

Forests, Trees and Human Health

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• S. Vries • K. Seeland • J. Schipperijn
Editors

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Preface

The histories of European civilization and European forests are closely intertwined. Prior to industrialization wood, fodder and food from forests helped support our rural economies. Since then forest management has continuously adapted to meet the needs of industry and of urbanized society. Today cultural, amenity and environmental objectives inform all forest management, reflecting the concerns and requirements of contemporary society.

In the late twentieth Century lifestyle-related health problems emerged as an important new concern in all developed countries. Should this lead to a new objective for forestry in Europe? Can forests and forest management help in the promotion of healthier lifestyles and improved mental health?

This book summarizes research on these questions. Between 2004 and 2008 some 160 scientists from 24 European countries, with contributors from Asia, Australia, Canada and the United States, worked together in COST Action E39 'Forests, Trees and Human Health and Wellbeing' to promote our understanding of how forests contribute to health in Europe and elsewhere.

Funded by the EU through the European Science Foundation, COST is an inter-governmental framework for European Cooperation in Science and Technology. Its function is to encourage coordination of nationally funded research on a European level so that Europe will continue to hold a strong position in scientific and technical research.

In addition to this book, which has many contributors, the scientists and professionals in COST Action E39 prepared state-of-the-art reports on national research initiatives concerned with forests and health. National health policies and priorities of European countries have been described and the possibilities for forestry to help meet them have been analyzed.

A successful COST action leads to continuing collaboration. Members of the action continue to work together in new primary research and have produced individual and jointly authored peer-reviewed papers in international scientific journals. International co-operation continues between researchers from the USA, Australia and Asia through joint arrangements with IUFRO and ASEM.

Coordinating such a large group of participants has been a major task made possible by the professionalism, commitment and hard work of the COST secretariat

in Brussels. Particular thanks are due to Arne Been and Günter Siegel, and most recently to Melae Langbein.

We gratefully acknowledge the help of Cecil Konijnendijk and Chris Baines, who facilitated and edited our efforts towards identifying future research needs. Jasper Schipperijn played an invaluable role in coordinating the final text and liaising with our publishers.

This action not only encompassed many different countries it was also highly interdisciplinary. The leaders of the five working groups in E39 appear here as editors (Part I – Christos Gallis, Part II – Terry Hartig, Part III – Sjerp de Vries, Part IV – Klaus Seeland, Paul Mitchell-Banks/Fabio Sabitano) in cooperation with the Action's chairman and vice-chair. Over the slightly more than 4 years of the Action their leadership and inspiration has helped us navigate the rocks and shallows on which so many multi-disciplinary projects can founder.

Forests and woods occupy about 30% of the land area of Europe and extend from the centers of our towns to the most remote areas. Most forests are accessible at little or no cost. If by encouraging a new way of seeing forests, as a resource for health, we have made a difference in the quality of life of people in Europe then all participants of COST Action E39 have reason to take pride and find encouragement for future work in the field.

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