

Attitudes of Slovenian School Children Towards Forests and Climate Change: a Study by the Forest of Experiments

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What is the Forest of Experiments?

We are a dedicated group of researchers from the Slovenian Forestry Institute working in the field of environmental education, knowledge transfer and science promotion. We carry out our educational work according to the principles of forest pedagogy, using principles based on the Flow Learning methodology.

Introduction

1. **Forests are important ecosystems** that are threatened and often degraded due to **anthropogenic activities and climate change**.
2. On the global scale, **Slovenia** is considered as one of the areas that is **severely affected by climate change**.
3. **Forests cover 58% of Slovenia**. In the recent years, **extreme weather events have become more frequent and intense**, resulting in ice-breaks, windthrows, forest fires, subsequent bark beetle attacks, massive floods and other natural disasters that have significantly altered forest structure and dynamics.
4. **School children** are **one of the key target groups in forestry's response** to climate change, as their opinions and perceptions will drive forest management in the future.
5. Climate change and its effects on forest ecosystems are an important issue that should be presented to children in a **positive way** that promotes a **proactive attitude** towards mitigation and adaptation.
6. To achieve this, we use the tool of **Forest pedagogy**, an approach to environmental education that promotes the **forest as a healthy and innovative outdoor learning environment** and uses **active pedagogical methods** to promote cooperation between children and impart knowledge about sustainable development and environment protection.

Aims

- Better understanding of the attitudes of school children about forests and climate change.
- Improving our future activities on this topic.

Study group

268 children from 17 classes and 11 Slovenian primary schools.

Methods

- A brief interactive presentation about forests and climate change.
- Group work (using post-it notes and posters) to express their answers to the questions: "How are the forests changing?" and "How can we help them?"
 - Group discussion to reflect on the answers.
- Data analysis – frequency of answers in groups (see figures).

Conclusions

Our results have shown that children are aware of current changes and threats that are affecting forests, but a lot of them perceive forestry in a negative way. This could be due to the school curriculum, which is mostly focused on biodiversity loss and protection, and different media channels - they are exposed to information about global problems (deforestation, etc.), while in Slovenia forests face different threats, which majority of them also recognized (pests, diseases, natural disasters, climate change).

We believe that in order to raise children's awareness it is important to spread the knowledge about forestry and forest management further through the principles and tools of forest pedagogics. Previous research has shown that outdoor experience with a mentor is a strong predictor of how environmentally aware and involved a child will become as an adult.

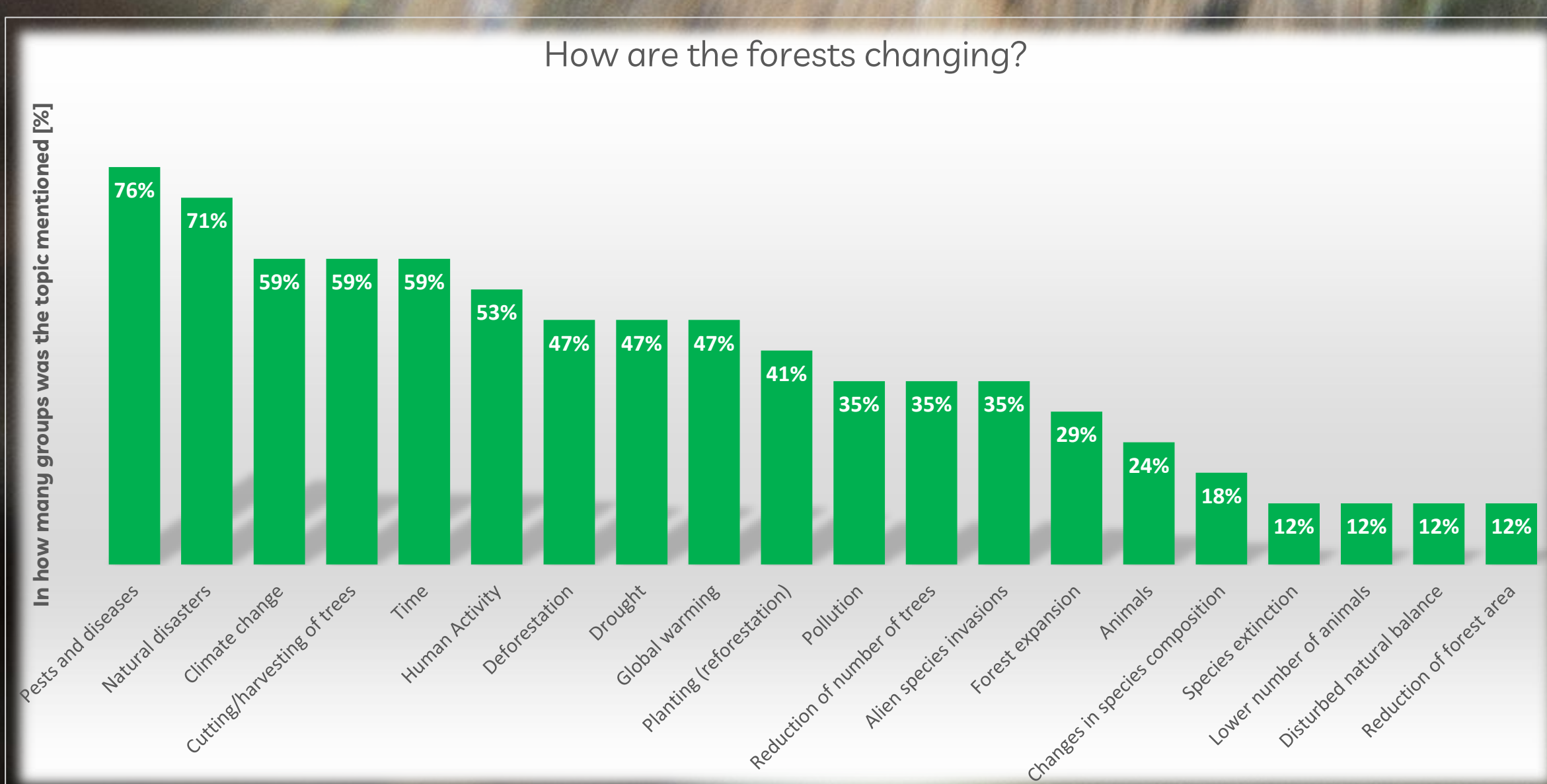


Photo: Gregor Skoberne

