Interreg
CENTRAL EUROPE

Co-funded by
the European Union

Pannon Future Forest

FORESTS AS THE ECONOMY OF THE FUTURE

– Best Practices and Business Opportunities in the Forest-Based Bioeconomy

Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE

Co-funded by the European Union

Pannon Future Forest

Project Acronym:	Pannon Future Forest
Project Title:	Mentor Network and Knowledge Hub boosting business actors' and support organisations' skills & knowledge to nurture pioneering business concepts in the emerging sectors of forest-based green economy
Projekt ID:	CE0301108
Duration:	24 months
Budget:	785,239.00 EUR
Financing:	European Regional Development Fund: 628,191.20 EUR (80%)
Project partners:	Pannon European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (Lead Partner, Hungary) Development Centre Murska Sobota (Slovenia) Croatian Forests Ltd. (Croatia) Mecsekerdő Plc. (Hungary) University of Osijek, Faculty of Economics and Business (Croatia)
Website:	www.pannonegtc.eu
Kontakt:	Pannon EGTC, 7621 Pécs, Széchenyi tér 9. judit.kispongracz@pannonegtc.eu

You can download the full study from here:

Pannon Future Forest
Project Overview

The Pannon Future Forest project is a transnational initiative implemented under the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme, bringing together a diverse partnership of organisations from Hungary, Croatia, and Slovenia. Led by the Pannon European Grouping of Territorial Cooperation (Pannon EGTC), the consortium combines the expertise of regional development agencies, forestry companies, and academic institutions, including the Development Centre Murska Sobota, Croatian Forests Ltd., Mecsekerdő Plc., and the Faculty of Economics and Business of the University of Osijek. This multi-actor partnership reflects a deliberate integration of policy, practice, and research capacities, ensuring that both economic development and environmental sustainability are addressed in a coherent and complementary manner.

The project focuses on a transnational rural area along the Hungarian–Slovenian and Croatian–Hungarian borders, characterised by significant natural assets but also by structural disadvantages typical of inner peripheries, such as limited economic opportunities, weak service accessibility, and low levels of innovation. At the same time, this area hosts some of Central Europe's most valuable ecosystems, including extensive forest landscapes and parts of the UNESCO-designated five-country biosphere reserve along the Drava River. These conditions create a unique paradox: while the region is rich in natural capital, its economic potential remains largely untapped.

Pannon Future Forest builds on the recognition that a new environmental market is emerging at both global and European levels, driven by increasing demand for carbon sequestration, biodiversity protection, and nature-based solutions. Instruments such as carbon farming schemes and biodiversity credits are opening up new business opportunities, particularly in sectors linked to forest-based green economy, including climate-tech solutions, bioeconomy innovations, and sustainable land management practices. However, local actors often lack the entrepreneurial skills, knowledge, and networks required to engage with these emerging markets effectively.

In response, the project aims to strengthen the innovation capacity of the region by developing a transnational Knowledge Hub and a Mentor Network that support business actors and intermediary organisations. Through a structured methodology, partners will first map and systematise existing knowledge and good practices at European level, then build the capacities of business support organisations to act as "catalysts" within their local ecosystems. This will be followed by the design and testing of a tailored mentoring programme that enables entrepreneurs to develop and implement pioneering business concepts aligned with the green economy.

A central element of the project is the creation of a collaborative, transnational learning environment, where forestry experts, researchers, and business developers jointly contribute to the development of new value chains. Pilot activities, including hackathons and mentoring cycles, will serve to validate the approach and generate concrete business solutions. These activities will culminate in a major transnational matchmaking and acceleration event, where innovative concepts are further refined and connected to potential partners and investors.

As a result, Pannon Future Forest will deliver a validated support system that enhances entrepreneurial discovery processes and fosters the emergence of new business models based on sustainable use of natural resources. In the long term, the Knowledge Hub will operate as a permanent platform, supporting continuous cooperation among stakeholders and enabling the scaling up of successful solutions across the wider region. By doing so, the project contributes not only to economic diversification and competitiveness, but also to climate adaptation, biodiversity protection, and the reduction of territorial disparities in Central Europe.

Forest as a reinterpreted product: business development potentials within the forest-based bioeconomy – a benchmark study for Pannon Future Forest

The Benchmark Study developed within the Pannon Future Forest project is grounded in the recognition that forests are undergoing a fundamental transformation in their economic and societal role. Across Europe and globally, forests are no longer viewed solely as sources of timber, but increasingly as multifunctional systems that generate a wide range of ecosystem services, including carbon sequestration, biodiversity protection, water regulation, and recreational value. These services are progressively becoming measurable, verifiable, and tradable, forming the basis of a rapidly emerging environmental market.

This transformation is strongly driven by European policy frameworks and global sustainability trends. The European Climate Law and the EU Biodiversity Strategy for 2030 have elevated the importance of natural ecosystems in achieving climate neutrality and restoring degraded environments. At the same time, the EU Bioeconomy Strategy promotes the development of circular, bio-based value chains, encouraging innovation not only in timber production but also in non-wood forest products and forest-based by-products. Regulatory developments such as the Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive (CSRD) further accelerate this shift by increasing corporate demand for reliable, verifiable sustainability outcomes, including nature-based solutions.

As a result, a new environmental market is taking shape, where ecosystem services are bundled into complex value propositions. Carbon credits may be combined with biodiversity or water management services, while traditional forestry activities are increasingly linked to tourism, wellbeing, and educational services. Technological advancements in monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) systems enable these services to be quantified and certified, transforming them into credible economic assets. This shift opens up entirely new business opportunities, particularly in areas such as climate-tech solutions, forest-based bioeconomy, and sustainable land management innovation.

The Benchmark Study aims to systematically explore these emerging trends and identify concrete business potentials based on frontrunner enterprises and best practices across Europe. It focuses on three main thematic pillars defined in the Pannon Future Forest project: climate-tech solutions, forest-based bioeconomy, and innovation in sustainable forest and land management. Within these pillars, nine thematic areas are examined, ranging from sustainable forest management and wood-based design to agroforestry, carbon and biodiversity markets, nature-based solutions, and regenerative tourism. Each thematic chapter combines an analysis of market trends with real-life business cases, providing both strategic insight and practical inspiration.

The study places particular emphasis on the project's target area along the Hungarian–Slovenian and Croatian–Hungarian borders, a region characterised by exceptional natural assets, including extensive forest ecosystems and the UNESCO-designated five-country biosphere reserve along the Drava River. Despite this rich natural capital, the region remains underutilised from an economic perspective. The emerging environmental market therefore represents a significant opportunity to unlock new, sustainable sources of income while preserving and enhancing ecological values.

Beyond analysis, the Benchmark Study is designed as a practical tool to support capacity building and innovation. It serves as the core knowledge base for engaging business support organisations—such as chambers of commerce, development agencies, forestry actors, and civil organisations—which are expected to act as "catalysers" in their local ecosystems. By strengthening their knowledge and strategic understanding, these organisations can better support entrepreneurs, SMEs, start-ups, and other stakeholders in developing new business concepts aligned with the green economy.

Ultimately, the Benchmark Study contributes to fostering an entrepreneurial discovery process in the region, enabling actors to identify and exploit emerging opportunities in forest-based sectors. By linking natural resource valorisation with innovation and market demand, it lays the foundation for more resilient, diversified, and sustainable regional economies, while also supporting the broader objectives of European climate and biodiversity policies.

I. Sustainable Forest Management, Innovation and Digitalisation

„Forests are no longer just sources of timber, but multifunctional systems delivering measurable ecosystem services that can be transformed into real economic value."

Keywords: ecosystem services, carbon markets, biodiversity, MRV, digital forestry, forest health, data, resilience, bioeconomy

Target groups:

Primarily relevant for foresters, forest management companies, and nature conservation organisations, but also for municipalities and regional actors interested in building forest-based innovation ecosystems. Additionally relevant for ecologists, communication experts, and sustainability-focused businesses exploring new service models.

The first chapter of the Benchmark Study highlights a major shift in how forests are understood and managed in Europe. Forests are no longer seen only as sources of timber, but as multifunctional systems providing ecosystem services such as carbon sequestration, biodiversity protection, water regulation, and recreation. These services are gaining economic importance as they become measurable and integrated into environmental markets.

A key trend is the move from traditional forestry to diversified, service-based models. Ecosystem services are increasingly treated as economic products, including carbon credits, biodiversity units, and water-related services, driven by growing demand from companies and institutions.

Technological development plays a crucial role in this transition. Monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) systems enable forest managers to measure impacts and provide reliable data, making ecosystem services tradable assets and creating new income sources.

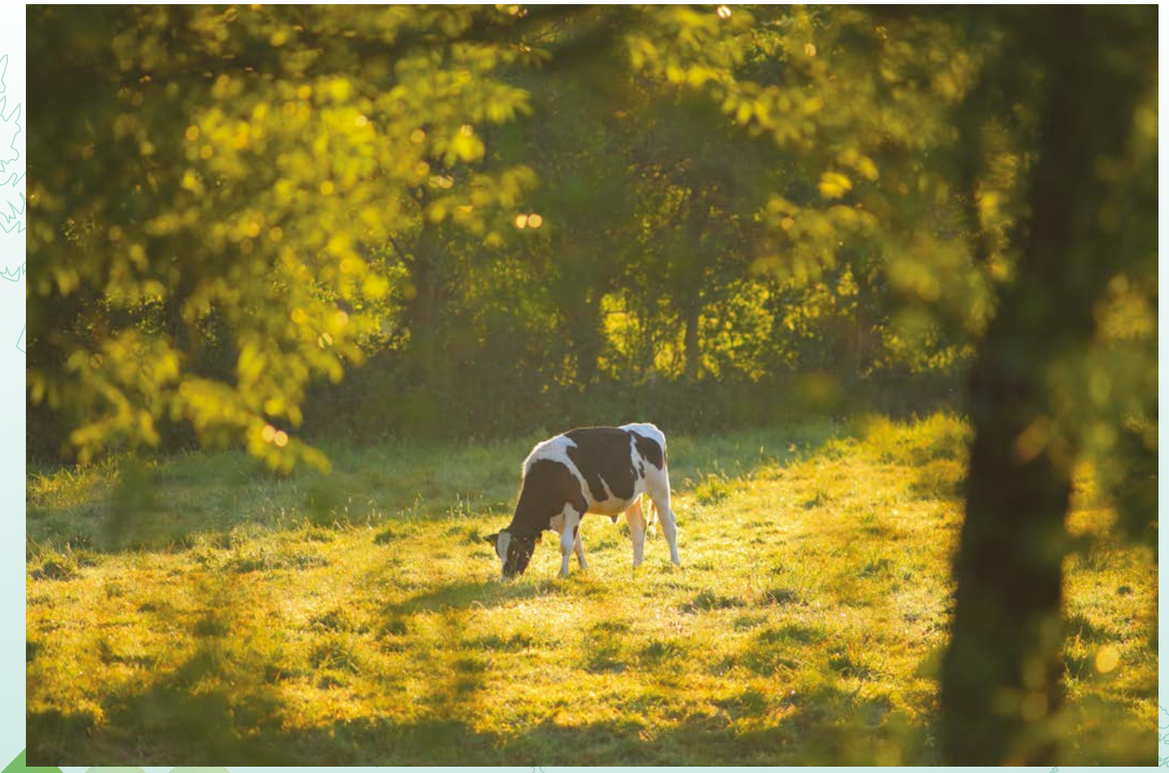
The chapter also highlights expanding business opportunities, such as carbon and biodiversity markets, nature-based solutions, recreation services, and bioeconomy products from both timber and non-wood resources.

At the same time, forestry faces increasing challenges from climate change, rising costs, and societal expectations. Timber revenues alone are often insufficient, making income diversification essential for sustainable forest management and resilience. Innovation and digitalisation support this shift through data-driven tools and cross-sector collaboration. Overall, forests are becoming key drivers of the green transition, linking ecological value with economic performance.

Good practices

DualWing Forestry Kft. *Drone-based forest monitoring and data analytics for precision forestry.*
https://dualwing.com/

GreenBee Projekt *(University of Sopron) – Uses bees as bioindicators for environmental monitoring.*
https://www.uni-sopron.hu/



II. Wood-Based Design

"Wood is no longer just a material – it is a design-driven, high-value solution for a low-carbon future."

Keywords: timber construction, circular design, sustainable materials, eco-design, prefabrication, craftsmanship, innovation

Target groups:

Most relevant for architects, designers, creative industries, and construction sector actors, as well as entrepreneurs and SMEs interested in sustainable product innovation.

The second chapter of the Benchmark Study explores the evolving role of wood-based design as a key driver of innovation within the forest-based bioeconomy. Moving beyond traditional uses, the field focuses on high-value, design-oriented, and sustainable applications that respond to environmental challenges and changing consumer expectations.

A central trend is the growing demand for renewable, low-carbon materials. Wood, as a naturally renewable resource with carbon storage capacity, is increasingly used as a substitute for concrete, steel, and plastics, supported by EU climate and circular economy policies.

At the same time, innovation goes beyond material substitution. Wood is shifting from a commodity to a premium, design-driven product. New technologies such as digital fabrication, modular construction, and advanced processing enable customised, high-quality products, from prefabricated houses to designer goods, allowing companies to achieve higher added value.

An important aspect is the integration of circular economy principles. The use of reclaimed timber, waste wood, and by-products reduces resource use and extends material lifecycles, while creating new business opportunities across the value chain.

The chapter also highlights the role of branding, storytelling, and consumer engagement. Products are valued not only for function, but also for their origin, sustainability, and aesthetics, opening opportunities for SMEs, designers, and local producers to enter niche markets.

Through concrete examples, the chapter shows how companies combine sustainability, innovation, and design to create competitive products. Wood-based design acts as a bridge between forestry and creative industries, fostering cross-sector collaboration.

Overall, wood-based design is presented as a strategic entry point for new market-oriented business models, supporting the shift from volume-based production to value-driven innovation, and contributing to both economic competitiveness and environmental goals.

Good practices:

Reclaimed Wood Furniture (example: Riva 1920) *– Transforms reclaimed timber into high-value design furniture.*
https://www.riva1920.it/en/

Čar lesa ("The Magic of Wood") *– Public awareness initiative promoting wood as a sustainable material.*
https://www.carlesa.si/

III. Agroforestry

"„Agroforestry reconnects agriculture with nature – turning landscapes into resilient, productive systems."

Keywords: agroforestry, resilience, soil health, biodiversity, diversification, climate adaptation

Target groups:

Highly relevant for farmers, agricultural entrepreneurs, and land managers, as well as policy actors and sustainability-focused stakeholders interested in regenerative land-use systems.

The third chapter of the Benchmark Study focuses on agroforestry as an innovative land-use approach that integrates trees with agricultural production, creating multifunctional systems with both ecological and economic benefits. It is gaining attention as a response to climate change, soil degradation, and the need for resilient rural economies.

At its core, agroforestry combines crops, livestock, and woody vegetation within one system. This enhances ecosystem performance, improving soil fertility, water retention, biodiversity, and microclimate, while increasing carbon sequestration and long-term productivity. As a result, these systems are more resilient to environmental stress and extreme weather.

Beyond ecological benefits, agroforestry creates new economic opportunities through diversified income streams. In addition to traditional agriculture, revenue can come from timber, fruits, nuts, mushrooms, and other forest products, as well as from ecosystem service markets such as carbon credits and biodiversity schemes.

The chapter highlights a shift towards regenerative and nature-based farming practices, reducing dependence on external inputs and supporting circular, local value chains. This aligns with growing demand for sustainable, traceable, high-quality food and relevant EU policy frameworks.

Innovation is driven by new business models and advisory services, including design support, consultancy, and knowledge platforms. Leading examples show how agroforestry can become profitable and scalable, often combining production with processing, branding, and direct sales.

Agroforestry is also a strategic tool for rural development, strengthening links between agriculture, forestry, and local economies, supporting job creation, landscape value, and regional identity, while aligning with EU climate and biodiversity goals.

Overall, agroforestry is a key component of the forest-based bioeconomy, integrating environmental sustainability with economic viability, and enabling diversification, resilience, and new market opportunities.

Good practices:

AGFORWARD Project *– EU-wide initiative developing agroforestry practices and tools.*
https://www.agforward.eu/

IV. The Voluntary Carbon and Biodiversity Markets

„Nature is becoming a measurable asset — and a new currency in the green economy."

Keywords: carbon credits, biodiversity markets, MRV, certification, natural capital, climate financeChapter IV – The Voluntary Carbon and Biodiversity Markets

Target groups:

Relevant for private and public landowners, forest managers, and nature conservation organisations, as well as regional development agencies, financial institutions, and IT companies supporting market entry and ecosystem service platforms.

The fourth chapter of the Benchmark Study examines the emergence of voluntary carbon and biodiversity markets as key elements of the new environmental economy. These markets are based on the idea that ecosystem services—such as carbon sequestration and biodiversity enhancement—can be quantified, verified, and traded, creating financial incentives for sustainable land management. The voluntary carbon market (VCM) is rapidly growing, driven by corporate climate neutrality commitments. Companies demand high-quality carbon credits from activities like afforestation, reforestation, and improved forest management, supported by evolving EU regulatory frameworks ensuring transparency and credibility.

At the same time, biodiversity markets are emerging, focusing on measurable ecosystem improvements such as habitat restoration and species protection, translated into biodiversity units. Although still developing, they are expected to grow due to increasing policy focus and corporate responsibility.

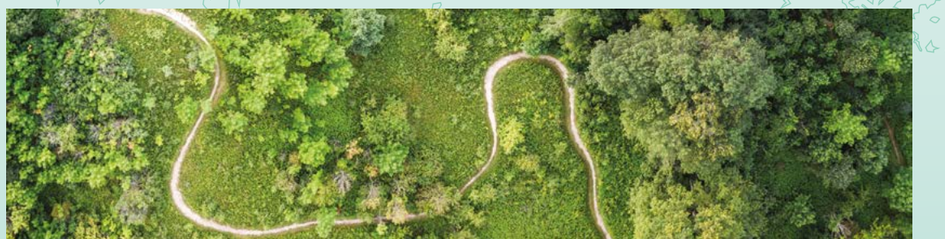
A key requirement is robust monitoring, reporting, and verification (MRV) systems, ensuring that impacts are real, measurable, and additional. Technologies such as remote sensing, satellite monitoring, and digital platforms enhance transparency and trust.

There is a clear trend towards integrated, bundled ecosystem services, combining carbon, biodiversity, water management, and other services into complex value propositions, increasing both environmental impact and economic value.

For landowners, forest managers, and developers, these markets offer income diversification and monetisation opportunities, but also require new skills, including understanding market mechanisms, compliance, and risk management. Business support organisations play a key role in capacity building and market access.

The chapter also stresses the importance of policy coherence, standardisation, and certification frameworks to avoid market fragmentation and credibility risks, highlighting the role of EU initiatives and international standards.

Overall, these markets are transformative tools that link environmental performance with economic value, supporting climate mitigation, biodiversity conservation, and new green business models.



Good practices:

Pina Earth *- offers high-quality carbon credits from local forests to ensure their long-term stability and remain species-rich and climate-resilient*
https://www.arbonics.com/ and https://www.pina.earth/en

V. Nature-based Solutions for Landscape Regeneration

„Working with nature is not a limitation — it is the most powerful solution."

Keywords: nature-based solutions, ecosystem restoration, resilience, water management, biodiversity

Target groups:

Primarily relevant for landscape architects, planners, farmers, and agricultural entrepreneurs, as well as engineering and design professionals working with environmental solutions.

The fifth chapter of the Benchmark Study focuses on nature-based solutions (NbS) as a strategic approach to ecosystem restoration while addressing economic and societal challenges. NbS are increasingly recognised as effective tools for climate adaptation, biodiversity enhancement, and sustainable land management, offering alternatives to technical or infrastructure-based solutions.

NbS are based on working with natural processes. By restoring forests, wetlands, and river systems, they improve water retention, reduce flood risks, enhance soil quality, and increase carbon sequestration, while strengthening ecosystem resilience to climate change.

A key trend is the integration of NbS into EU policies and funding frameworks, including the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and climate strategies. This creates a more supportive environment for scaling NbS projects and business models.

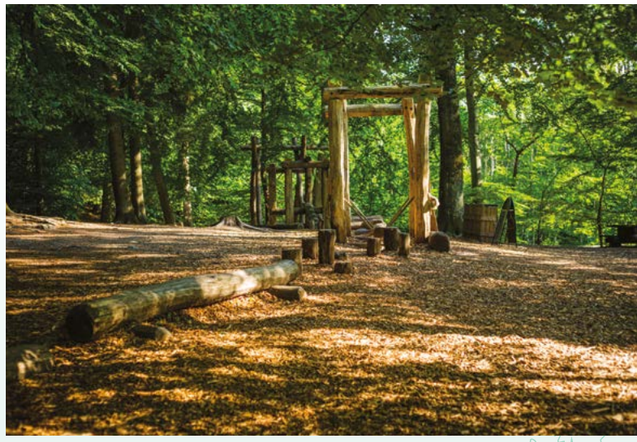
From an economic perspective, NbS create new market opportunities by linking environmental restoration with revenue generation, such as carbon credits, water services, and biodiversity financing. They also provide indirect economic benefits, including improved land productivity, lower management costs, and enhanced tourism attractiveness.

The chapter highlights the importance of innovation and interdisciplinary collaboration, involving environmental experts, engineers, planners, and businesses. Approaches like landscape architecture and ecological engineering are combined with traditional knowledge to create effective solutions.

Examples show how NbS can become viable business and development models, including landscape restoration, natural water management, and multifunctional green infrastructure, acting as drivers of local economic development.

Importantly, NbS represent a mindset shift: from viewing nature as a constraint to recognising it as an economic asset. By investing in natural capital, regions can achieve environmental, economic, and social benefits simultaneously.

Overall, NbS are positioned as a cornerstone of the green transition, offering scalable, cost-effective, and sustainable solutions for landscape regeneration and regional development.



Good practices:

Ilona Mill Workshop *– create spaces that are close to nature and suitable for free play, using natural materials as much as possible*
https://jatszhatoterek.hu/

Konopljina Iža *- hemp shives mixed with lime (hemp concrete) are used as a main construction material. The combination of hemp and wood contributes to a favourable indoor microclimate. Hemp-based walls provide advantages such as fire resistance, humidity regulation and improved indoor comfort.*
https://goricke-ize.si/en/konopljina-iza/

VI. Business Opportunities by Connecting Entrepreneurial Skills with Novel Ecological Ideas

„Ideas from nature create value – entrepreneurship turns them into reality."

Keywords: entrepreneurship, innovation, business models, mentoring, startups, green economy

Target groups:

Relevant for entrepreneurs, SMEs, startups, universities, and business support organisations, as well as regional stakeholders interested in building innovation ecosystems and CSR/ESG platforms.

The sixth chapter of the Benchmark Study shifts the focus to people and entrepreneurial skills as key factors in unlocking the economic potential of green markets. While natural resources and ecological ideas provide the foundation, success depends on the ability to translate them into viable business models.

A central message is that the green transition is also an entrepreneurial challenge. Many promising ideas—such as nature-based solutions, ecosystem services, and forest innovations—remain underutilised due to a lack of business knowledge, strategic thinking, and market awareness.

The chapter emphasises the need to combine ecological expertise with entrepreneurial competences, including business planning, marketing, financial management, and innovation development. This enables actors to turn concepts into market-ready solutions and customer value.

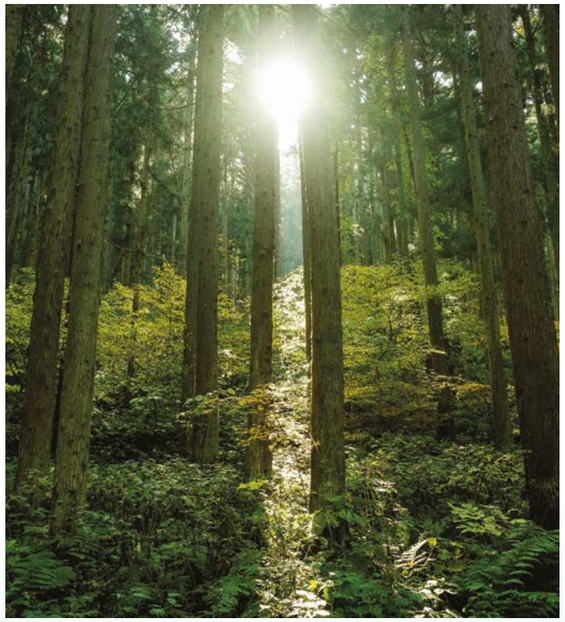
A key trend is the growing role of intermediary actors, such as business support organisations, innovation hubs, and mentoring programmes, acting as "catalysers". They support knowledge transfer, networking, and entrepreneurial development processes.

The chapter also highlights the importance of experimentation and co-creation. Tools such as hackathons, mentoring cycles, and innovation workshops help develop and refine ideas through collaboration and iteration.

Another important trend is the rise of purpose-driven entrepreneurship, where businesses aim to deliver both economic and environmental value, responding to increasing consumer, investor, and policy demand.

Examples show how innovative solutions emerge at the intersection of ecology and entrepreneurship, and how even small initiatives can scale up with the right skills, networks, and support systems.

Overall, entrepreneurial capacity is a key enabler of the forest-based bioeconomy, transforming ecological potential into economic outcomes and supporting regional development and sustainability.



Good practices:

The Future Forest Initiative *– it is an innovation centre focused on forests and climate, to bring forestry-related startups and technological solutions to practical application. The organisation supports the rapid market development of innovations through accelerator programs, a partnership network, and testing in real-world environments.* https://www.futureforest.de/en/home

Supporting bioentrepreneurship at Josip Juraj Strossmayer University of Osijek - The lifelong learning program is intended for people who have completed one of the studies offered at the Department of Biology, as well as masters and engineers in the field of natural, biomedical, and biotechnical sciences, who have not acquired sufficient knowledge on the aforementioned topic, and who want to start or improve an existing entrepreneurial venture https://biologijaunios.wixsite.com/biopoduzetnistvo

VII. Environmental Education and Nature-based Wellbeing as Market-based Activities

„Forests do not only sustain ecosystems – they sustain people."

Keywords: wellbeing, forest bathing, education, health, awareness, experiential learning

Target groups:

Mainly relevant for NGOs, nature conservation organisations, and forest management entities, but also for entrepreneurs and service providers exploring wellbeing and education-based business opportunities.

The seventh chapter of the Benchmark Study explores environmental education and nature-based wellbeing as emerging segments of the forest-based bioeconomy. Forests are increasingly recognised not only as ecological systems, but as spaces that support health, learning, and quality of life.

A key trend is the growing demand for reconnection with nature. In response to urbanisation, digitalisation, and health challenges, people seek physical, mental, and emotional regeneration in natural environments, where forests offer accessible and scalable wellbeing solutions.

Environmental education is shifting towards experiential, practice-based learning, including outdoor education, guided tours, workshops, and hands-on activities. These approaches enhance environmental literacy and support long-term behavioural change.

At the same time, nature-based wellbeing services are becoming marketable products, such as forest bathing, mindfulness programmes, therapeutic recreation, corporate wellbeing, and educational tourism. These create hybrid offers combining health, education, and leisure.

The chapter highlights that this field offers low-entry business opportunities, especialy-ly for local actors, as services can be developed using existing natural assets with limited investment, supporting rural economic diversification.

A key success factor is delivering high-quality, authentic experiences, based on storytelling, local knowledge, and landscape identity, combined with professionalism and service standards.

These activities align with broader policy goals, contributing to public health, environmental awareness, and social cohesion, and are increasingly supported by public funding and programmes.

Examples show how initiatives successfuly-ly combine education, wellbeing, and business development, positioning forests as platforms for service-based innovation.

Overall, this is a dynamic and growing market segment, transforming the human–nature relationship into value-generating activities, supporting economic diversification, sustainability, and resilience.

Good practices:

Ági Berecz *– an environmental educator, ecotherapeutic self-awareness mentor, forest bathing guide, deep ecology group work facilitator, and trainer, helping clients to move forward from wellbeing (shinrinyoku) to deep ecology through self-development.* https://agiberecz.com/

REAL School Budapest *– it is a not-for-profit, international primary and middle school (ages 5- 14) for the curious, creative and courageous kids. At REAL School, driven by a clear mission, children connect knowledge to action through real-life, project-based learning. The curriculum balances core academics with nature, smart tech, wellbeing, entrepreneurship, and regeneration.* https://www.realschool.hu/

VIII. Potential of Non-Wood Forest Products in Food Industry Innovation

„Forests are not only ecosystems — they are sources of future food innovation."

Keywords: non-wood products, forest food, value chains, gastronomy, local products, sustainability

Target groups:

Relevant for small-scale producers, SMEs, tourism service providers (restaurants, guides, guesthouses), as well as forest management companies exploring new business models.

The eighth chapter of the Benchmark Study explores the role of non-wood forest products (NWFPs) in reshaping the food industry and creating new business opportunities within the forest-based bioeconomy. Products such as mushrooms, berries, herbs, and honey are gaining attention as part of sustainable, local, and health-oriented food systems.

A key trend is the growing demand for natural, functional, and traceable food products. Consumers seek high-quality, sustainably sourced ingredients with strong local and ecological connections, supporting a shift towards localised and resilient food systems.

The chapter highlights the influence of regenerative and nature-based approaches, where food is seen as part of a holistic system linking health, environment, and lifestyle. This creates opportunities to integrate forest-based ingredients into innovative food products, gastronomy, and experiences.

From a business perspective, NWFPs offer income diversification, especially for rural actors and forest managers. By combining harvesting, processing, branding, and direct sales, producers can develop high-value niche products. The "forest-to-fork" concept connects production with storytelling, tourism, and customer experience.

Innovation extends to business models, including experiential gastronomy, direct-to-consumer sales, local branding, and integration into tourism and hospitality, helping businesses differentiate and strengthen local identity.

The chapter emphasises the importance of knowledge, quality standards, and sustainable harvesting, ensuring long-term resource availability and consumer trust.

Examples show how traditional knowledge and modern entrepreneurship can be combined to create scalable, market-oriented solutions.

Overall, NWFPs are positioned as a promising component of the green economy, connecting forests with food systems and enabling innovative, sustainable, and locally embedded business models.

Good practices:

Dzsindzsa *– entrepreneur specialised in the Forest to Fork movement. Dzsindzsa's main profile is closely linked to personal events, such as cooking workshops (e.g. a monthly workshop in cooperation with a major Hungarian gastronomy portal), lectures, and market appearances, alongside an online webshop where customers can purchase the products.* https://dzsindzsa.hu/

Biobia *- from Mecsek Hill, a project that integrates wild plant pedagogy with experiential gastronomy and ecological catering. Led by its founder and collaborators, Biobia offers wild edible picnics, ecocatering events, and team-building workshops that combine hands-on plant identification, seasonal foraging experiences, and preparation of forest-inspired meals.* https://biobia.hu/

IX. The Visitor Economy and Regenerative Tourism (Summary)

Tourism is no longer about seeing places — it is about sustaining them."

Keywords: regenerative tourism, visitor economy, sustainability, community, experience, destination management

Target groups:

Primarily relevant for tourism service providers, but also for municipalities, destination management organisations, and regional tourism boards applying system-level approaches.

The ninth chapter of the Benchmark Study explores the shift toward regenerative tourism, where the focus moves from consumption to active contribution. The visitor economy concept now prioritizes the overall impact on local communities and ecosystems rather than just visitor numbers. A key trend is the demand for meaningful, nature-oriented experiences that allow travelers to connect with local environments. Consequently, tourism must now minimize negative impacts and actively restore ecosystems to enhance local wellbeing.

Forests and natural landscapes are central to this transformation, providing the setting for ecotourism designed to generate long-term value for all stakeholders. This opens new business opportunities by integrating sustainability into tourism products, such as community-led initiatives and nature-positive concepts that involve visitors in conservation activities. Such approaches allow destinations to differentiate themselves and build stronger visitor relationships.

Successful implementation requires a systemic approach and collaboration between management organizations and local authorities to maintain ecological balance. Sustainability is no longer optional but a central element of competitiveness. By shifting the mindset from „using" a destination to ensuring its long-term vitality, tourism aligns with climate action and biodiversity protection. Ultimately, regenerative tourism serves as a driver for more resilient and sustainable regional economies.

Good practices:

GreenKayak *– the initiative, established in 2017 by an environmental NGO based in Kopenhagen (it is now operational in several countries: Sweden, Germany, Finland and Norway), simply involves visitors as volunteers in the fight against pollution while kayaking. The green kayak service makes the kayaking experience free for those who are willing to collect litter in the water during paddling and share the experience on social media using the hashtag #GreenKayak.Develops nature-based tourism linked to ecosystem restoration.*

This project is supported by the Interreg CENTRAL EUROPE Programme with co-financing from the European Regional Development Fund.