

A GEM AND AN OBJECT OF EXPLOITATION:
THE TATRA MOUNTAINS
AND THE CONSERVATIONIST MOVEMENT IN POLAND

Bianca Hoenig

This contribution looks into the role of nature conservation in the Polish part of the Tatra mountains since the middle of the 19th century. This range of high mountains in the southern part of the area that borders on today's Slovakia is eminently important for the development of the nature conservation movement in Poland. The author deals with the changing and frequently competing opinions about nature in the mountains and the use to which mankind may put it, ranging from the idea of a gem that must be protected to a resource that can be exploited. The project – first mentioned in the late 19th century and put into practice in 1954 – to establish a national park in the Tatra mountains is used as an example for assessing the relationship between developments in Poland and transnational tendencies. The author demonstrates that the dynamics of nature conservation on the international level have had a considerable effect on the Polish approach towards how to deal with the Tatra mountains. The conservationist movement in Poland sometimes even acted as a vanguard from which the international debate received important new impulses. The debate about conserving or exploiting the Tatra mountains casts some light on the correlation between the national significance of this mountain range and contemporary views on how to deal with natural landscapes on an international level.