

# Social innovation to address sustainability challenges and enlarge the opportunities provided by forests for a green and just transition of marginalised mountain areas

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## **Abstract:**

In this paper, we provide conceptual and practical insights into social innovation, highlighting its role in achieving a more sustainable provision of ecosystem services from forests, as well as its role in tackling societal challenges and utilising the opportunities available in marginalised mountain areas across Europe. The findings indicate that social innovation and innovative governance mechanisms are crucial for the promotion of sustainability and multi-functionality in mountain forestry, as well as for the enhancement of a smart, green, and just transition of marginalised rural areas, so that forest-dependent communities, living and working in the vicinity of woodlands, can become healthier, happier, and more prosperous. The results show that social innovation has a power of enabling forest-dependent communities and woodland-based social enterprises to build and realise their capacities, while reducing existing inequalities, and promoting social justice and inclusion. There is also empirical evidence to suggest that by adding to improving human wellbeing, social innovation can create new responses to pressing social demands (e.g., for climate neutrality) that are not adequately addressed by markets or existing (e.g., public) institutions. We believe that the conceptualization and operationalisation of social innovation in the context of multi-functional forestry, offered by this research and its findings, can help informing forest policy and management decisions and the design of practice measures for Green Recovery and a long-term sustainability of socio-ecological systems in marginalised mountain areas.

## **Keywords:**

Natural capital, ecosystem services, woodlands, communities, stakeholder engagement, sustainability, resilience