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URBAN FORESTS AND THE NEEDS OF VISITORS: A CASE STUDY OF KOŠUTNJAK PARK FOREST, SERBIA

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Abstract

Urban forests contribute to social, aesthetic and economic benefits within cities. In urban forest management, these aspects are often not incorporated, especially in the countries of South East Europe (e.g. Serbia), where the management of urban forests is still dominated by classical forestry aims (i.e. timber production). This paper analyzes the Košutnjak urban forest in Belgrade, with a special emphasis on the needs of its visitors and the importance of its use. We aim to raise awareness of the social benefits that this urban forest provides to residents and offer suggestions for sound and responsible management, which are based on the assumption of active and regular involvement of visitors. This case study contributes to a better understanding of visitors' relationships with this urban forest, which is an important urban forest at the country level.

Visitors of this urban forest completed a face-to-face survey, which indicated that most of the visitors came from surrounding neighborhoods, mainly for active recreation (engaging in sports) and relaxation in the forest. Most of respondents were satisfied with the management and maintenance of the area. Nevertheless, they offered suggestions for improvements. Most of the visitors would be willing to get personally involved in a decision-making process regarding the area and showed a willingness to pay money toward the maintenance via fees. Thus, this study demonstrates the potential and need of public involvement in the management of such urban forests. The findings indicate that this approach could help decision makers express commonly shared values in management decisions.

Keywords: Belgrade, public involvement, urban forest, visitor needs, willingness to pay

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