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Title: Landscape effects on human health and well-being as elements of social innovation in marginalized rural areas: reflections on why and how to evaluate them.

Selected topic

Relationships between landscape and human health and well-being

Presentation format: *Oral presentation*

Orientation of contribution: *Scientific-oriented*

Keywords

social innovation, evaluation, indicators, SIMRA, marginalized rural areas

Abstract

Social innovation is an emerging topic, identified in the EU Strategy 2020 as one of the crucial, intangible factors required to promote smart, inclusive and sustainable growth. Although there is not yet an unambiguous definition of social innovation, “new social uses” of forests and rural landscapes are identified in the scientific literature and described in terms of social innovation. These include the use of forests and natural landscapes as beneficial to human health and wellbeing (e.g. for stress reduction and salutogenetic effects). Empirical evidence exists of positive effects of access, community volunteering and views of woodlands and natural environments on the health of specific population groups (e.g. disabled, elderly, children). However, a method to comprehensively evaluate direct and indirect long-term impacts that these new types of social uses can provide for society, the economy and institutions is not yet available, while knowledge on short-term effects on health and health assistance costs is limited and fragmented. Reflections will be presented on why and how these effects, including impacts, should be evaluated, with a focus on marginalized rural areas. Results of a more comprehensive evaluation approach would support the design of more effective public policy and reform of obsolete policy frameworks which, in several European countries, are not accounting for the important role of landscapes and forests for collective well-being. Our reflections are based on the preliminary findings and advancements of a 4-year research project, SIMRA (Social Innovation in Marginalized Rural Areas), funded under the EU Horizon2020 Programme. The project involves 26 partners throughout Europe and the Mediterranean basin, with a network of stakeholders which includes social farmers, social foresters and other social innovation initiatives directly or indirectly linked to the effects of forests and rural landscapes on health and well-being. It is planned to expand this network over coming years to enable the analysis of case studies, including on rural health care. This presentation will provide preliminary ideas and option for discussion about approaches and indicators to be used for capturing the multifaceted aspects of new social uses of forests and landscapes, with a focus on the specificities of health and human well-being in marginalized rural areas.