



The 125th Anniversary Congress on 18-22 September 2017 in Freiburg, Germany, will offer a wide selection of scientific sessions highlighting innovative research and interdisciplinary research approaches of relevance to forests, and focus on the transfer of scientific knowledge on critical global forest-related challenges to national and international political agendas. In a series of “Congress Spotlight” articles individual sessions shall be showcased to give a foretaste of the richness and scope of research findings that will be presented at the Congress. Keep updated at: <http://iufro2017.com/>

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Remote forest-dependent communities can benefit through social innovation

Many rural forest-dependent communities face similar challenges – lack of infrastructure, housing, and transport as well as aging populations.

When global issues such as climate change, sustainability, and energy and food security are added to the mix, the need for solutions to the challenges becomes much more pressing.

Prof. Maria Nijnik, coordinator of a session to be held at the IUFRO 125th Anniversary Congress in Freiburg in September, sees social innovation that enhances the sustainable use of forest ecosystem services as one way to address those challenges.



The village of Iza in Transcarpathian Ukraine is famous far beyond the region's borders for its wicker products. Most villagers are involved in the business.
<http://ukurier.gov.ua/uk/articles/selo-iza-na-zakarpatti-postachaye-virobi-z-verbi-d/>

Social innovation entails new practices targeting new products, services, models and social relationships and collaborations, as well as new fields of activity. It is usually described as focusing attention on ideas and solutions that create social value, as well as the processes through which they are generated.

Ms Mariana Melnykovich is co-chair of the session, and a PhD student at the Ukrainian National Forestry University and at the James Hutton Institute in Aberdeen, Scotland, UK. She gave an example from the Ukrainian Carpathians, where local farmers have created an association for local sheep cheese production, along with ecotourism and the promotion of local culture.

Other examples of social innovation identified by the session organizers include community-owned renewable energy initiatives, social care farming, local food production, agroforestry, arts and crafts cooperatives, as well as emissions trading, fair trade, broadband and microfinance.

“The ecosystem services of forests are especially important to forest-dependent communities in marginalized rural areas where local wellbeing can be lower than elsewhere,” said Prof. Nijnik, Principal Social-Economic Scientist of the James Hutton Institute. Prof. Nijnik is also an IUFRO officeholder ([Working Party on Managerial Economics](#)) and

coordinator of the Social Innovation in Marginalized Rural Areas (<http://www.simra-h2020.eu>) project, funded by the European Union Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Program.

“Forests provide a long list of benefits to people and are vital to communities. Sustainable use of forest ecosystem services can provide a substantial contribution to the wellbeing of those communities,” she said.

The IUFRO Congress session being organized by Prof. Nijnik and Ms Melnykovich is entitled **“Ecosystem services and the wellbeing of forest dependent communities: enhancing social innovation and building resilience to global changes in remote rural areas”**.



Photo source: <http://www.simra-h2020.eu/index.php/2017/05/>

“Attention to social innovation and its role in attaining a more sustainable use of ecosystem services has been rising,” said Prof. Nijnik. “Social innovation is expected to respond to social demands that are traditionally not addressed by markets or existing institutions.”

She noted that social innovations can include the creation of new institutions, networks and governance arrangements and, while these practices may be closely associated with rural policy reforms, they necessarily rely on the voluntary engagement of civil society.

Expansion of novel local businesses (e.g. bioenergy) and activities (e.g. mountain biking) in some localities can be seen as a means of economic advance. However, these can also entail environmental and social challenges.

To effectively address these challenges at a local level, participatory governance and implementation of ecosystem based management practices are becoming increasingly important. A cohesive policy combining top-down and bottom-up approaches that include local initiatives and social innovations can be a solution, she added.

The IUFRO session in September will address questions of how to integrate local and indigenous knowledge in forestry-related decision-making processes; what are green energy options for forest-dependent communities; how to assess forest policy options through an improved understanding of the attitudes prevailing in forest-dependent communities, building resilience and capacities for sustainability, and how to integrate forest ecosystem services into climate change adaptation plans.

Underlining the importance of the topic, Prof. Nijnik noted that she had been pleasantly surprised to receive 21 abstracts on the subject from all around the world.

The September 18-22 Congress in Freiburg will celebrate IUFRO’s 125th anniversary. Founded in 1892 in Eberswalde Germany, IUFRO has grown to unite more than 15,000 scientists (who cooperate in IUFRO on a voluntary basis) in almost 700 member organizations in more than 120 countries.

IUFRO promotes global cooperation in forest-related research and enhances the understanding of the ecological, economic and social aspects of forests and trees. It disseminates scientific knowledge to stakeholders and decision-makers and contributes to forest policy and on-the-ground forest management.

About 2000 scientists from 89 countries are expected to attend the Congress. The Social Innovation session in Freiburg will be one of 172 scientific sessions that will cover a wide array of topics dealing with various aspects of forest research.

See you at the IUFRO 125th Anniversary Congress in Freiburg, Germany!
Look out for [#IUFRO2017](#) on Twitter and [@iufro2017](#) on Facebook!

The International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO) is the only worldwide organization devoted to forest research and related sciences. Its members are research institutions, universities, and individual scientists as well as decision-making authorities and other stakeholders with a focus on forests and trees. Visit: <http://www.iufro.org/>

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