

Need to develop recreation indicators in forestry

The project 'Social indicators in forestry' aimed to evaluate the status of recreation indicators used in forestry and related sectors in North European countries. The main outcome suggests that there is a need to develop common, comparable recreation indicators and methodologies to gather systematic data for those indicators in Northern Europe.

SOSIN-project group (from left): Natalia Demidova, Nadezda Demina, Marjo Neuvonen, Peter Fredman, Tuija Sievänen, Kalle Karoles, Odd Inge Vistad, Martin Lorenz and Kerli Karoles in Tallin November 2013.



Aiming to harmonize indicators for recreation and tourism in forest sector

There is strong evidence that nature-based recreation and tourism bring many important benefits to the societies in Northern Europe. Recreation provides meaningful leisure activities, opportunities to enjoy social relationships and to get physical exercise, which mean many kinds of health and wellbeing benefits to all social groups of our populations. Nature-based tourism has an important role for regional development in most peripheral regions, which lack other sources of livelihoods for local people. National outdoor recreation surveys show that 76 to 91 percent of the adult population in Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland visit forests annually.

Nature-based recreation and tourism make an important contribution to social sustainability. The essence of social sustainability can be read

in the first principle of the Rio declaration in 1992: "Humans are at the center of concerns for sustainable development. They are entitled to a healthy and productive life in harmony with nature." Sustainability is a concept that includes the idea of change which must be acceptable according to our common values. Statistics and other measures on nature-based recreation and tourism provide information basis for their future development. Monitoring changes over time and comparing regions and countries in terms of nature-based recreation demand good indicators.

Status of recreation indicators and monitoring in North European Countries

In Northern Europe almost all countries seem to have governmental policy documents, which include some consideration of nature-based recreation and tourism. The most typical document is a national forest program or strategy, but only Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden have specifically focused strategy programs for nature-based recreation and tourism. Nature-based recreation and tourism are also included in strategies of biodiversity and nature protection but also of general tourism or countryside development.

Most countries were able to report a set of indicators related to nature-based recreation and tourism, but only a few indicators appear to be applicable to all countries under current conditions. However, there is good potential to develop common indicators for the North European countries.

The common goal for standardized indicators and harmonized monitoring methods

Most countries have a serious shortage of data to provide quantitative figures for social indicators that can give information on on-going changes, although there are some efforts to in-

clude recreation into running inventories. Denmark has included it in the National Forest inventory, and Finland, Denmark and Scotland have national outdoor recreation demand inventories. Some countries have national databases of recreation supply (of recreation areas, trails, other services).

A previous COST action (COST E33) showed that most European countries lack efficient monitoring systems to offer estimates of indicators that can be compared across time and regions. There is a need to harmonize and standardize methodologies for statistics and indicators in North European countries. This was the motive for the joint SNS- and EFINORD-supported network “Social indicators in forestry” (SOSIN). Its aim was to describe the experiences of monitoring social indicators in nine Northern European countries (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania, Northern Germany, Northwest Russia, Norway, Scotland and Sweden), with a particular focus on nature-based recreation and tourism types when monitoring recreational use.

Future challenges

There is an obvious need to enhance the monitoring of social aspects of forests and forestry, and also other sectors in society related to nature-based recreation and tourism. Globalisation continues to have a strong impact on human society across Europe, and European countries will continue to share policies for use of natural resources but also in terms of the status of wellbeing of populations. Good measures and indicators for our societies’ success in achieving the objectives of sustainable development are essential and valuable for the wellbeing of people. Our knowledge-base and understanding of the full range of benefits, which people gain from the natural environment when taking part in nature-based recreation, supports the overall

goal of enhancing the provision of access to healthy green environments for recreation. Monitoring sustainability is most importantly a tool for proactive development but it functions also as a tool to show the benefits of sustainable management of forests and other natural resources. Furthermore, monitoring of benefits can be used to raise environmental awareness of the public and to increase the levels of acceptance for forest and other natural resource use and management.

The next challenge is to work towards relevant and informative indicators that reveal the benefits to our societies. The task is to develop and improve the indicators which are already in use, and also to create new indicators. There is a need to assess the possibilities of creating and recommending standardized and harmonized social indicators, which could provide comparable figures across countries and regions. In all countries included in this study, there is a challenge to develop monitoring systems to produce inventory data for recreation statistics that provide a knowledge-base for indicators that are comparable across Europe.

The report

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Tuija Sievänen, Finnish Forest Research Institute

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