servheen, Herrero and Peyton, 1999). According to the study done by authors brown bears originally occurred throughout Europe but later disappeared from most areas as the human population grew. Over the past decades people's attitudes towards brown bear has been divided

between fascination and fear. These large carnivores always bring to mind a sense of awe in human beings for their strength and intelligence. As stated by Zedrosser, Gerstl and Rauer (1999), the introduction of agriculture became a main threat for brown bear population. People were afraid of the devastating effect which these animals could have on their crops; hence bears were hunted continuously through all of Europe. Data from several sources have identified that in some places bears were completely eliminated or pushed back into the densely wooded highlands, away from human population (Nellemann et al., 2007, Enserink and Vogel, 2006). Today, the environmental movement is giving these animals a new chance for survival due to the fact that bears are important indicator of ecosystem health wherever they are found (Servheen, Herrero and Peyton, 1999). The authors highlight that bear conservation helps to conserve healthy watershed, natural ecosystems and species diversity. Also Breitenmoser (1998, p.285) draws our attention to ecological importance of large carnivores. Top predators are believed to be keystone species in an ecosystem as they control large herbivore populations which in turn-if the predators are missing tend to overgraze their habitat with fatal consequences for the ecosystem. According to the Pan Parks News (2012), scientists from Oregon State University published a research on the loss of large predators like brown bears or wolves causes a great increase in the population of large herbivores. This new research makes clear how large predators can help maintain native plant communities by keeping large herbivore populations in check, allow small trees to survive and grow. Their presence contributes to the health of forests, streams, fisheries and other wildlife. The Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats suggested action plan where one of the goal is to conserve the present viable brown bear populations in Europe and allow them to expand into suitable habitat and also reduce the conflict between brown bears and humans. The plan is to promote activities that secure a positive public attitude toward brown bears (Zedrosser et al., 2001). As stated by Promberger (2001), the political development within the European Union creates new and promising opportunities for the successful management of large carnivore populations on European wide scale. According to the author, The Carpathian Large Carnivore Project is the integrated management approach which overall target is to establish a community-based conservation of large carnivores

and their habitat. However, conflict with humans is a main problem in brown bear conservation worldwide (Swenson et al., 2000). Such conflicts usually involve livestock farmers and bee keepers but also injuries of humans. The authors suggest system of compensation as one of the most important steps in helping mitigate the conflict between farmers and brown bear. The conservation of brown bear calls for active management such as reintroduction, translocation or hunting (Linnel, Salvatori and Boitani, 2008). However, Promberger (2001) claims, that the management and conservation of brown bear must propose new strategies to secure carnivore conservation in the long-term on a large scale. The author has reported that eco and wildlife tourism based programmes are significant contributors of funding for research and management activities and create public support for ecological land-use planning and conservation activities. Furthermore, Woodroffe, Thirgood and Rabinowitz (2005) point out that the use of wildlife to generate revenue with aim to achieve conservation and local economic development has been main goal of many conservation organizations. In brown bear management, bears are symbol of the richness of nature, therefore, communities can use bear presence to increase the value through ecotourism promotion (Shackley, 1996). Carnivore advocates say, that Europe as a whole could take some lessons from Austria and Italy. After considerable ups and downs, both countries have learned anew to live with bears (Enserink and Vogel, 2006). Furthermore, the authors point out that tourism experienced significant increase after billing their regions as bear and wolf country. The study, however suffer from the fact that brown bears extinct in Austria. European Wildlife (2012) reported that there is no bear left in the Northern Limestone Alps. Between 1989 and 2010 at least 35 bears have lived in this region but poaching and small founder population caused that Austria has now lost all its bears.

More arguments against ecotourism and wildlife tourism have been summarized by Isaac (2000, pp65). The author argues that efforts to protect natural areas through ecotourism may be ineffective if government ignore the social and political problems that contribute to environmental degradation. If governments do not use their power to address these problems, the power of ecotourism to enhance environmental protection will be limited.

2. 3. 1. ROMANIA CASE STUDY

The Romanian Carpathians are home to 35% of the European brown bear population, estimated at about 4000 animals (Wildlife Extra, 2008). Romania is also one of the few European countries in which the rural landscape is well preserved over time in its original form (Dinu, Cioaca, Ratiu and Pscut, 2011). According to the study done by authors, Romania which possesses 55% of the entire length of the Carpathian chain together with the other six Carpathian countries is taking part in the international program "The Carpathian EcoRegion Initiative". Also The Association of Ecotourism in Romania has achieved a partnership for nature conservation and tourism development among tourism associations, non-governmental associations acting in local development and nature conservation, nature conservation projects and travel agencies. Therefore, the innovative idea promoted by the association is to bring together the public and the private sector in a partnership for nature conservation and sustainable tourism development (Discover Eco-Romania, 2011). One of the members of the Association of Ecotourism in Romania is Absolute Carpathian, a local tour operator which offers an unforgettable Romanian experience for those interested in brown bear and other large carnivores. The watching tours are based on high quality services provided by local experienced and hospitable people. The package and tailor-made tours with special focus on bear watching both in special observation facilities and in the wild includes environmental projects carried out in collaboration with local communities and insights into the best conservation projects in Romania (Absolute Carpathian, 2008). According to their web-page, the company after four year of work within the Carpathian Large Carnivore Project and its accomplishment in 2003 has decided to share with tourists the experience of tracking and observing wildlife in its natural habitat. The Carpathian Large Carnivore project was a joint initiative of several international and national partners with the overall goal of creating a model area for the conservation of large carnivores in the Southern Carpathians (Carpathian Large Carnivore Project, 2001). By ecotourism activities the company helps to understand the importance of wildlife conservation and continues its work to protect large carnivores and their natural habitats. The Ecotourism programs also help local people get economic benefits from the presence of bear, wolves and lynx. According to Young (2007), the initiative includes organized excursions

that bring groups of visitors into the area, which lead to new custom for local accommodation providers and other businesses. Tourism in Romania is growing thanks to dedicated groups of individuals whose passion for this area is helping to redefine its importance as one of the great surviving wonders of the natural world (Wild Carpathia, 2011). Primary emphasis of the documentary film Wild Carpathia (2011) is the importance of maintaining wild land through tourism. The initiatives help to protect biodiversity which depends on people and protect small scale farming community. In this case, Romania presents a model example of how responsible tourism can help carnivore conservation (WWF-UK, 2000). In accordance to The Anatolian Leopard Foundation (2012), the ecological component involves an investigation into promoting the Romanian Carpathians as Europe's Yellowstone National Park.

Table 2: Carnivore Tourism in Romania

Current Situation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The bears, wolves and lynx in Transylvania programme initiated by Large Carnivore Project
Visitors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 289 visitors in 2000 so far involved in the programme, mainly from Western Europe
Revenue	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1999: \$130.570 of which 53 per cent went to the local community through local tour operator, catering and transport services

(Source: WWF-UK, 2000)

2. 4. RECREATIONAL HUNTING AS A CONSERVATION TOOL

Perhaps, the most controversial issue in conservation is recreational hunting. While hunters insist that their activity is an important conservation tool, some conservationists point on strong ethical concerns raised about morality of hunting for pleasure (Dickson, Hutton and Adams, 2009). Hunting remains an important land use and an essential part of the cultural heritage of many indigenous societies. In European countries hunting continues to be a vital and diverse tradition. Today, Europe is a hunting environment that has more diversity than any other region in the world (Bauer and Giles, 2002). However, the claim that hunting can cause a wide range of impacts on target species has been reported widely in the literature. Many conservationists argue that hunting can cause different levels of disturbance and varieties of hunting methods associated with illegal activities have negative consequences on many non-target species (Bauer and Herr, 2004). Jenkins (2010) argues that recreational hunting can increase the value of wildlife especially in local communities. However, there is no one answer to the impact of recreational hunting on biodiversity conservation as the activity takes place in a wide variety of contexts. For example, European and African countries are very different places with different patterns of social capital, different developmental needs, different pressures and opportunities (Adams et al., 2009). According to the authors, in some contexts, recreational hunting has made a real contribution to conservation of species but in others has been irrelevant or unhelpful.

Brown bears have been both persecuted and valued by people through the centuries. More recently, bears have been valued for trophy hunting and in some areas hunters helped bear populations to survive and recover (Decak et al., 2005). According to the Action Plan for the conservation of the Brown Bear in Europe, legalisation of bear hunting may increase acceptance for bears which helps facilitate the conservation of a viable bear population (Swenson et al, 2000). According to the authors, legally killed bears are often nuisance bears which prey on livestock, visit orchards, apiaries and garbage dumps, or are involved in injuries of humans.

Brown bear is a species listed as endangered by some international regulations, but also as a game species in others. The example is Croatia, where The Brown Bear

Management Plan was approved in 2004. The plans specific objectives include habitat preservation, maintaining a desired bear population level, providing economic benefit for local residents through tourism and hunting (Huber et al., 2008). According to the authors, in Croatia bears are hunted with the hunter on an elevated stand next to a feeding site during the night and full moon. This form of hunting provides a good vantage point for observation, allows for the determination of age and sex, reduces the possibility of wounding a bear, minimizes disturbance of the habitat, provides for the safety of hunters and others and enables better control of harvest. Another report done by Skrbnisek et al (2011) states, that culling is planned in a way that maximises the income from trophy hunting. The income from the trophy hunting has also inspired the local business to ensure more sustainable use of brown bear; therefore they started offering "experience bears" eco-tours. The levy collected from all the profit-making uses of bears is used for population monitoring and research within the bear management. However, in Bulgaria, the establishment of hunting farms in the recent past led to increased international hunting tourism which resulted in disturbances of the structure of populations inhabiting the region (Servheen, Herrero and Peyton, 1999). As stated by Linnel, Swenson and Andersen (2001), large carnivore conservation requires the rapid establishment of effective wildlife management and enforcement structures that either make protection effective or regulate harvest of both large carnivores and their prey at sustainable levels. According to Brainerd (2007), sustainable use of game species maintains the potential of biodiversity and can positively contribute to the conservation of wild populations and also benefit society.

2. 4. 1. BEREZINSKY BIOSPHERE RESERVE CASE STUDY

The great example of sustainable tourism and conservation practice is Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve in Belarus. With the aim of preserving and increasing the number of valuable wild animals, the Berezinsky State Reserve was established in 1925. The tourism program in the area is based on ecological-nature oriented principles. The unique flora and fauna of the Berezinsky Reserve have been preserved thanks to the conservation leadership and by developing the natural environment; its wildlife became

a real model of European nature (Berezinsky Biosphere Reserve, 2012). The reserve organises ecotourism and hunting tourism programs. Ecotourism specializes in observation of species in natural environment since 1994- Their successful marketing strategy in cooperation with French Tourism Agency and French journalists made US\$ 25.000 in less than two months. Western agencies and tourists donated different equipment such as telescopes, binoculars, spotlights as well as recordings of bird and animal sounds, field guides, etc. to the reserve. The reserve gained experience in operating field excursions, tackling organization issues, due corrections were made to the tour programs and schedules (Babitsky, 2002). According to the case study done by Babitsky (2002), the reserve has a valuable experience in organizing hunts for foreign hunters. In 2001 the number of such tours rose to 28, 59 foreign hunters were received; the reserve earned more than US\$ 34 thousand. Alongside with nature protection and scientific research, ecological education is considered a priority in the activities of the reserve. Analysis of results suggests a noticeable increase in the flow of visitors, including those from abroad.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research refers to an information gathering through a variety of methods to describe a concept and then explain relationships between concepts (Robbins, 2008). In the first stage, according to the author, there is an idea, or a question the researcher wants to answer. Secondly, the researcher carries out the plan by collecting and analyzing the information. The question – what do we want to know – presents the development of the purpose of the research. Table 3 displays three theoretical purposes of research:

TABLE 3: Theoretical Purposes of Research

<i>Exploratory Research</i>	Researchers are exploring what is happening, because not much if any is known.
<i>Descriptive Research</i>	Describes what is happening by collecting statistics reported in the news, academic journal articles and government and non-profit reports.
<i>Explanatory Research</i>	Examines why something is happening in attempt to explain why one variable causes change in another.

(Robbins, 2008)

The researcher considered these purposes of research while choosing the methodology approaches. The aim of the research is to explore wildlife tourism opportunity in Slovakia within brown bear conservation initiatives, therefore exploratory research has been undertaken. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) the way of conducting exploratory research is a search of the literature, interviewing 'experts' in the subject or conducting focus group interview.

3. 1. PRIMARY RESEARCH

Bryman (2008) examined quantitative and qualitative primary research. According to the author, quantitative research can be understood as a research strategy that emphasises quantification in the collection and analysis of data. Qualitative research differs from quantitative research strategy in emphasizing words rather than quantification in the collection and analysis of data, the author states. The methods selected are qualitative in nature and this reflects the fact that research is primarily concerning policy issues and the appropriateness of current actions underpinning bear management and tourism. This focus was selected rather than a more demand-based study that would consider visitor motives and experiences that would have employed a more quantitative approach. The research used different qualitative techniques such as expert interviews and case studies. The advantage of qualitative strategy is that it provides a richer and more in-depth understanding of the population under study (Vanderstoep and Johnston, 2009). According to the authors, techniques such as interviews and focus groups allow to the researcher to gain very detailed and specific answers. However, the sample sizes are small and therefore the findings may not generalize to the larger population from which the sample was drawn. In this case, an examination of the organizations offering bear watching projects was undertaken to gain a richer understanding of the diversity of the projects offered in Slovakia, including the relationship between purpose of projects and the nature of organisations offering bear watching opportunities. For its purpose, the analysis of various relevant portals and web-pages also provided substantial amount of data in relation to this type of activities present in Slovakia.

3. 2. SAMPLING

Different authors have described sampling in a variety of ways. Jankowitz (2005, p.202) defines sampling as the deliberate choice of a number of units-the sample- who are to provide the researcher with the data from which will draw conclusions. A variety of strategies from non-probability and probability sampling methods are available, however, the research used accidental sampling which involves the choice of a sample from the

population whose views the research want to discover as Jankowitz (2005) demonstrated.

TABLE 4: Non-probability sampling

Convenience Sampling	The sample that is simply available to the researcher by virtue of its accessibility
Snowball Sampling	The researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people who are relevant to the research topic and then uses these to establish contact with others
Quota Sampling	A sample that reflects a population in terms of the relative proportions of people in different categories, such as gender ethnicity, age groups, socio-economic groups and region of residence

(Source: Bryman, 2008)

Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2005) identify some considerations of non-probability sampling. One of the examples is quota sampling which is type of purposive sampling. In this type, the participants should have a distribution in the population that we can estimate and should also be pertinent to the topic studied. To determine whether bear watching tourism has its demand in Slovakia, the participants were selected on the basis of their activities in this area. A small sample was chosen due to the fact, that only two initiatives in Slovakia using bear watching within their activities. The research focused primarily on expert interviews. The chosen method has been preferred due to the fact that talking to experts is a more efficient and concentrated method of gathering data than for example systematic quantitative surveys (Bogner, Littig and Menz, 2009). It is also evident that by talking to experts, the researcher is able to obtain good results in short period of time.

3. 3. INTERVIEWS

The research used mainly semi-structured and focused interviews. According to Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2009) unstructured interviews are informal and interviewee is given the opportunity to talk freely about the topic area. On the other

hand, focused interview refers to an interview using especially open questions to ask interviewees about a specific situation or event that is relevant to them and of interest to the researcher (Bryman, 2008). One of the objectives of the research was to address the potential of bear tourism in Slovakia, therefore this type of interview helped to understand the attitudes toward this activity. The semi-structured interview is used with the purpose to obtain information about personal, attitudinal material (Jankowitz, 2005). The interviews were conducted with two funders of bear conservation initiatives in Slovakia and the resident hunter with the experience in recreational hunting within their hunting club. Some of them were used on a face-to-face basis; however, due to the long distance between the researcher and interviewees, telephone based and internet-mediated interviews were employed. The advantage of using the internet is significant because the software automatically records the electronic interview, as they are typed in (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). Bryman (2008) states that online answers tend to be more considered and grammatically correct, however, there is also a disadvantage of lack of spontaneity. The interview consisted of a series of e-mails. Firstly, after making contact and obtaining agreement to participate (Appendix 1), the researcher e-mailed a small number of questions to which the participants replied. Secondly, the researcher responded to these ideas asking further questions.

3. 4. DESIGN OF QUESTIONS

After deciding on particular type of interviews, the interview format and type of questions played important role. One of the most important issues in the question design is to decide whether to ask a question in an open or closed format. According to Bryman (2008) the advantage of the open questions is that respondents can answer in their own terms, which is useful for exploring new areas or ones in which the researcher has limited knowledge. In this research, the questions have been chosen with the aim to find out more about tourism programs and brown bear conservation in Slovakia. Special interest has been paid to wildlife tourism and its contribution to brown bear protection. The questions included some background information to the study. The second part of the interview focused on present, past and future perspectives on bear watching tourism

in Slovakia. Vanderstoep and Johnston (2009) recommend using feeling questions as well to ascertain meanings, interpretations and associations. Opinion questions and value questions were used in the interview for the need of comment on recreational hunting tourism in Slovakia.

The main points of the questions were:

- The purpose of bear watching
- The demand for this activity
- The problems and conflicts in brown bear conservation activities in Slovakia
- Recreational hunting opportunity

(See Appendix 2)

3. 5. ETHICAL ISSUES

Ethical codes represent values that have been deliberately adopted in the research process (Bryman, 2008). Therefore, ethics are moral principles, norms or standards of behaviour that guide moral choices about our behaviour and our relationships with others (Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler, 2005). It is vital within the qualitative research methods that harm to participants should be considered when carrying out an interview. Bryman (2008) states, that care need to be taken when findings are being published to ensure that individuals are not identified or identifiable. Ethical issues have been examined within the data gathering and some guidelines followed such as:

- Explanation of the benefits of the study
- Explanation of the participants rights and protection
- Asking permission

(Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler, 2005)

In accordance to the ethical issues mentioned above, the researcher has been following these certain ethical codes. The interviewees were informed about the aims and benefits of the study and gave permission for the interview.

3. 6. SECONDARY RESEARCH

To enrich the information and produce analysis, the secondary data were also helpful. Blumberg, Cooper and Schindler (2008) state, that secondary data have a prominent role in qualitative research. The purpose of using case study from Romania and Belarus in the literature review was to closely look at the example of conservation of brown bear and tourism elsewhere and analyse it within findings of the research. Case study focuses especially on describing, understanding, predicting and controlling the individual, organisation or process (Woodside, 2010). According to the interests and aims of the research the case study has been useful for its validity and reliability in the discussion and findings. Secondary data in the findings chapter consist of data published mainly by Slovak Wildlife Society initiative. Such data included both qualitative and quantitative data. Survey based secondary data refers to data collected using a survey strategy, usually by questionnaires (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill, 2009). The research examined these, to ascertain the attitudes and values of local people in the Tatra area towards brown bear.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

4. 1. CONSERVATION PROGRAMS AND BEAR TOURISM IN SLOVAKIA

The brown bear is the most numerous large carnivore in Slovakia (Rigg and Adamec, 2007) According to the study done by the authors, a limited research on numbers suggest a total of 700-800 individuals inhabiting a range of around 13.000km² and the number appears to be increasing. This has led to an increase of human-bear conflict due to the economic damage but also strengthened sense of fear worsened by sensational media reporting (Rigg and Morley, n.d). Previous studies show that people's attitudes toward, and valuation of large carnivores result in general rural opposition to the central powers in big cities (Ericsson, Bostedt and Kindberg, 2008). Rigg and Adamec (2007) reported that there are clearly divided opinions on how the brown bear population in Slovakia should be managed. The authors claim that favourable public opinion is important aspect in successful management. Wechselberger, Rigg and Betkova (2005) pointed out that income from ecotourism and enthusiasm of ecotourists for wildlife might influence local people's attitudes to carnivores. According to the study done by authors, quite a high proportion of people in Slovakia would like to see a bear or other large carnivore in the wild and those who said they had seen a bear had significantly more positive attitudes toward this species than those who had not. However, the research shows that the public is poorly informed about issues of wildlife conservation management. The knowledge about large carnivores differs significantly by geographical region as people in the control area were surprisingly more knowledgeable than people in the core area. The following part of this paper examines existing initiatives in Slovakia offering bear watching tours and evaluates these activities in the discussion.

4. 1. 1. SLOVAK WILDLIFE SOCIETY

Slovak Wildlife Society was established in 1998 by a group of English people inspired by Slovakia's wildlife but concerned by threats likely to be posed by economic development. The society has since expanded into a multinational initiative which has

been registered in Slovakia as a citizens' association since 2005 (Robin Rigg, 2012). It is a not-for-profit organisation focused on large carnivores such as brown bear, wolf and lynx. The mission of the organisation is to help ensure the long-term survival of these species and their habitats in Slovakia by finding sustainable solutions for co-existence with people. Their programme of sustainable, responsible ecotourism tries to show the value of protecting wildlife and natural habitats, rather than over-exploiting them. According to their website, significant importance in their work has local involvement, volunteering and exchange information and ideas between nationalities (The Slovak Wildlife Society, 2012). The BEARS Project Initiative organises wildlife bear watching holiday with locally-based wildlife expert guides with experience of combining responsible ecotourism with conservation research. The cost which visitors pay for this experience goes directly to fund conservation (Medvede.sk, 2012). The key partners and supporters are the State Nature Conservancy of the Slovak Republic, Slovakia's National Park authorities, the State Forestry Service, WWF, Oxford University's Wildlife Conservation Research Unit and many others (SWS, 2012). The founder and chairman of Slovak Wildlife Society is Robin Rigg a UK- born conservationist who has lived in Slovakia since 1996. He has set up and led several innovative projects in Slovakia such as Protection of Livestock, Conservation of Large Carnivores, The BEARS Project and the Slovakia Wolf Census Project (Large Herbivore Network, 2012).

4. 1. 2. STUNNING SLOVAKIA

The partnership between the company Stunning Slovakia and High Tatras National Park Authorities allows bear watchers access to non-tourist trails. Stunning Slovakia is integrating these tours into their "Project Bear" programme which helps to conduct further research in brown bear management. Each of their tours is centred on a unique opportunity to track bears in their natural habitat (Stunning Slovakia, 2011). The main aim of their bear watching program is to increase the awareness of good wildlife watching in Europe and also to encourage Slovakia to think of its natural heritage as an asset that needs to be protected. According to their website, each participant on their tours has the opportunity to help in expanding their knowledge of bear behaviour and is

encouraged to fully participate in monitoring bear movements and behaviour whilst in the field (Stunning Slovakia, 2012). The team is the mixture of nationalities and the combined years of experience and skills both within tourism and the research community shows that it can deliver its goal of funding long-term and beneficial research (Stunning Slovakia, 2011). Graham Bishop is one of 'Stunning Slovakia' team member who is specialising in wildlife and adventure holidays. Fair and responsible tourism to the people and the environment is something that is particularly important to him (Stunning Slovakia, 2012). According to Graham Bishop (2012) the founders of Stunning Slovakia have a background in wildlife tourism in different parts of the world and believe that the 'big game' of Europe should be marketed like the equivalent animals in Africa or Asia.

4. 2. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Carpathians is a popular recreation area throughout the year. A rapidly developing economy increases tourist business, which causes growing number of visitors. The development of infrastructure, such as hotels, mountain shelters and skiing resorts led to disturbance of wildlife species (Carpathian Brown Bear Project, 2011). After 1990, winter sports and rural tourism emerged in the Carpathians and mountain communities often considered tourism as the first option for development (Gurung et al., 2009). However, such implementations of development tend to overlook the fact that outdoor recreation is a major conservation problem for many wildlife species (Beale and Monaghan, 2004). The table 3 shows major threats to the bear population in Slovakia. From this data we can see that one of the major threats is infrastructure development within tourism and recreation.

Table 3. Major Threats to the bear populations in Slovakia

Major threats to the bear population(s) in the country:^a

Threat	Past (<2000)	Present (2000- 2005)	Future (>2005)
<i>Habitat loss / degradation (human induced):</i>			
Agriculture	-	+	+
Extraction of wood	-	+	+
Infrastructure development: Industry	-	-	-
Infrastructure development: Human settlement	-	-	+
Infrastructure development: Tourism/recreation	-	+/-	+
Infrastructure development: Road building	-	+/-	+
<i>Harvest:</i>			
Legal hunting & trapping	-	-	-
<i>Persecution:</i>			
Shooting	-	-	-
Trapping / snaring	-	-	-
Poisoning	-	-	-
<i>Traffic:</i>			
Vehicle and train collision	-	+	+
<i>Natural disasters:</i>			
Storms / flooding	-	-	-
Wildfire	-	-	-
Avalanches / landslides	-	-	-
<i>Changes in native species dynamics:</i>			
Competitors	-	-	-
Prey / food base	-	-	-
Pathogens / parasites	-	-	-
<i>Intrinsic factors:</i>			
Limited dispersal	-	-	-
Poor recruitment/reproduction/regeneration	-	-	-
High juvenile mortality	-	-	-
Inbreeding	-	-	-
Low densities	-	-	-
Skewed sex ratios	-	-	-
Slow growth rates	-	-	-
Population fluctuations	-	-	-
Restricted range	-	-	-
<i>Human disturbance:</i>			
Recreation / tourism	-	+/-	+
Research	-	-	-
War / civil unrest	-	-	-
Transport	-	-	-

(Source: Adamec, n.d.)

This study set out with the aim of assessing the importance of wildlife tourism and its contribution to the conservation of brown bear in Slovakia. The above mentioned founders of Slovak Wildlife Society and Stunning Slovakia have been asked to contribute to the discussion whether the presence of bears in Slovakia can be turned into a benefit through the development of wildlife tourism. Robin Rigg (Appendix 3) states that the original aim of bear watching was to show local people a positive benefit of having such animals in their country but also to raise funds for their other activities. He describes visitor motivation for bear-viewing as an interest in being in natural environments and supporting nature conservation. The visitors respond very positively especially when conservationists manage to show them bears. Because bears are perceived as charismatic but shy animal, there is no always guarantee to see them, but viewing occurs in spectacular wilderness settings of Tatra National Park so the activity is also seen as a favourite photographic subject. However, both Robin Rigg and Graham Bishop (Appendix 3) agreed that there is very little demand for this type of tourism in Slovakia. According to Robin Rigg, one major criticism of Slovak government and its promotion of tourism is that there is too much focus on destructive unsustainable forms of tourism and development. Nevertheless, the development plan has not escaped criticism from World Wildlife Fund (2010). Its article points out that Slovakia is considering opening its oldest national park to developers in a way that ignores basic conservation principles. Slovakian authorities recently submitted a proposal to rezone Tatra National Park that would open some of the most ecologically sensitive areas of the park to developers. The proposed zoning would allow for tourist infrastructure development, particularly ski resorts in undisturbed areas that were designated as priority areas for nature conservation, WWF says. According to LCIE (n.d), large carnivores need lots of space. Single individuals roam over areas of hundreds or thousands of square kilometers. They also show a total lack of respect for the borders that humans have drawn across the map of Europe. There is a need to constantly invest in education, information and law enforcement. Furthermore, developing fair and democratic institutions that take the concerns of rural people into accounts when management decisions about large carnivores are being made is a necessity. The effort of Slovak Wildlife Society is to make conservation of brown bears in Slovakia as a

central aspect in their tourism program. Also the main focus is to alert the government body of Slovakia to recognise the significance and opportunity of sustainable and environmentally sensitive wildlife tourism. Mr Bishop is of the same opinion and added that potential clients know nothing about Slovakia's natural heritage, the tourist board does not market this aspect of Slovakia and it is left to foreign businesses such as theirs to develop the market. He went on to say that the human population around the Tatras is increasing as is bear population. Unless strategies are developed to allow peaceful coexistence then there will be increasingly insistent support for and against bears. In addition, Wildlife Extra (2008) states that Stunning Slovakia's experience of conservation projects worldwide is that, although the intentions are good, there is often little or no thought given to the long-term sustainability of it. According to the source, in most cases the projects fail due to lack of funding. Project Bear is aiming to avoid this by providing the majority of funding for the Project through low impact and responsible tourism. The market for wildlife holidays in the UK is substantial and Stunning Slovakia feels that it has the experience to take advantage of this.

4. 2. 1. RECREATIONAL HUNTING AS AN OPPORTUNITY

It has been mentioned in the literature review (Brainerd, 2007), if managed professionally, the hunting tourism may prove to be a factor of development for rural and mountain regions. The author also points out that hunting of large carnivores is acceptable under certain conditions and may benefit and be compatible with their conservation. Large Carnivore Initiative for Europe (n.d) in its brochure states that there is no reason why large carnivores cannot be harvested in the same way as other game species as in Europe their acceptance by the rural public may depend on them being harvested. In Slovakia brown bear is considered as protected species. The Act on Nature and Landscape Protection states that it is forbidden to capture, injure or kill bears; according to the hunting law, it is an all year protected game species. Based on the exceptions (permissions from the Ministry of Environment and Ministry of Agriculture), bears are legally hunted in Slovakia by exceptions either by "regulation shooting" or "protection shooting" (Adamec, Rajtar and Urban 2005). It is also important

to consider that not all large carnivore species are endangered and many species (including brown bear) are widespread and their numbers occur in the thousands (Linnel et al.,2005). According to the authors the appropriate management scenario for a particular species can vary from strict preservation to sustainable harvest and even population reduction. The research tries to get an answer to the question whether recreational hunting is a possible option for bear conservation and population reduction. The question has been asked to both, the conservationists and to local hunters. Robin Rigg the conservationist and founder of Slovak Wildlife Society already mentioned in his publication that some radical environmentalists NGOs, notably the Wolf Forest Protection Movement, Freedom of Animals and Predator, remain staunchly opposed to hunting. The Slovak Wildlife Society has adopted policies based on recognising that progress probably requires compromise (Rigg and Adamec, 2007). According to Robin Rigg, many international experts argue that hunting can contribute to conservation as part of a multi-faceted management strategy. By allowing some hunting opportunities, they say, hunters are more likely to accept bears and so the level of poaching is likely to be lower. Illegal hunting is potentially much more dangerous, because it is by definition unregulated so there is no control on which bears are killed, where or when. Hunting could also raise some revenues for conservation initiatives. He also mentioned that the preconditions to ensure that legal hunting is not detrimental to the population is that the population is sufficiently large and there is adequate monitoring to assess population status and the effects of hunting which is definitely inadequate in Slovakia. More controversial, in Riggs opinion, is the question whether recreational hunting can reduce human-bear conflicts. He made a point that there has been far too much emphasis placed on this in Slovakia, where it is often argued - mostly by hunters and the media - that controlling the number of bears through hunting is the main step to reducing conflicts. Mr Rigg does not agree with this. According to him, most international experts claim that the most important step to reducing conflicts is to use preventive measures such as electric fences, bear-proof bins but also to educate people how to behave. If these measures fail, which can sometimes happen, then there are other possibilities which include the removal. Mr Rigg also explained that just generally reducing the number of bears in an area and hoping that this will somehow reduce problems at a

specific site is not an effective strategy. An example is the High Tatras National Park, where waste management is completely inappropriate for a national park with bears. Even if they reduce the number of bears, the bears that are left will still visit the waste bins if they are left open and accessible like they are now, Mr Rigg argues.

The same question has been asked to local hunter in the Tatra Mountains area Mr. Dusan Ballo. Mr Ballo has been critical to the new policies in large carnivore conservation. He said that brown bear population is too high and cause many conflicts in Slovakia. The most important are depredations on farm livestock particularly sheep but many other. Rural people and local hunters feel that the costs of having these large carnivores fall unfairly upon them while NGOs do not bear these costs. Also the dealing with these problems is inappropriate and new policy on large carnivores is inevitable. He mentioned that hunters are allowed to hunt only young bear population up to 100kg. These bears are pushed out from wild territory by older bears. The hunters suggest that lethal control of older territorial bears is also inevitable. Mr Ballo went on to say that total ban of hunting is for a stable population of large carnivores evidently contra-productive and might have serious outcome on the attitudes of local people to bears which could result in an increase in poaching. His major criticism is, that many conservationists ignoring the special role of hunters in the conservation management for their unique knowledge of habitats and species, their commitment and experience. He also explained that income from trophy hunting is one of the way how to compensate the losses to farm livestock.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has established the potential of bear tourism as an important part in the portfolio of tourism products in Slovakia. However, wildlife tourism and ecotourism, with an objective of promoting the conservation and sustainable management of brown bear population in Slovakia is undeveloped. Much of the wildlife of Slovakia has been ignored as a tourist resource and their presence and importance should have been more widely recognised especially by tourism organisations. The case studies mentioned in the first section prove, that ecotourism should be an attractive and economically beneficial development option in the regions. Ecotourism alongside with sustainable forms of recreational hunting can provide for the local population the economic benefits, change their attitude towards protected species and ensure their collaboration. As has been mentioned in the literature review by Enserink and Vogel (2006), some proponents of the large carnivores in Europe argue that brown bears may lure but not deter tourists. It is essential for the conservation organisations to become progressively more involved in tourism as this can provide a source of revenue together with increasing promotion of their goals. The responsibility of the conservation programs is to rising awareness of the value of the wild species which brings an adequate motivation to the tourism sector. It must also be kept in mind that brown bear conservation in Slovakia and its implementation to some tourism programs has its limits and problems. Firstly, marketing strategy should be more focused on advertisement of wildlife tourism programs (bear watching, ecotourism etc.) at regional and also at national level. The ecotourism and possible recreational hunting programs require the development of permanent contacts with tour operators and agencies. Furthermore, the staff's special and professional skills are inevitable. The growth of nature-based tourism has referred to the need to protect pristine and delicate natural environments. Therefore, further investigation and experimentation into ecotourism is strongly recommended. It is important that ecotourism criterion is applicable to the visitor centres, tour packages, accommodation facilities, outdoor activities and restaurants (Hamele et al., 2009). According to this source, the business must contribute to the support of biodiversity conservation, including supporting natural protected areas and must generate net benefits for local communities. Also interactions with wildlife must not produce adverse effects on the

viability of populations in the wild. The absence of comprehensive ecotourism management plans leads to impossibility of target investment and weak communication with local population involved in decision making. It has been mentioned in the literature that conservation hunting programme is one that contributes to the viability of wildlife species. However, weak monitoring commonly brings corruption and unsustainable harvesting (Wall and Child, 2009). Recreational hunting in Slovakia experiences lack of management in this area. For example, the organisation of local hunt alongside with foreign tourists could bring the revenue to the conservation. Difficulties arise, however, when an attempt is made to implement the policy. The discussion part in this research shows clearly that conservation and management of brown bear in Slovakia has its complications based on human attitudes. Recreational hunting of nuisance bears became in this case a wicked problem, as there is no single correct solution for this issue. Warburton and Norton (2009) point to the differing values of interest groups who see the problem so differently, they cannot agree in formulating and solving it creatively and cooperatively. In case of Slovakia, recreational hunting of brown bears will remain controversial, because every action made by different interest groups-hunters or conservationists, can be protested from multiple value and scientific perspectives. The results of this research support the idea that the lack of a corresponding knowledge of public values, political forces and socioeconomic factors will result in ineffective policies intended to assure the long-term well being of this animal (Kellert, 1994). Very little was found in the literature on the question of tourism and brown bear conservation in Europe. These findings are rather disappointing. Surprisingly, the case study of Romania further supports the idea of wildlife tourism in Slovakia. The role of the mass media in generating wildlife tourism demand, through documentaries and films based on the natural world should not be miscalculated. In conclusion, further data collection is required to determine exactly how wildlife tourism affects bear conservation in Slovakia. The lack of recent reports on the current state of demand of, and supply of bear tourism in Slovakia is a major limitation of this study. This highlights a need for projects that incorporate wildlife watching elements and evaluate the effectiveness of these projects and effects on conservation of brown bear in Slovakia.

*...Being against is not enough. We also need to develop habits of constructive thinking
(Edward de Bono)*

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