

Towards a Forest Bio-economy Inclusive of Social and-or Ecological Value Added

Meeting report by:

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Meeting website: <https://www.iufro2020.eurac.edu/>

This IUFRO conference entitled **“The social and ecological value added of small-scale forestry to the bio-economy”** was held online due to the Covid-19 pandemic. It took place on 7-8 October 2020 at EURAC Research, Bolzano, Italy, and offered 41 presentations, five speeches and welcome addresses including one by IUFRO President John Parrotta. The meeting attracted participants from 23 countries and involved IUFRO Units not only in Division 4, but also in Divisions 3, 5 and 9 as well as the Task Force ‘Unlocking the Bio-economy and Non-Timber Forest Products’.



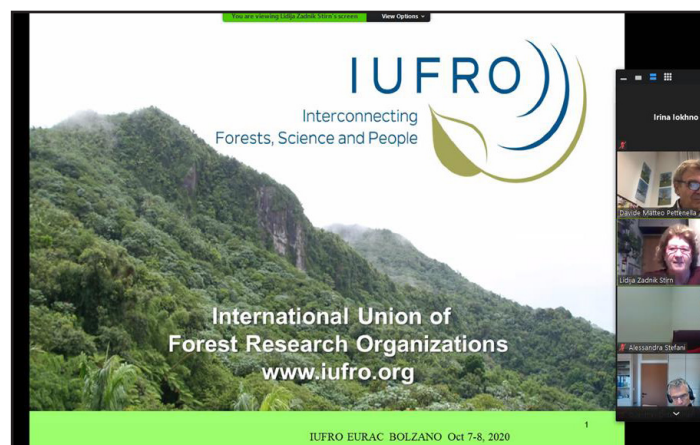
Christian Hoffmann, EURAC Research

The conference was the 2020 edition in the series of annual scientific conferences in the field of forest managerial economic and accounting organized by IUFRO Research Group 4.05.00 and others,

but the path to organize this annual IUFRO conference was not a straight one due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

Originally, there were plans to hold two 4.05.00 conferences in 2020. Firstly, the annual IUFRO 4.05.00 conference was scheduled to take place in Padua, Italy, in June 2020, under the title *“Is there a room for the small-scale enterprises in the forest bio-economy?”* Secondly, a meeting organized by Working Party 4.05.04 and EURAC Research originally titled *“Expanding the paradigm of forest based value chains towards social and ecological dimensions”* was planned for October 2020 at EURAC in Bolzano.

EURAC Research is an interdisciplinary private research association founded in 1992. It comprises 11 Institutes, 4 Research Centers and 2 Offices in Rome and Vienna. It employs about 500 researchers and also hosts the permanent Secretariat of the Alpine Convention.



Lidija Zadnik Stirn, University of Ljubljana, shared the screen: first slide of her introduction presenting IUFRO

Because of the Covid-19 lock-down, the two events mentioned above were merged under the new title *“The social and ecological value added of small-scale forestry to the Bio Economy”* and jointly organized by the University of Padua and the European Academy of Bolzano, EURAC Research.

There were plans to hold this IUFRO event as a hybrid conference and to meet at least some of participants physically in Bolzano, but the raising Covid-19 figures in autumn also prevented this scheme.

Nevertheless, the organizers took advantage of all the benefits that a pure online Webinar could offer and managed to organize a cross-cutting event, bringing together the interests and expertise from different IUFRO Units, universities, institutes and enterprises.

Aim

The conference was aimed at researchers and practitioners engaged in managerial, social and environmental forest economics and accounting, management of forest enterprises, specifically small-scale enterprises, forest ecosystem services, land-use, natural resource policy, decision support making, and related fields under the bio-economy paradigm.

Thus, the focus was also on interpreting and promoting the impact of forest bio-economy on the development of quality product markets and nature-based services and the concepts behind them: social innovation, product diversification, multi-functionality and the value added network of vertically and horizontally integrated economic stakeholders. The conference relates to Themes 1 and 3 of the IUFRO Strategy, *“Forest for people”* and *“Forests and forest-based products for a greener future”*, respectively.

Topics

The issues presented at the conference reveal high diversification from a thematic and geographic point of view, and reflected interdivisional, interdisciplinary and inter-institutional cooperation. Among of the topics addressed and critically discussed were:

- Innovation
- Multifunctional forestry
- Socio-ecological & Eco-system services
- Small-scale Forestry
- Non wood forest products
- Regional value chains
- Forest policies
- Certification
- Forest owners
- Innovative financing for biodiversity from bio-economy perspective
- Socio-cultural forest management
- Supplemental income opportunities for small-scale forest business
- Indicators for sustainable forest management of small-scale forestry
- Actors in regional value chains
- Education
- Sustainable forest management in indigenous communities
- Climate change and its impact on raw material, timber market and payment for ecosystem services



Davide Pettenella, University of Padua

towards reconsidering the meaning of bio-economy in the light of the three pillars of the new 20-year plan:

- ecological transition
- digitalization
- social cohesion

The prevailing understanding of bio-economy is still connected to decarbonization through the technological development of new natural-resource-based industries.

Considering the aspects connected to social cohesion, we should give attention to small-scale activities, oriented also to service production and other “minor” non-wood forest products that are more linked to the territories, more labor intensive and socially inclusive, that promote a multifunctional use of the forests, rather based on social than on technological capital.

The conference contributed to the reduction of misinformation through internet and social media, which often leads to the undesired, undervalued and misused outcomes of forest science. The conference certainly increased the transparency, independence, accessibility, inclusivity, integrity and quality of **forest science, which has never been more important than today**, and is one of the key missions also of IUFRO.

Proceedings and Reports

A book of abstracts has already been published (58 pages, with an introduction by C. Hoffmann and D. Pettenella): https://www.iufro2020.eurac.edu/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Abstract-Book_15.10.20.pdf

A special issue of the *Austrian Journal of Forest Science* will publish a selected number of peer-reviewed papers presented at the conference. *Tentative deadline of paper submission*: 27 November 2020 <https://www.forestscience.at/>

Future activities (proceedings, future meetings, other)

The next annual conference “*Managerial, Social and Environmental Aspects of the Forest-based Sector for Sustainable Development: 40th Anniversary Conference for 4.05.00*”, is planned to take place in Brno, Czech Republic, May 12-14, 2021: <https://iufro2021.lfd.mendelu.cz>

Find the full report at: <https://www.iufro.org/science/divisions/division-4/40000/40500/activities/>

Photo IUFRO



Shifting the focus to small-scale activities

Actors in large private and public investments are mainly focused on capital-intensive investments based on low-cost biomass in vertically integrated value chains, where the perspective of the social or ecological value added often lags behind. In the face of this mainstream economic trend, in the future we need to focus more on small-scale labor-intensive activities in the bio-economy context, including the non-wood products and cultural services, as they seem to be playing a minor role in the discussions of scientists and decision makers.

Social and ecological value added

Extending the economic paradigm towards social and ecological value added asks for considering the associated trade-offs or opportunity costs. The challenges of climate and socio-demographic changes, coupled with complex and dynamically changing political and socio-economic situations, support the relevance of transforming the business thinking.

Reconsidering the meaning of bio-economy

Bio-economy is included in the political agenda of the European Union and of many other countries; the recovery and resilience plans promoted after the Covid-19 event are advancing