

Forests for Public Health

By Christos Th. Gallis, Deputy Coordinator of IUFRO Research Group 6.06.00 - Forest, trees and human health and wellbeing
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Urbanization and modern lifestyle changes have diminished possibilities for human contact with nature in many societies. At the same time, many societies today face increasing incidence of poor physical and mental health associated with chronic stress, insufficient physical activity and exposure to anthropogenic environmental hazards that cannot be addressed by medicine and technology alone.

Forests, urban forests and other green spaces may be incorporated into public health systems and policies to promote mental and physical health and reduce morbidity and mortality in residents by supporting relaxation and stress alleviation, stimulating social cohesion, encouraging physical activity, and reducing exposure to air pollutants, noise and excessive heat.

Human health and wellbeing are vital socio-political and public health issues today and in the future. They crucially define our lives. Forests, urban forests, and green spaces can have a significant influence on the health and wellbeing of many people. We might look at them as a kind of health insurance.

The World Conference on “Forests for Public Health” held on 8-11 May, 2019 at the Athens War Museum, Greece, aimed to bring together renowned scientists from different countries and disciplines to present research and state-of-the-art knowledge and theories on two major issues:

- the significance of the role of forests and green spaces in improving the health and wellbeing of a population; and
- challenges faced by the urban and landscape planning fields in designing green infrastructure that benefits physical activities both in urban space and in forest/nature

The following focal areas were discussed at the conference:

- Forest medicine for public health
- Mental health benefits of exposure to nature
- Planning physical activities and human recreation in forest/natural environment for public health
- Urban forests and their ecosystem services for public health
- Urban forestry and green spaces planning and design for human activity
- Forest therapy, health policies, practices, economics and culture of forests for public health
- Green care on public landscapes for public health

The conference, which attracted 150 participants from 26 countries, was organized and hosted by the Forest Research Institute of Greece in collaboration with the National Institute of Forest Science (NIFoS), Republic of Korea and involved the IUFRO Research Group on Forest, trees and human health and wellbeing.

The conference, which was sponsored by the National Institute of Forest Science (NIFoS), the Greek National Center for the Environment and Sustainable Development, and the Geotechnical Chamber of Greece, was held under the auspices of H.E. the President of the Hellenic Republic Mr. Prokopios Pavlopoulos.

A Conference Abstracts Book will be printed and abstracts will also be published in the CABI abstracts database. A book under the draft title of “Forests for Public Health” is under preparation and shall be published by Cambridge Scholars Publishing in the year 2020. The “World Conference Forests for Public Health” established as a global scientific event shall be repeated every other year in different countries. Meeting website: <https://fph2019.org/>