

Forest fires and social perception of the landscape: A study with Spanish population

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Abstract

Forest fires are a global environmental problem that burn millions of hectares every year throughout the planet, causing human and economic losses as well as significant degradation of the natural environment. In Southern Europe, with Spain and Portugal at the head, 70% of the continent's forest fires occur. The growing human population and continuous occupation of the territory, exercise a role of domination and submission of nature. For this and other reasons, we can't omit the involvement of humans in the probability of occurrence of fires in the world. At present, it seems obvious that we are experiencing a change of trend in aspects such as temperature and precipitation rates, something that, together with other environmental evidences, has been associated with global climate change. In this context and as it always did, fire plays a modulating role in the characteristics of the vegetation and the structure of the landscape. This last aspect is the one we focus on in this study. Some of our findings determine that 95.90%, of the Spanish population surveyed, consider that there is a representative and characteristic landscape in the area where they live. We have also found that the "recreational" value of landscape is greater than the "economic" value, an aspect that may be relevant when it comes to forest management and forest fires. On the other hand, we have been able to confirm the high concern of Spanish citizens for the threat posed by natural phenomena to the landscape of their community and, especially, the concern about the threat of forest fires on the landscape, where 80.34% of our sample has identified damage to the landscape due to the impact of forest fires. Studies on social perception are a good tool for planning and improving prevention and risk management, as well as for the development of environmental policies appropriate to each specific territory.

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Biography

Jaime Senabre is a Psychologist and Environmental Consultant as well as the Chief of Brigade in a Forest Fire Service with more than 20 years of experience. He collaborates with several companies and institutions in the area of training in Psychology in Emergencies and Human Resources. He is Professor at the University of Valencia for Master's in Intervention and Operational Coordination in Emergencies and Catastrophes and other postgraduate courses on emergencies. He is the Director and President of the International Scientific-Professional Committee of the National Symposium on Forest Fires (SINIF).

He has lectured internationally and has been part of the organizing committee of several international congresses on Earth Sciences and Climate Change. He has published articles on forest fires, stress, psychosocial risks and emotional trauma, mainly in relation to emergency services and natural disasters. Currently, he is assigned to the research group on "Climate and Territorial Planning" (University of Alicante), where he researches on the social perception of forest fire risk and behaviour in the event of possible disasters.