Health benefits of forests: Opportunities for the forest sector

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1 Introduction
1 Introduction
2 Classification scheme

- Forest for health promotion – preventing ill-health
- Forest recreational and tourism offers
- Forest education
- Forest for therapy – treating ill-health

Directly focused on providing health benefits

Potential amount of users

Intensity of using health and well-being benefits of forests
2 Classification scheme

Intensity of using health and well-being benefits of forests vs. Potential amount of users

Forest for health promotion – preventing ill-health
Forest for therapy – treating ill-health
Forest recreational and tourism offers
Holistic programmes and interventions
Forest education
3. Key criteria for good practice examples

- Transferability
- Scientific evidence
- Evaluation
- Employee qualification
- Target group
- Quality management
- Financial profit for the forest owner
- Value added (local)
## Key criteria for good practice examples

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4 Forests for human health promotion and disease prevention

Concepts and opportunities that **directly focus on providing health benefits** for a large and inclusive population that can prevent diseases.

Health benefits **can be provided without direct intervention** - just by providing forests and making them accessible for the recreational use.

- Forests for outdoor recreation
- Curative forests and forest trails
- Forest for mindfulness and “forest bathing”
4 Forests for human health promotion and disease prevention

- **Forests for outdoor recreation**
  Benefits of recreation and physical activity include physical and mental well-being, feelings of escape and freedom, and fun and enjoyment.

- **Curative forests and forest trails**
  Wooded areas which are specially suitable for promoting health and well-being across a broad spectrum.

- **Forest for mindfulness and “forest bathing”**
  Forest for mindfulness target at focusing people’s minds on the present moment using all the senses to engage with woodland (Ambrose-Oji, 2013).

  “Forest bathing” as a relaxation method to be combined with recreation in forests and includes stimulation of all the senses (Tsunetsugu et al., 2010).
5 Forests for therapy and rehabilitation – treating illnesses

Forest therapy focuses on ill-health through treatment and rehabilitation in a forest environment.

This involves smaller numbers of people with specific health conditions such as mental ill-health and addiction issues. Nature is used as the setting and catalyst for therapeutic purposes.

- Forests for hospitals and health care
- Forests for social prescribing
- Wilderness therapy and forest camps
5 Forests for therapy and rehabilitation – treating illnesses

- **Forests for hospitals and health care**
  ... combine the beneficial effects of forests with medical services usually offered in rehabilitation centres and hospitals.

- **Forests for social prescribing**

- **Wilderness therapy and forest camps**
  ... are often applied for psychological reasons and demand a certain level of **physical fitness** (adventurous character).
Forest education providing indirect health benefits

Learning to be active and to interact with natural elements as well as learning to feel good is targeted in forest surroundings (Van den Bosch, 2017). Forests are used as a location and a practical model for all dimensions of sustainability.
Forest education providing indirect health benefits

- **Forest pedagogy / Forest Related Education for Sustainable Development (ESD)**
  Physical activity as well as **sensory, meditative, creative and social experiences stimulated** by FP **support human health**.

- **Outdoor educational institutions: kindergartens and schools**
  **Creative, unstructured, and natural playing** in the forest according to the own needs involves a **continuous process of learning**.

**Forest schools** mainly take pupils once a week to forests. Confidence, social and communicative skills, motivation and concentration, as well as physical skills have been shown to be improved (O’Brien and Murray, 2005; 2006; 2007; Massey, 2002 Roe & Aspinall, 2011; Lovell & Roe., 2009).
7 Forest recreation and tourism providing indirect health benefits

With the decline in the net revenue gained and jobs offered in timber production, nature tourism is more and more important for rural development.
7 Forest recreation and tourism providing indirect health benefits

- Due to modern lifestyle, the attractiveness of forests for recreation and tourism is more and more recognized.

- Financial losses from adapted forest management practices can be offset by the increased number of visitors, but forest owners and enterprises need to be involved in the generated economic profits.

- Forests provide the opportunity for creative and exclusive tourism offers.

- Negative impacts have to be minimised to contribute to sustainable development and to minimise conflicts. → sustainable recreation and tourism
Green jobs generating additional income and investments in the forest sector

- Green jobs based on forest ecosystem services
  
  - **Local providers** of forest activities can generate revenue and benefit from offering various activities, such as guided forest excursions, educational or therapeutic programmes, workshops, seminars, etc.

  - It is a challenge for the future to find a balance between traditional forest services and “new services”.
Green jobs generating additional income and investments in the forest sector

- Networks, cross-sectoral communication and coordination
  - **Networks will support the implementation** and promote the awareness among providers and potential users.
  - Health opportunities and benefits offered by forests go **hand in hand with SFM** - the forest sector plays a key role.
  - To ensure the forest sector benefits financially from generated profits it has to **participate in the development of new marketable income streams**.
Conclusions

Promoting the health benefits of forests provides opportunities for forest managers to

- **diversify** their businesses and generate **income**.
- establish **new networks** and cooperations.
- to improve the public awareness for all services delivered by forests and forestry.
- increase **competitiveness** of the forest sector.
- be considered in key **national government objectives and strategies**, World Health Organisation **action plans** and the **Sustainable Development Goals**.
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