Forests for Human Health:
Challenges and Opportunities

8 - 9 April 2019, Vienna
WORKSHOP REPORT
The workshop was organized by FOREST EUROPE Liaison Unit Bratislava in cooperation with the Austrian Research Centre for Forests (BFW).

This report was compiled by FOREST EUROPE Liaison Unit Bratislava summarizing the views and facts provided in presentations and those resulting from the follow-up discussions among the panellists, moderators and other participants of the workshop and these do not necessarily reflect the views of the workshop organizers. In any case, the report does not represent the position of FOREST EUROPE signatories.

Presentations delivered at the workshop are accessible at the FOREST EUROPE website at: https://foresteurope.org/event/14512/
Forests for Human Health: Challenges and Opportunities

8 - 9 April 2019, Vienna
WORKSHOP REPORT
Forests for Human Health:

Acknowledgments

The workshop *Forests for Human Health: Challenges and Opportunities* was held on April 8-9, 2019 in Vienna, Austria, within the FOREST EUROPE Work Programme 2016-2020, whose implementation is mostly supported by governments of Slovakia, Germany, Spain, Sweden and Turkey, but also by voluntary financial or in-kind contributions of other countries and organisations. In this regard, this workshop would not be possible without the contribution of the Austrian Research Centre for Forests (BFW). In addition, members of the FOREST EUROPE Expert Group on human health and well-being helped to shape the scope and the focus of the workshop and they also identified the right and well balanced group of speakers and panellists.

Special thanks go to the moderators, speakers, panellists who provided the contents for the workshop and this report:

- Peter Mayer - Austrian Research Centre for Forests (BFW)
- Franziska Krainer - Austrian Research Centre for Forests (BFW)
- Liz O’Brien - Forest Research, UK
- Igor Viszlai - FOREST EUROPE, Liaison Unit Bratislava
- Liisa Tyrväinen - Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE)
- Ľudmila Marušáková - FOREST EUROPE, Liaison Unit Bratislava
- Markus Sallmannshofer - Austrian Research Centre for Forests (BFW)
- Kevin Lafferty - Forestry Commission Scotland
- Mark Nieuwenhuijsen - IS Global, Barcelona Institute for Global Health
- Piero Lercher - Department of Environmental Medicine, Medical Chamber Vienna
- Trudi Else - Active Forests, England
- Ellen Devine - Forestry Commission England
- Gorka Altuna - Union of Foresters of Southern Europe (USSE)
- Alex Gesse - Instituto de Baños de Bosque, Spain, and European Forest Therapy Institute
- Dirk Schmechel - Bavarian Institute of Forestry; Subgroup Forest Pedagogy of FCN
- Anders Mickos - Municipality of Sipoo, Finland
- Paul Nolan - The Mersey Forest
- Marta Pahissa - DKV Seguros Insurance Company
- Leire Salaberria - Union of Foresters of Southern Europe (USSE)
- Piotr Borkowski - European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR)

The workshop was attended by more than 70 participants from 15 European countries and different international organizations. The organizers would also like to express their sincere thanks to all who contributed to the discussions.
Content

Political background .................................................................................................................................................. 6
Workshop objectives .................................................................................................................................................. 6
Forests for human health - challenges and opportunities ..................................................................................... 6
Outcomes ................................................................................................................................................................. 7

ANNEXES

Programme overview ............................................................................................................................................... 10
Speakers’ background .............................................................................................................................................. 12
Forests for Human Health:

Background

Following the Madrid Ministerial Resolution 1, building on former initiatives, ongoing work and experience in signatory countries and organisations, FOREST EUROPE seeks ways to strengthen the social aspects of sustainable forest management (SFM). Highlighting the positive impact and benefits of forests on human health and well-being, FOREST EUROPE addresses this highly topical issue, which is also in line with global agendas including the UN Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development as well as the EU Forest Action Plan and the EU Forest Strategy.

To support this issue, the FOREST EUROPE Expert Group on human health and well-being was established according to the FOREST EUROPE Work Programme Action 4.6 “Enhancing the social dimensions of SFM in the context of the benefits of forests on human health and well-being.”

The Expert Group conducted the study named “Human Health and Sustainable Forest Management”, which was presented during the workshop. The study provides, amongst others, a review of research resources and scientific evidence published in the recent twenty years in Europe, pertinent to social aspects of sustainable forest management in the context of human health and well-being, as well as good practice examples from different European countries.

Workshop Objectives

The purpose of the workshop was to enable the sharing of state-of-the-art knowledge, experience, lessons learnt and good practice examples relating to social aspects of sustainable forest management with special attention to human health and well-being.

Moreover, the workshop was aimed at promoting health benefits of forests and their integration into SFM and thus to raise awareness about the benefits that forests deliver for human health. During the workshop, main barriers and drivers for the promotion of health benefits of forests were discussed with the aim to generate green jobs and build better cross-sectoral cooperation with representatives of various sectors and stakeholders.

Workshop conclusions are translated into a set of recommendations for policy makers and further steps for future cooperation based on discussions held at the workshop.

Forests for Human Health - Challenges and Opportunities

There are several barriers to the promotion of health benefits of forests. It is mainly the lack of understanding of nature and forests, lack of health professional awareness and understanding and lack of communication on forest operations – what health benefits of forests entail and why they are needed. For all of this, it is necessary to provide effective knowledge transfer and communication about what sustainable forest management entails and why it is important for forest health and how this can contribute to human health.

Cooperation with the health sector is needed to develop forest and health training as a part of undergraduate health studies.

Another problem is the limited funding situation (particularly private funding). There is a role for state forests to provide subsidies for forest and health-related activities for the wider public good.

We are still waiting for more scientific evidence on this topic. Thus, much activity and focus on forests and health have started without definite evidence of health benefits being in place e.g. Shinrin Yoku in Japan. Lack of evidence is sometimes used as an excuse to not take any action.

Being in the forest also leads to risks from the general public accessing and using forests for health and well-being. Therefore, we need to focus on the risk-benefit balance i.e. the risks of inactivity and mental ill-health, risks of pollen allergies and tick-borne diseases and the benefits of forest environments for health in terms of physical, mental and social health and well-being.
Challenges and Opportunities

Workshop conclusions

The following recommendations presented as workshop conclusions are the results of discussions held at the workshop and present the opinions of involved stakeholders.

Key messages and workshop recommendations on Promoting the use of health benefits of forests

- Legal framework - a forest and health framework could be developed that explicitly mentions the health benefits of forests.

- Designation of health areas - small areas of forests could be designated for health-related activities in both public and private forests. For example, an area could be set aside (with extensive forest management) for quiet forest bathing or mindfulness activities that can have a positive impact on mental health.

- Cooperation - to enhance the forest sector to work and cooperate with the health sector at different levels, there is potential for health care savings by focusing on preventing ill health by promoting the use of forests for human health.

- Volunteering - one way in which people can gain health and well-being benefits is through volunteering in local forests. This can not only support forest managers and sustainable forest management, the physical activity can be important for health and social benefits as well as the opportunity to improve wider well-being through undertaking meaningful forest protection, restoration or conservation activities.

- Forest owners need more information and awareness about how they can address the new interest group of people wanting to get healthier in the forest. They also need to be informed about how they can integrate health offers to their management.

- Incentives for forest owners and managers should be covered by grants or tax deductions aimed to motivate them to focus also on ecological and especially social functions and services of their forests.

- Taster sessions - these could be created and aimed at different audiences. For example, taster sessions for forest owners and managers of the health and well-being benefits of forests and how this might create an opportunity for owners to develop additional income through the provision of their forests for health-related activities. Another option could be to offer taster sessions for different sections of the public to raise awareness about how they might engage with forests on a personal level to improve their health and well-being.
Forests for Human Health:

- There are five main messages to promote use of benefits of forests for human health:
  - Forests have a role in preventative health care. The research shows that forests improve people’s quality of life and general wellbeing. By investing in forests and encouraging people to use forests, there is the potential to improve the health of the population.
  - We should invest in getting children and young people to use the forests for their health and well-being in their daily life and on a regular basis, to create a healthier future population that is used to the beneficial health and well-being effects of the sustainable resource forest. Moreover, forests can help to reduce the burden on health care services by improving population health/ preventing illness.
  - Due to the positive effects of outdoor education (strengthening and developing of new social relationships, participation and community capacity building, better socioemotional development, better learning results), offers and programmes concerning the impacts of forests on human health should be combined with Forest pedagogy concepts.
  - Forests can have a role in curative medicine. Projects can be designed for patients with specific health needs/ illnesses with helath interventions in forests. These projects can be used and evaluated alongside traditional medicine/ treatments.
  - The benefits of forests as a health care option outweigh the risks. Although there are risks to people taking part in activities in the forests, the evidence of benefits of participation in forest-based activities is greater than the risks. There is also a substantial evidence base demonstrating the benefits of health interventions in forests. In addition, risk-prevention should be developed and professionalized. This includes forest-therapists and forest health guides who need to have forest and forestry related knowledge and skills.

Key messages and workshop recommendations on Communicating the health benefits of forests

- The contents of the communication should focus on the general message and not stress the details on e.g. blood pressure. At the same time, it would be good to inform about various positive health effects that forest visitors can have, e.g. physical fitness, mental health, immune function etc.
- According to the theory of Petty (on attitude change), it would be important to use role models instead of rational arguments for getting people involved with the forest. If you come up with rational arguments, the audience is actively looking for rational counter-arguments (no time, too dangerous etc.) to react to your rational arguments. The result would be that the prejudice that e.g. forest visits would not be practicable /too inconvenient etc. will be strengthened and will be more difficult to change in the future.
- If you are using role models like in advertisements or social media (influencers), you don’t need arguments, the audience just sees that influential people buy a certain brand or show certain behaviour. By this, you don’t address the rationale but evoke feelings and sensations.
- It seems to be especially important that one could use means like storytelling.
- It is also important for people to see and actively experience the forest and get first-hand emotions and sensations in nature, in order to understand the positive effect personally. Therefore, we need to find compelling narratives about how we use our forests responsibly. The impact of forests on human health and the management measures of some foresters and forest-owners are providing to guarantee these benefits (since centuries) are such a compelling narrative.
- Include influencers and social media in general with videos, podcasts, etc. to get in contact with young people and not to stick to the old forms of information. Interviews should interact with influencers and role models and facilitate the process of informing the public.
Challenges and Opportunities

Key messages and workshop recommendations on Improving cross-sectoral cooperation between various stakeholders

- To trigger cooperation between various stakeholders, markets need to be developed to support the rising demand. This could lead to the increased interest of private sector, including health-insurance companies.

- To find win-win situations and joint targets, more joint discussion forums should be organized between various sectors - forestry, health, tourism etc.

- The health care sector has a strict requirement regarding evidence-base, thus holistic view on health and health promotion should be applied. To formulate health recommendations, more information on dose-response is needed.

- Creation of quality standards should improve the credibility of forest-related health products. In this regard, good demonstration projects (products and services) need to be established, as well as new projects should be released.

- To influence the health sector and policymakers, we need to have doctors/ medical practitioners and service users sharing their experience and advocating forest-based health projects, as influencers for this topic.

- The forestry sector needs to understand health sector priorities and be specific (using research and evidence) on how forests can address these priorities; also the use of proper language and terminology is needed.

- The forestry sector should lobby policymakers in cooperation with other sectors (for example, other green jobs sectors, drug companies, landowners). Policymakers should be invited into the forests to experience the health benefits directly.
Annex I - Program Overview

8 April 2019

13.00-13.30 Opening and welcome speeches
Representatives of:
- Federal Ministry for Sustainability and Tourism, Austria
- Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development of the Slovak Republic
- FOREST EUROPE – Liaison Unit Bratislava
- Austrian Research Centre for Forests (BFW)

13.30-14.30 Block I - Plenary Session “Presentation of the study Human Health and Sustainable Forest Management, prepared by the FOREST EUROPE Expert group”
- Impacts of forests on human health and well-being
  - Liisa Tyrväinen - Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE)
- Human Health and Sustainable Forest Management
  - Ludmila Marušáková - FOREST EUROPE – Liaison Unit Bratislava
- Health effects of forests: opportunities for the forest sector
  - Markus Sallmannshofer - Austrian Research Centre for Forests (BFW)
- Q&A

15.00-16.30 Block II - Plenary Session “Role of forests in human ill-health prevention, rehabilitation and therapy”
- Kevin Lafferty - Forestry Commission Scotland
- Mark Nieuwenhuijsen - IS Global, Barcelona Institute for Global Health
- Piero Lercher - Department of Environmental Medicine, Medical Chamber Vienna, Austria
- Q&A

16.30-18.00 Block III - Panel Discussion “Expectations, challenges and opportunities”
Moderator: Peter Mayer - Austrian Research Centre for Forests (BFW)
- Paul Nolan - The Mersey Forest
- Marta Pahissa - DKV Seguros Insurance Company
- Leire Salaberria - Union of Foresters of Southern Europe (USSE)
- Piotr Borkowski - European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR)
- Q&A
9 April 2019

9.00–10.30 Block IV - Plenary Session “Best practice examples”
- Trudi Else - England, Active Forests
- Ellen Devine - Forestry Commission England
- Gorka Altuna / Alex Gesse - Union of Foresters of Southern Europe (USSE) / Instituto de Baños de Bosque, Spain, and European Forest Therapy Institute
- Dirk Schmechel - Bavarian Institute of Forestry; Subgroup Forest Pedagogy of FCN
- Franziska Krainer - Austrian Research Centre for Forests (BFW)
- Anders Mickos - Finland, Forest Therapy in Health Care and Social Services
- Q&A

11.00–12.30 Block V - Parallel Sessions “Actions and policies”

Parallel Session I - “Barriers and drivers for promotion of health benefits of forests in the context of a green economy”
Moderator: Liz O’Brien - Forest Research, United Kingdom

Parallel Session II - “How to communicate the health benefits of forests?”
Moderator: Dirk Schmechel - Bavarian Institute of Forestry; Subgroup Forest Pedagogy
Ľudmila Marušáková - FOREST EUROPE - Liaison Unit Bratislava

Parallel Session III - “Improving cross-sectoral cooperation between various stakeholders”
Moderator: Liisa Tyrväinen - Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE)

12.30–13.30 Block VI - Plenary Session (Report back to plenary, discussion and conclusions)
Annex II - Speakers background

Liisa Tyrväinen

Liisa Tyrväinen works as a Research Professor at the Natural Resources Institute Finland (LUKE) and has long experience in interdisciplinary research work regarding amenity benefits of forests and other types of nature areas. Her work has a strong focus on cultural ecosystem benefits, in particular, outdoor recreation, and nature-based tourism. A key target of her research has been to measure health and social benefits of forests and other nature areas. She has been studying health and well-being benefits of forests for over 15 years in several national and international collaboration projects. She has published over 60 peer-reviewed publications, in more than 230 scientific publications. Currently her research team located in Helsinki investigates the role of nature for physical activity promotion, how management affects restorative qualities of forests and potential benefits of virtual nature environments in work environments. Liisa Tyrväinen is a member of editorial boards of Urban Forestry and Urban Greening and International Journal of Outdoor Recreation and Tourism journals. She is also a member of board of directors at Metsähallitus leading management and utilization of state-owned lands in Finland.

Markus Sallmannshofer

Dipl.-Ing. Markus Sallmannshofer, BSc, born 1992 in Munich, Germany, has obtained a master’s degree in Forest Sciences at the University of Life Sciences in Vienna, Austria. Experience in forestry, nature conservation and forest pedagogics widened his perspective towards the multifunctional use of forests and in particular strengthened his interest in harnessing synergy potentials amongst timber production, conservation and the social functions of forests. He utilizes his passion for wildlife photography and film for forestry related public relations work. Actually, he is developing integral conservation and forestry strategies and guidelines in consideration of key stakeholder interests for the Mura-Drava-Danube Biosphere Reserve spanning across five countries.

Kevin Lafferty

Kevin Lafferty is the national policy advisor for Access, Health & Recreation in Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) that serves as the forestry directorate of the Scottish Government. His remit covers access legislation including rights and responsibilities, outdoor recreation, tourism, conservation and managing Forestry Commission’s woods for health program. He is an expert in health and environment policy and practice developing pathfinder projects with the National Health Service and allied health professionals to promote health & wellbeing through the use of the outdoors. This includes setting up the multi-award winning Branching Out - positive mental health through nature referral program and Greening the NHS Estate demonstration program in Scotland. He is a member of the International Union for Conservation of Nature Specialist Group on Health and Protected Areas.

Piero Lercher

Piero Lercher, MD, is a sports physician and an expert in the field of preventive medicine and occupational and environmental health. He published several scientific publications and books and he also works as cartoonist and medical illustrator for several journals and projects. Dr. Lercher has history in medical consultation and study-coordination, and furthermore on conceptual design, coordination and implementation of various interdisciplinary projects including prevention and lifestyle medicine. Currently, he is the Medical Director of the Austrian Health Insurance program “Gesund ist erfolgreich” (= “to be healthy is successful”). Dr. Piero Lercher is medially present in public lectures at various health events and congresses as well as in health-related TV and radio interviews. He works as a lecturer at the Medical University of Vienna (since 2004) and at the Karl Landsteiner Private University of Krems (since 2014). Since 2005 he serves as the organizational director of the Public Health-Master program of the Medical University of Vienna. In March 2012, Dr. Lercher was appointed the Head of the Department of Environmental Medicine of the Vienna Medical Chamber. Moreover, he is a member of many committees of several professional societies (e.g. ÖGSMP, Gesellschaft der Ärzte in Wien, Ordo equestris vini europae).
Challenges and Opportunities

Peter Mayer

Peter Mayer is the Managing Director of the Austrian Research Centre for Forests (BFW), responsible for the development and implementation of the overall strategy and financial operations of BFW. From 2003 to 2010 he was the Executive Director of IUFRO, the International Union of Forest Research Organizations. From 1998 to 2003 Peter Mayer was the head of the Liaison Unit of FOREST EUROPE responsible for developing pan-European forest policy. He holds a master’s degree in forestry and political science and a PhD in forest policy.

Mark Nieuwenhuijsen

Mark J. Nieuwenhuijsen PhD is a world leading expert in environmental exposure assessment, epidemiology, and health risk/impact assessment with a strong focus and interest on healthy urban living. He has been involved in many international research projects. He led the EC funded PHENOTYPE study, examining the relations between green space and health, and is a PI on the EC funded BlueHealth project evaluating the relationship between blue space and health. He has edited 3 books on Exposure Assessment and on Environmental Epidemiology, and one on Integrating Human Health into Urban and Transport planning, and has co-authored 400 papers published in peer reviewed journals and 30 book chapters. In 2018, he was awarded the ISEE John Goldsmith Award for Outstanding Contributions to Environmental Epidemiology.

Paul Nolan

He has been working with The Mersey Forest Team as the Director for 18 years. He has been working on promoting “Green Infrastructure” for over 10 years. Paul has previously worked in Scotland in the commercial forestry sector. He has degrees in Forestry from Bangor University and in Forest Products Technology from Brunel University. He is the chair of the Northwest Green Infrastructure Think Tank and Unit, the National Community Forest Partnership and the Sefton Coast Partnership and a member of the Nature Connected Management Group. Paul is also a board member of the Mersey Forest Foundation and Community Forest Land Trust - two (very) small charities.

Ľudmila Marušáková

Ľudmila Marušáková is the head of FOREST EUROPE · Liaison Unit Bratislava and is responsible for leading the secretariat of the pan-European ministerial process known as FOREST EUROPE focused on developing common forest policies in Europe. Formerly she was working in the field of continuing education, training and communication at the National Forest Centre in Slovakia where, as a deputy director of the Institute for Forest Consulting and Education, she coordinated international activities.

Leire Salaberria

Leire Salaberria is the Managing Director at Union of Foresters of Southern Europe (USSE). She has a Degree in Law and has been practicing international commercial law during 10 years, before joining USSE. She has been the Managing Director of USSE since 2014, representing the organization in every national and international forum and concentrating the work of the organization in: strengthening of the associative structures of forest ownership in Southern Europe through the development of international and trans-regional cooperation projects; maintaining the visibility and influence of USSE in a 28-country European Union and in an increasingly globalized world; promoting the sustainable management of forest and of products, goods and services generated by forests of Southern Europe; contributing to the definition of European and international forest policy through positioning, representation and inter-sectoral dialogue in relevant international forums, offering the points of view and requests of Southern European forests in decision making forums: the European Union, FOREST EUROPE, United Nations, COFO-FAO, and more.
Marta Pahissa i Espluga

Marta Pahissa is the Environmental Projects Coordinator, Life & General Insurances - DKV Seguros Group (ERGO) / Environmental Innovation in Health, Burial, Home and Life insurance services. Previously, she acted as Executive Director of Terra Foundation, and director of solar cooking international cooperation projects (SCI, SolarAfricaNetwork, SolareBrücke). She has a master’s degree in Interdisciplinary Studies in Environmental, Economic and Social Sustainability (UAB University), a master’s degree in Scientific, Medical & Environmental Communication (UPF University), and a bachelor’s degree in Environmental Science (UAB University).

Piotr Borkowski

Piotr Borkowski has his MSc in Forestry, graduated in 1993 from the Forestry Faculty at Warsaw Agricultural University. From 1993 to 2000 he worked at the Forest District of the Polish State Forests - National Forest Holding and dealt with forest management planning, forest harvesting planning, land surveying and geodesy. From January 2004 – December 2007 he was the head of the Liaison Unit Warsaw of the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE: currently FOREST EUROPE). Since September 2012 he works as Executive Director of the European State Forest Association (EUSTAFOR).

Franziska Krainer

Franziska Krainer is a project manager in the Unit for communication at the Austrian Research Centre for Forests. Her main task lies in the management of the Green Care FOREST project. The project is focused on the concept of social sustainability and on the communication of the positive effects on human health and well-being provided by forests. The main aim is to implement pilot projects accomplishing these concepts in strong cooperation with forest owners and forest enterprises together with partners from the health, educational and social sectors. Franziska holds a master’s degree in Science with emphasis on wildlife ecology and management from the University of Natural Resource and Life Sciences Vienna. She gained the professional experience in nature education due to her previous employment as National Park ranger in the National Park Neusiedler See-Seewinkel and as the Head of Nature Education in the Natural History Museum of Graz. She enjoys working in projects that focus on fostering a respectful and sustainable interconnection between people and nature.

Gorka Altuna

Gorka Altuna is the Advisor and Head of Projects at Union of Foresters of Southern Europe (USSE). Forestry engineer by E.T.S.I.A Lleida University (Catalonia, Spain). He was a Biodiversity technician in Environmental Department (San Sebastian City Council) by 2012, technician Basque Wood Cluster from 2013 to 2015 and forestry technician in HAZI’s Forest Department (Basque Country Govern’s Corporation for 1st sector development) from 2015 to 2017. Currently he has been the Head of Projects development in USSE since 04/2017. Gorka Altuna has a good experience in different national and international projects related to the forestry, wood energy and timber sectors. His main tasks are writing and developing projects, including communication and dissemination. He also has experience in PEFC and FSC Chain of Custody and Sustainable Forest Management audits as well as writing Forest Management Plans.

Anders Mickos

Anders Mickos is the Medical Director and Service Director in the Municipality of Sipoo, Finland, where he is in charge of Medical services for citizens of all ages and Social services for the working age population. Anders is a Licentiate of Medicine (~M.D.) and has previously worked as a General Practitioner in public health services. For several years, Anders has been involved in introducing Health Forest excursions as a method of additional treatment and intervention in Primary Health Care and Social services, making Sipoo a pioneer of this field in Finland. Sipoo has been offering Health Forest treatment to clients of Social and Health services since 2015. In his spare time Anders is active in the Scout Movement and as a Scout leader, he wants to offer the younger generation in Sipoo a positive relationship with forests and nature.
Challenges and Opportunities

Ellen Devine

Ellen Devine is Centenary Wellbeing Projects Manager, Forestry Commission England. The Forestry Commission is celebrating its centenary by inspiring a deeper appreciation of our forests, while nurturing and protecting them for future generations. We know that forests offer a unique environment improving physical and mental health — whether through walking, adventure trails, mountain-biking or being still. As Centenary Wellbeing Project Manager, Ellen brings her experience of working in the health and community sectors to deliver a program of activities that promote the health and wellbeing benefits of forests and woodlands for everyone.

Alex Gesse

Alex Gesse is a Certified Forest Therapy Guide. Trainer and Mentor of guides by the European Forest Therapy Institute (EFTI), being one of its co-founders. Alex Gesse is the founder of the Instituto de Baños de Bosque and the Instituto de Banhos de Floresta de Portugal. Alex Gesse is the author of “Sentir el bosque: La experiencia del Shinrin-Yoku (baño de bosque)”, Grijalbo, edited by Penguin Random House Editorial Group. He is trained in business management, sociology, leadership, non-verbal communication and leadership. He holds an E-MBA by EAE Business School of Barcelona. He also attended the Forest Therapy Guide training with the Association of Nature and Forest Therapy Guides and Programs (ANFT). He was the first ANFT European Trainer, training and mentoring guides from all over the world, and the European Coordinator.

Dirk Schmechel

Dirk Schmechel holds the Diploma in Forest sciences at Ludwig-Maximilians-University Munich, 1987. He is the Head of department “Knowledge-transfer, Forest pedagogy and PR” at the Bavarian State Institute of Forestry since 2012, responsible for the education of certified Forest pedagogys in Bavaria. Since 2006 he is a member and official delegate from Germany for the Subgroup Forest pedagogy of the Forest Communicators Network of FAO and ECE, as well as a steering group member and coordinator of the Subgroup since 2014. During 2005 - 2012 he was a deputy head of the department Forest pedagogy at the Bavarian Ministry of Forestry and from 2003 - 2005 manager of the State-forest-district Munich. Before 2003 (from 1987) he was responsible for forest-welfare-function-planning, nature-protection in forests, PR and Forest pedagogy in different offices of the Bavarian Forest Administration.

Trudi Else

Trudi Else has been working at Sport England since 2001 and is currently the Strategic Lead for Market Development within the Facilities and Planning Directorate. Her portfolio includes new partnerships and opportunities to increase activity and currently leads the work in the outdoors with a number of land owners across to activate their settings and visitors. Previously she has worked across a number of programs and sectors delivering leisure provision from play, green spaces and playing fields to major capital build - including the London Olympic Velopark, Manchester Commonwealth Games regeneration legacy and the Manchester Institute of Health and Performance.

Liz O’Brien

Liz O’Brien is the Head of the Social and Economic Research Group at the Forest Research in the United Kingdom. Her research explores the well-being and the cultural ecosystem benefits of trees and woodlands including a strong focus on the health benefits of engagement with trees and woodlands – physical, mental and social. She was previously involved in two EU COST Actions: 1) Forests and human health, 2) Urban forests and green infrastructure, as well as the UK National Ecosystem Assessment Project on shared values. She has researched groups that are excluded and disadvantaged and their engagement with woodlands and wider nature. She has been involved in a large number of evaluations of projects and programs including the current Active Forest Programme and the Westonbirt Community Project (both led by Forestry Commission England), and the Grow Wild Programme (led by the Royal Botanic Gardens Kew). She has cooperated with a range of countries in her research including Norway, Sweden and Australia.