

The multiple values of European mountain forests: which perspectives in a green economy?

A Round Table promoted in the framework of EXPO 2015 -*Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life*-

3rd June 2015, 3.00 – 6:30 pm, Pianeta Lombardia - EXPO 2015, Milan

This year's Universal Exhibition is celebrated at a crucial moment. The United Nations special conference will approve a set of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), from poverty eradication, achieving food security and water availability to resilient human settlements, ecosystems conservation and energy security. In December governments hope to sign a global treaty on tackling climate change, first of this type in the last 20 years. For that, Expo2015 “*Feeding the Planet, Energy for Life*” represents a great occasion to create momentum around key food security and sustainable land management issues on the global level.

Forests are the key land ecosystem ensuring the preservation of biodiversity and they constitute an important source of renewable materials. Hence, forests play an essential role in achieving sustainable development and related Goals (SDGs), poverty eradication and green economy. The forest sector contributes already largely to the green economy, seen as the mean to achieving sustainable development, but can play an even more significant role if use of wood based products and dissemination of modern wood energy.

In this context, it is worth noticing that almost one third of the European land surface is covered by mountains, and forests cover some 40% of the European mountain areas. Due to their intrinsic multi-functionality, mountain forests provide a multiple set of ecosystem services, benefiting the livelihood of European population - and not only mountain dwellers - in manifold ways. These services include for example the protection from natural hazards such as rockfall, avalanches and hydrogeological stability, the production of timber and non-wood goods, and landscape aesthetics which is often key to tourism and recreation. Nature conservation values and biodiversity aspects are often involved as well as the capacity of forests to act as a carbon sink can play a major role in climate change mitigation policies.

Given the relevance of these topics for the themes addressed by the EXPO 2015, the Italian Ministry for the Environment and the UNECE/FAO Forestry and Timber Session cooperate for the organization a high-level Round Table titled “*The multiple values of European mountain forests: which perspectives in a green*

economy?”, which will take place on the 3rd of June 2015 to discuss the potential of the European mountain forest sector in a green economy according to an inter-sectoral, integrated perspective.

The event will consistently take place on the eve of the launch of the “Mountain Week” promoted from 4th -11th June 2015 as an initiative of the Ministers of the Alpine Convention at EXPO 2015 as well as of the celebration of the World Environment Day 2015 which will take place on 5th of June, 2015.

In the Alpine region, where forests are a potential driver for economic development, creating jobs in wood processing, agriculture, tourism and energy production, **the implementation of green economy principles creates multiple opportunities for the forest sector. The Alpine Convention, through its Protocol on “Mountain Forests” and its work on the green economy, is aligned with the objectives of the Rovaniemi Action Plan for the Forest Sector in a Green Economy adopted in December 2013 at the joint session of the UNECE Committee on Forests and the Forest Industry and the FAO European Forestry Commission.**

The Action Plan for the Forest Sector in a Green Economy was adopted to address how the European forest sector could lead the way towards the emerging green economy at the global level. A discussion on the potential synergies between the Rovaniemi Action Plan and other strategic regional cooperation frameworks for sustainable mountain development in Europe, including the Alpine Convention and the Carpathian Convention, will thus be the core of this high-level Round Table with the aim to contributing to the global discussion on the sustainable management of the resources of our planet that will be at the heart of the EXPO 2015.

Mountain forests therefore represent one of the core natural assets of the European region that could lead the way towards a green economy - bio-based, low-carbon, socially inclusive - by improving human well-being and social equity while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.

The **Round Table** aims to address these topics by means of a territorial approach that wishes to identify the specific conditions and the potential contribution of the mountain forests in the different bio-geographical regions of Europe, from the Carpathians to the Mediterranean - through the Alpine arc.

This approach is also directed to analyze how international cooperation can play a leading role in promoting the contribution of the European forest sector to a green economy, through an effective multi-level governance of sustainable forest management strategies that can also be a driver to sustainable development and action to fight the potential impacts of changing climatic conditions.



From a resource manager's point of view, forest products offer scope for innovative variations on the standard repertoire of forestry, agriculture and forest industry practice, such as:

- a) make integrated approaches to land use, such as agroforestry, still more versatile;
- b) make sustainable forestry practices easier to promote by enhancing the value and fringe benefits of standing forests, so deflecting local pressures to over-harvest the timber component;
- c) enhance the protection of watersheds or prevent soil erosion by providing economic incentives to conserve natural spaces;
- d) clamp down the land use changes increasing the economic value of natural resources (primarily deforestation and land abandonment)
- e) provide an extra line of defense against global trends like adverse climate change or general loss of biodiversity.

Cultural landscapes in Europe have been shaped by the long-term agro-sylvicultural and grazing activities, originating a complex ecosystem composed by the interaction among forests, grasslands, croplands and rural villages. This land use pattern is now recognized and appreciated for its ability to provide a wide range of ecosystem services especially in mountain areas, such as biodiversity and cultural heritage conservation.

For this reason, and in order to encourage human activities in mountain areas, the study and development of alternative and additional incomes from the multiple forest sector products and services, like those relative to commercialization of NWFPs, may play an active role even for the future nature conservation strategies related to the land sharing approach in a green economy.

This acknowledgement has also a fundamental social role, trying to arrest the abandonment of rural land that is affecting mountain areas in Europe (e.g. Alps, Apennines and Carpathians), and will be the object of an open discussion that will take place in the context of this Round Table

