Workshop on sharing experiences on urban and peri-urban forestry

28th January 2011, Brussels

REPORT OF THE MEETING

In the context of the European Union Forestry Action Plan (EU-FAP), on January 28th 2011, Member State representatives, invited experts and stakeholders, as well as European Commission staff met in Brussels to discuss their experiences on urban and peri-urban forestry (UPF), explore its potential and identify recommendations for taking the UPF agenda forward in Europe. A brief report of the proceedings of this workshop follows, focusing on the outcomes and recommendations produced. Background and delivery experience case study papers and presentations can be found at http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/events/28-01-2011/index_en.htm.

Context

The EU-FAP, under theme three, contributing to the quality of life, proposed to explore the potential of urban and peri-urban forests (Key action 12). Under this action, two activities were foreseen:

1. Review and integrate methodologies for evaluating the social and human impacts of urban and peri-urban forests in order to establish appropriate long-term indicators and robust frameworks to guide future investment and management
2. Explore structures to engage local communities and non-traditional stakeholders in planning, creating, managing and using urban and peri-urban forests.

As a contribution to Key action 12 and the above activities, the European Commission, in co-operation with the Forestry Commission of Great Britain, hosted a workshop focusing on sharing experiences on the delivery of UPF.

Objectives

The objectives of the workshop were to:

- Review and share current knowledge and understanding of structures, processes and information as well as management-decision making practices used in relation to UPF and their contribution to social and community agendas as well as their interlinkages with other policy areas such as climate change, biodiversity, urban development and urban regeneration
- Identify remaining gaps in knowledge and understanding and propose further actions to complete the picture
- Exchange experience of good practice in the policy-making, delivery and aftercare of UPF
- Identify further opportunities for trans-national collaboration in the development of urban and peri-urban forests
- Formulate recommendations for further actions that reflect the discussions and help to fill identified gaps so that the Standing Forestry Committee (SFC) is informed about what needs to happen, where, when and how.

**Participation**

Participants travelled from across Europe to take part in the workshop with representatives from Austria, Belgium, Croatia, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Luxembourg, Poland, Slovenia, Sweden and the UK. These included Member State representatives; interested stakeholders, such as the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), the Advisory Group on Forestry and Cork and the Peri Urban Regions Platform Europe (PURPLE); experts, such as representatives from Bristol city council (UK), the Vienna Forest Service and the Swedish National Board of Housing, and the research community, including representatives from Universities in Bari, Copenhagen, Brussels, Vienna, Stockholm and Myerscough College (UK). Also in attendance were representatives from EU institutions: Committee of the Regions and Directorate General for Agriculture, DG Environment and DG Regional Policy of the European Commission.

**PROCEEDINGS**

**Introduction**

The workshop was chaired by Cecil Konijnendijk who is professor of Green Space Management at the University of Copenhagen and a well-established expert in the UPF field. Professor Konijnendijk began the workshop with an illuminating introduction to the history and importance of UPF in Europe. This was followed by an opening address from Hilkka Summa, Head of the Unit responsible for forestry within DG AGRI, which usefully situated the UPF agenda and the workshop within current European policy.

The rest of the workshop consisted of three overview papers which established the context for discussions and the current evidence base, five case study papers which explored how UPF has been delivered in different regions, countries, municipalities and cities across Europe, as well as two sessions devoted to experience and knowledge sharing, constructive debate and dialogue.

**Overview Papers**

The three overview papers were collaborative efforts involving experts from across Europe and led by Forest Research and the Forestry Commission of Great Britain. These focused on:

- **The physical UPF resource in Europe** – led by Marcus Sangster, Forestry Commission
  
  *Co authors:* Anders Busse Nielsen, SLU and Amy Stewart, Forest Research.
Summary: This paper established the common definition of UPF to be used throughout the workshop. This definition accepted that UPF is an interdisciplinary and integrative concept and was based on two existing definitions:

1. The definition of urban forestry used by the Society of American Foresters that sees it as ‘the art, science and technology of managing trees and forest resources in and around urban community ecosystems for the physiological, sociological, economic, and aesthetic benefits trees provide to society’.
2. The definition of UPF adopted by the UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) which sets urban forestry within a wider context of the urban green environment and highlights the fact that UPF includes urban and peri-urban woodland, as well as trees in parks, gardens, cemeteries, tree-lined streets and squares, undeveloped areas, transport and river corridors.

The original purpose of the paper was to report on the structure, composition and quantity of the UPF resource in Europe. However, these ambitions were frustrated by a lack of relevant empirical data at a national and European level. The main thrust of the paper, therefore, was on information and data requirements and on the threats to, and constraints on UPF, such as climate change, and pests and diseases. The paper concluded that the management of UPF in Europe is hindered by a lack of good quality empirical data but that this problem could be overcome with only fairly minor amendments to existing processes and systems. This would help to ensure that UPF can contribute more fully to the wellbeing of Europeans and the sustainability not only of the urban environment but also the wider environment that is so strongly impacted by urban activities.

- The societal benefits of UPF in Europe – led by Amy Stewart, Forest Research
  Co-authors: Simon Bell, Estonian University of Life Science and Edinburgh College of Art; Giovanni Sanesi, University of Bari; Rik De Vreese, Vrije Universiteit Brussel and Arne Arnberger, BOKU.

Summary: This paper described the main benefits (or ecosystem services) that UPF can provide to society, including improvements to the physical quality of the places where people live and enhancements to their quality of life. These benefits were described under three headings:

- Environmental: improved air quality; moderation of urban climates; reducing rainfall runoff intensity and flooding; improving water quality; reducing noise levels, and supporting biodiversity
- Social: recreation, physical health and mental well-being; social interaction, inclusion and cohesion; education, and learning and aesthetics and quality of place
- Economic: economic value of social and environmental benefits; property values and willingness to pay

The paper also reviewed evidence relating to how these benefits can be realised in practice. The paper found that UPF provide a vital resource to urban populations in a multitude of ways but that in the planning and execution of UPF interventions, many factors must be taken into account.
It was concluded that there are numerous gaps in available evidence relating to UPF benefits but of particular importance is the need for the development and use of standardised systems to quantify or value the benefits or ecosystem services provision from UPF and for a better understanding to be gained about how exactly UPF should be designed and managed for benefit provision.

**The governance of UPF in Europe** – led by Anna Lawrence, Forest Research

*Co-authors:* Mark Johnston, Myerscough College, Cecil. C. Konijnendijk, University of Copenhagen and Rik De Vreese, Vrije Universiteit Brussel.

*Summary:* Governance can be defined as the institutions, organisations, knowledge and processes involved in making policy and management decisions. UPF governance therefore refers to the structures, rules, partnerships and processes that shape decisions about urban and peri-urban trees and woodlands. This paper presented a conceptual framework and provided an overview of: issues pertaining to laws, policies and regulations that relate to UPF; the government structures that influence their implementation; tenure of trees and woods in towns; the different groups of stakeholders that are involved; the range of delivery mechanisms available, and the participatory and knowledge management processes required to achieve UPF.

The paper concluded that the governance of UPF relies on a particularly diverse body of legislation and policy which brings with it the need for partnership and proactive adaptive management approaches. UPF is already more socially inclusive than other types of natural resource management and a central tenet of UPF is the need for public participation.

There are a number of continuing challenges to UPF governance, in many cases there are no comprehensive policies for UPF, the information base for planning and management is often weak, urban demands are rapidly changing and conflicts over UPF and their use have intensified. These challenges need to be addressed at the most appropriate governance level and scale. Investing in communication, involving stakeholders and awareness raising at the local level should be a priority as this will increase public and political support for UPF. There is also a need for integration between sectors, between urban and rural planning, and between cities and countries.

**Case Studies**

Five case studies were presented from different regions of Europe (Southern, Central, Atlantic, Eastern and Nordic):

- **The Lombardy regional experience in Italy** – Dr. Robert Carovigno, Lombardy Forest Service
- **The Vienna city experience in Austria** – Herbert Weidinger, Vienna Forest Department
- **The Bristol city experience in the UK** – Russell Horsey, Bristol City Council
- **The Celeje city experience in Slovenia** – Robert Hostnik, Slovenia Forest Service
- **The Stockholm regional experience in Sweden** – Ulrika Åkerlund, Swedish National Board of Housing
Participants also viewed a video created by the European Atlas project (UNEP-EEA-ESA) on UPF in the Ruhr district in Germany.

Discussion

The combination of overview papers, case study presentations and facilitated discussion sessions led to a lively, motivating and productive exchange. The discussion sessions helped to draw out gaps in the current state of evidence and formulate recommendations on what needs to happen in order to further the UPF agenda within Europe. It was noted that UPF is an important element in the delivery of the remits of Agricultural, Environmental and Regional policies.

Workshop recommendations

Based on the presentations and discussions at the workshop, the following recommendations are made to policy makers at the EU and national levels:

1.1. Resources and management

1. The different components of the urban forest, such as woodland, park and street trees, need to be considered in a much more integrated way, rather than as domains of their own. Moreover, both public and private land needs to be taken into account.

2. With current levels of empirical data on UPF resources across Europe being so poor, it is challenging to make trans-national or pan-European overviews. More comparative studies that go beyond the city or city-region level are needed on the quantity, structure, composition and state of UPF resources.

3. This in turn rests on the development of common definitions within data-gathering processes and common approaches to data collection and standards of measurement and evaluation within countries and across national boundaries. The recent work in this direction by organisations such as FAO, but also the International Society of Arboriculture and the International Union of Forest Research Organisations should be supported. Results from EC Research programmes and projects dealing with harmonisation of forest information can also support the development of common definitions.

4. UPF resources need to be accounted for specifically in National Forest Inventories and tree health surveys, including trees in non-public spaces. This links up to the general need for clearer common definitions and to the wider debate on forest information derived from the adoption of the Commission's Green Paper on forest protection and information.

5. There is a need for landscape scale identification of opportunities for expansion and integration of UPF within new urban development. Integrative processes are required which give a profile to UPF in urban planning and design.

6. More needs to be understood about the implications of climate change for UPF, covering species choice, effects on existing resources and likelihood of catastrophic environmental events.

7. More research is needed to explore the risks posed by pests and diseases, covering institutional issues that impact on effective national-level control and regulation, levels of risk, implications of climate change, remedial measures, cost-benefit assessments and the genetic make-up of UPF species.
1.2. Benefits

1. Further **assessment needs** to be carried out to better quantify the contribution of UPF to maintain and enhance biodiversity and to the provision of **ecosystem services** (e.g., water purification, carbon sequestration, climate regulation, recreational and cultural values, protection of infrastructure, etc.) in urban areas. Such assessment should also establish how to reap the potential of UPF to be used in ecosystem-based approaches to mitigation and adaptation of climate change.

2. Many of the studies which provide an evidence base for the benefits of UPF originate in North America. There is a need to **replicate and advance these studies** in a European context, as well as to development new approaches in Europe.

3. There is a need to develop **common approaches** to the identification and valuation of the products, services and benefits that are provided by UPF. This will allow management objectives to be established and comparative Cost Benefit Analysis to be carried out, which will in turn help to inform wider resource management. Furthermore, if this is not achieved then the field will have continuing difficulty competing with urban land uses where such quantitative is readily available. This effort should connect to the EU Forest Action Plan Key Action 3, and can benefit from findings from the work of an ad hoc Standing Forestry Committee working group on valuation and compensation methods for non wood forest goods and services, and of the Commission’s study on the development and marketing of non-market forests products and services.

4. A link could be also made with ongoing work under **The Economics of Ecosystem services and Biodiversity (TEEB)** study that will start a new phase and aims at more concretely provide a valuation of ecosystem services and biodiversity in Europe. Thus in that exercise, European evidence of the benefits of UPF among other ecosystems could be gathered.

5. There is a need for evidence to be gathered and guidance developed on **how UPF should be designed and maintained**, including decisions about species choice, density, distribution and quality, to ensure **maximisation of the potential benefits** to society. These findings need be incorporated in UPF management plans. This task would be made easier if more was known about the extent, composition and quality of the existing UPF resource across Europe, a need identified above.

6. Guidance development would also benefit from further study of the **different benefits generated by different types or elements of UPF**. This development could be linked to initiatives on Business and Biodiversity at EU level (Commission Platform on Business@Biodiversity) and national level (national platforms). These platforms aim at **exchanging best practices** and information on the business opportunities provided by biodiversity and on the best ways to reduce the negative impacts of business on biodiversity. The EU Business@Bioversity platform has a specific strand dedicated to forestry which would be a good forum to exchange information on the management of UPF.

7. UPF provides a wide range of benefits. However, more needs to be understood about how the attainment of **certain benefits impacts upon the realisation of other benefits** (‘trade offs’) and how best to achieve a satisfactory balance between them.

1.3. Governance

1. With current levels of evidence, it is challenging to make generalisations. More **comparative information** is needed on what modes of UPF governance exist – and how they work.
2. These in turn rest on the **legal base** for UPF. There is a need for a comprehensive overview of existing and potential tools.

3. It is important to gain a clearer idea of **appropriate scale** for UPF policy.

4. There is a need for evaluation of **funding mechanisms** for UPF, including income generation from benefits. In this context, there could be very strong links with ongoing work on the EU Biodiversity Strategy and assessments on the application of innovative financing mechanisms to fund the protection of ecosystems and the services they provide. For example, public–private partnerships with banking institutions are being created which could be very helpful for this purpose.

5. More attention should be given to the **urban-rural interface**, informed by thinking across a traditional ‘planning divide’. This involves peri-urban forestry as well as related approaches such as urban agriculture.

6. As an overall recommendation, this workshop suggests that the **development of a European-wide strategy for UPF** should be explored. Here the EU’s Forest Action Plan provides an obvious starting point.

7. Given the important role of UPF in protecting biodiversity, connecting natural areas, mitigating climate change and contributing to the adaptation to the effects of climate change, there is a clear benefit in **linking the work on UPF with ongoing work** on the EU Biodiversity Strategy and in particular on Green Infrastructure, which will lead to a Communication on Green Infrastructure (GI). UPF can be an integral part of this Green Infrastructure in urban areas and as such could also be considered in the same EU funding mechanisms that could be envisaged for GI (Cohesion funds, LIFE+, etc).

8. There is a need to increase the awareness amongst citizens and decision makers of the importance of the ecosystem services provided by UPF. This awareness is needed as a base for informed decision making in a context of intense competing demand for land, increasing urbanisation and urban sprawl.

### 1.4. Cross-cutting issues

1. UPF should not be regarded in isolation, but rather **linked up with others sectors**, policies and initiatives.

2. **The research base and networks for UPF need to be expanded.** Research from all the disciplines involved should be attracted and be part of a much wider scientific narrative – so funders of environmental research, planning research, climate change research, wider land-use research and in mechanisms such as the EU Framework want to see UPF as an area in which they seek to expand scientific knowledge & evidence.

3. Better **collaboration between scientists, practitioners and policy makers** engaged with UPF should enhance knowledge exchange and the promotion of good practice.

4. Whilst there is no shortage of technical skills they are concentrated in a fairly narrow group. **Knowledge-transfer system** should be developed targeted at different disciplines, fields and groups, for example in the form of Continuous Professional Development requirements in the relevant professional bodies.