

## Comparison of Forest Recreation and Nature Tourism in Hungary, Italy and Slovakia Based on the First Outputs of the COST E33 Action

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### Introduction

COST Action E33 'Forest Recreation and Nature Tourism' (FORREC) is a network of European researchers and practitioners who are involved in forestry, landscape architecture and tourism. The main objective of COST Action E33 is to improve the quality of information available to policy makers and forest managers on the recreation and tourism benefits of forestry.

The present paper attempts to review the first outcomes of the COST Action E33 to gain an overview of the major demands, conflicts and potentials of nature tourism and forest recreation in Hungary, Slovakia and Italy. On the basis of the overview, hypotheses are stated regarding the development of forest recreation and nature tourism in the investigated countries. These should build the basis of further and more detailed investigations.

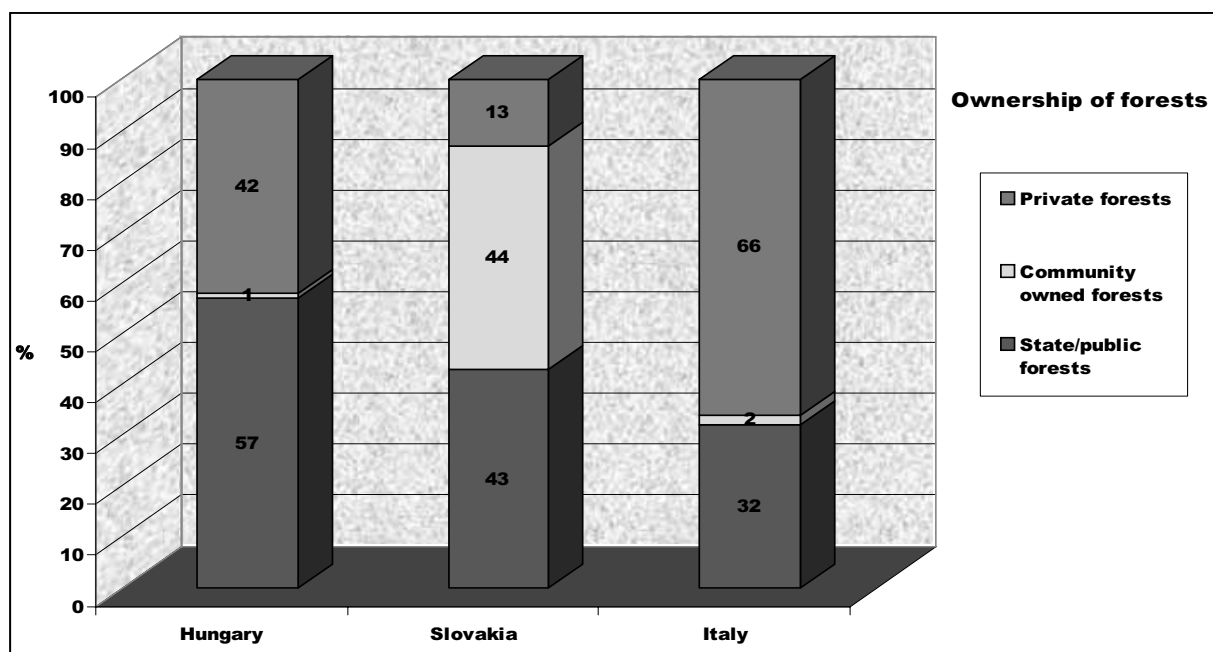


Figure 1: Ownership of the forests in Hungary, Slovakia and Italy.

## Methods

In COST Action E33 a questionnaire has been prepared to gather information about the general conditions, conflicts and approaches to the management of forest recreation and nature tourism in Europe (Wirth & Pröbstl 2005). The questionnaire has been filled out by experts in each participating country. The questionnaires were not statistically significant but aimed to draw a general picture of the countries.

The present paper is based on the data collected about the three mother-countries of the authors, delegates of COST Action E33. The topics of forest cover, ownership, legislation, forest functions and forest planning are discussed.

Forest cover varies in the examined countries. (Sk: 40,8%, I: 30%, H: 19,4%). The ownership patterns have radically changed in Hungary and Slovakia during the last 15 years. After 1990, woodlands have been returned to private owners. In Italy 2/3 of the forests ownership is private (figure 1).

16,1% of forests are designated for recreation in Slovakia. The forests with priority of health, social benefits, tourism, education and research enclose only 2% of forests in Hungary. In Italy forests are not classified by law as "recreational forests". Recreation is considered to be a major function of the greater part of the forests, so forest management plans include it as a driving aspect.

The proportion of timber production and protection functions show main aspects of forest utilization. Economic use predominates forests (Sk: 67%, H: 65%, I: 58%). The proportions of protected forests are also quite high (I: 34%, H: 20%, Sk: 16,9%). Protected forests play a significant role in forest recreation. In Italy the proportions of forest functions are changing because of the neglect of silvicultural activities in many mountainous zones and an increase of protection and tourist-recreational values.

Planning of recreation and nature tourism in forests is usually undertaken by foresters and forest service personnel, sometimes in collaboration with landscape architects, environmental educators and local administrators. Some more information about legislation and planning tools is shown in table 1.

## Hypotheses

Hungary and Slovakia need to develop and manage recreation and tourism in forests in light of the relatively new private land owning structures and market. The forest landscapes offer qualities unavailable in many more developed European countries. These are e.g. remoteness, quietness and the presence of wildlife as well as hunting prey. As a tool for rural development, forest recreation and nature tourism are likely to have an increasingly important role in these countries.

Despite the longstanding tradition of nature/mountain tourism in Italy, nowadays an increasing importance of new types of nature tourism can be found. The trend in delivering appropriate policies concerning forest recreation as well as providing skills for the operators of the sector is highly positive. Planning, design and management of forests with major recreation functions and nature tourism are particularly developed in publicly owned forests and protected areas, where the social and public issues are considered as driving forces. The private owners' interest is still low in investing and activating forms of recreation and nature tourism management in their forests.

Table 1: Comparison of Hungary, Slovakia and Italy regarding forest recreation and nature tourism.

| Which categories of protected areas exist in your country?  | HU                             | SK | I   |
|---|--------------------------------|----|---|
| Protected areas for landscape conservation  | X                              | X  | X   |
| Nature parks  | X                              | X  | X   |
| National parks  | X                              | X  | X   |
| Other   | Natural monuments, Natura 2000 |    | Natural reserves,<br>Natura 2000 sites,<br>Wildlife oasis,<br>Biogenetic reserves,<br>Natural monuments |
| Is this planning a legal instrument or is it optional for forest owners?  | HU                             | SK | I   |
| Legal requirement   |                                | X  |   |
| Optional  | X                              |    | X   |
| Is there independent planning for recreation and nature tourism in forests?   | HU                             | SK | I   |
| Yes, at regular intervals   |                                |    |   |
| Yes, in special cases   | X                              | X  | X   |
| No  |                                |    |   |
| Which data are available for recreational planning?   | HU                             | SK | I   |
| Data from national surveys  | X                              |    | X   |
| Data from regional surveys  | X                              | X  | X   |
| Data collected by the forest administration   | X                              | X  | X   |
| Data collected by others especially for the planning process  | X                              |    | X   |
| If there is public participation in the definition of visions and goals, which groups take regularly part                   | HU                             | SK | I   |
| Land owners   | X                              | X  | X   |
| Land users  | X                              | X  | X   |
| Local residents / Other citizens  | X                              | X  | X   |
| Hiking clubs and sport associations   | X                              | X  | X   |
| Mushroom / Berry collectors   |                                |    |   |
| Hunting and fishing representatives   | X                              | X  | X   |
| Community representatives   | X                              |    | X   |
| Other   | activists in nature protection |    | activists in nature protection  |
| At what regular intervals is monitoring carried out?  | HU                             | SK | I   |
| Every 1 or 2 years  |                                |    |   |
| Every 3 to 5  |                                |    |   |
| Less than once in 5 years   |                                |    |   |
| At irregular intervals, as necessary  |                                | X  | X   |
| Other   | 10-15 YEARS                    |    |   |
| Are there regional differences in the treatment of forest based recreation and nature tourism?                              | HU                             | SK | I   |
| There are very big differences  | X                              | X  | X   |
| There are big differences   |                                |    |   |
| There are some differences  |                                |    |   |
| There are small differences   |                                |    |   |
| There are no differences  |                                |    |   |
| Overall how do you evaluate the consideration of forest based recreation and nature tourism in the forests of your country? | HU                             | SK | I   |
| Excellent   |                                |    |   |
| Good  | X                              | X  |   |
| Sufficient  |                                |    | X   |
| Satisfactory  |                                |    |   |
| Unsatisfactory  |                                |    |   |

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