

Symposium: Innovations in urban forestry research – The European experience

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Introduction – Urban Forestry Research in Europe

This symposium provides a brief but comprehensive overview of the current state of urban forestry research in Europe. Although the continent has a long history of research on urban trees and urban green space, the urban forestry concept did not obtain wider recognition until the mid-1990s. At that time, a series of regional and pan-European research networks were established under the umbrella of the urban forestry concept, bringing together researchers from different disciplines and fields. Research networks were extended to also include practitioners, as embodied in the European Forum on Urban Forestry, an event set up in 1998 and held every year in a different European city. Since the setting up of these initiatives, the body of research on European urban forestry has rapidly increased, as reflected in the literature, as well as in e.g. the growing number of doctoral studies on urban forestry topics.

The symposium discusses the current state of European urban forestry research, highlighting European strengths and innovative research that also has important implications for urban forestry policy and practice. Three of Europe's leading experts will present their review of three overall themes. Cecil Konijnendijk van den Bosch looks at People and Trees, focusing on the socio-cultural aspects of urban forestry. Francesco Ferrini's topic is Trees and Management, with particular emphasis on advances in arboricultural research. Finally, Anders B. Nielsen will present the theme of Trees and Urban Forests, looking at e.g. resource inventories and assessments, and the connections between trees, woodland and the overall urban forest. The presentations are followed by a panel debate in which e.g. Europe's role in global urban forestry research and development is discussed. Particular emphasis will be on cross-linkages between North America and Europe.

Trees and People: Advances in Research

The European urban forestry research scene has traditionally has one of its strongholds in research on the social and cultural services provided by urban trees, parks and woodland. This presentation discusses the current state of art within this theme, providing both a more general overview and discussing a number of especially innovative projects and their findings. Research has moved far beyond the more traditional approaches of e.g. counting visitors or asking people what they like or dislike about their local urban forest. Recent years have for example seen increasing efforts to obtain a *more in-depth understanding of the interrelations between people and urban forests*, from a socio-ecological perspective. Various research methods and tools have been developed that help us gain much better insight in how people perceive, use and relate to forests and trees. Especially the Nordic countries have been active in this development, having

identified various ways of categorizing landscape characteristics and linking these to e.g. the impacts on recreation and mental health and wellbeing.

Other work has given particular attention to less-studied *user groups*, such as the growing population of ethnic minorities, the elderly, and children. Also this research has made the picture of how people and urban forests interact much more nuanced.

The various *cultural ecosystem services* of urban forests are the topic of studies that attempt to assess and sometimes quantify these services. This work has included, among other, hedonic pricing studies, but also on issues such as place identity, social cohesion and learning. Study of the direct and indirect health effects of urban forests has been among the most rapidly expanding components.

Another line of research has studied the *involvement of residents in urban forestry policy and practice*, studying for example volunteering in green space management as well as people's engagement in more formal planning processes. Not only have different involvement processes been studied, but research has also looked at the motivations of both residents and urban foresters.

The above relates to the wider topic of *urban forest governance*, concerned with the setting and implementation of rules that guide the strategic development and management of urban forests. Recent work has attempted to assess and compare different governance approaches and arrangements, while also looking at more specific aspects of urban governance, such as the role of urban forests in city branding.

Further reading

- Konijnendijk, C.C., 2003. **A decade of urban forestry in Europe.** *Forest Policy and Economics* 5(3): 173-186.
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- Konijnendijk, C.C, Nilsson, K., Randrup, T.B. and Schipperijn, J. (eds.), 2005. **Urban Forests and Trees.** Springer, Heidelberg. 520 p.
- Nielsen, A.B., Konijnendijk, C.C., Wiström, B., Jensen, R.B., 2013. **Municipal woodland in Denmark: resources, governance and management.** *Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research* 28(1): 49-63.