

Health and recreational function of forest ecosystem services of periurban forests of a protected area - analysis of visitors' knowledge about forest ecosystem services

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INTRODUCTION

Public Institution „Nature Park Medvednica” (PINPM) conducts research *Understanding the health functions of peri-urban PA forests and payments for ecosystem services (PES)* as a part of the project SINCERE. The aim of the research is to valorize the health function of forest ecosystem services (FES) and to develop the PES methodology.

For the research purpose, a pilot study was conducted to assess the energy capacity of the hiking trails of the Medvednica Nature Park (NPM).

The primary goal of the research was to collect information on levels of energy capacity activation considering users health, and the secondary goal was to determine the differences in physical activity on the two most visited hiking trails.

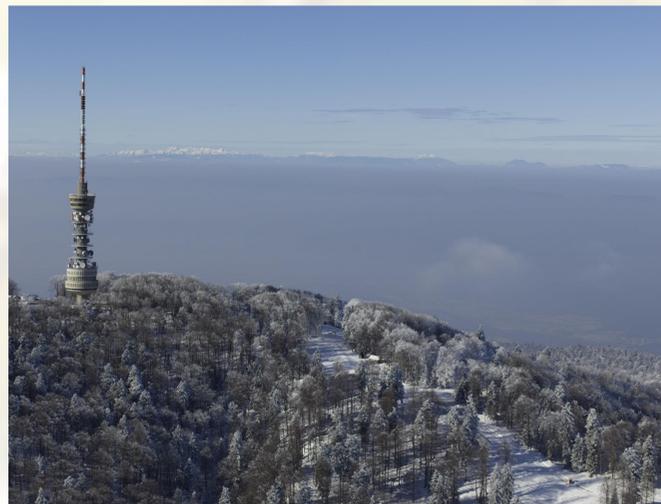
PINPM conducted a visitor survey. The aim of the survey was to assess how visitors evaluate wellbeing provided by the Park and analysis of visitors' FES perception.

METHODES AND RESULTS

The aim of the survey was to assess how visitors evaluate wellbeing provided by the Park using the method of willingness to pay to enjoy the area. The research was conducted twice, in 2018 and a repeated in 2020. According to the results, the most important reasons for coming to the Park are fresh air, staying in nature, sports and recreation.

Most visitors are not familiar with the FES term but those who know it recognize more services (beside the primary ones) such as production of oxygen and wood pulp. Most of the respondents believe that being in nature improves their social, psychological and physical wellbeing.

However, less than half of the respondents were willing to pay a visit to the Park in 2018, while in 2020 that number decreased.



CONCLUSION

This project aims to raise public FES awareness and its impact on health. With higher FES awareness greater involvement in content design and more conscientious attitude towards the Park are expected from stakeholders and visitors. The results of the pilot research will be used for planning sports and recreational activities as a valuable data on the well-being and consumption of the Park's natural resources. The results of the surveys, however, indicate that it is necessary to continuously educate visitors and public about the FES.



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