

Theresa Frei		
Affiliation	European Forest Institute, Governance Programme	
Session Chair		
Presentations	Session 3.3	<i>Individual presentations: Forest Land Use and Land Use Change.</i>

Abstract Session 3.3 – Governing abandoned land? Perceptions and governance of natural forest regrowth in France and Spain.

Natural forest regrowth (NFR) on abandoned agricultural land is an important change in rural and peri-urban European landscapes, often caused by socioeconomic drivers, demographics, and policy related aspects. Posing challenges to the land management and governance in the regions concerned, this landscape transition has far-reaching ecological, economic, and societal consequences. It is a cross-cutting topic, touching upon crucial questions of the future of Europe's small-scale agriculture, the rewilding of land, risks and opportunities in forestry, and finally a land management vision embracing various land uses. While NFR is often considered as challenge related to the loss of agriculture and heterogeneous landscapes, it is increasingly debated as an opportunity for restoration attempts.

Until now, NFR has not been widely discussed in (forest) policy analysis. My research focuses on France and Spain and address this topic by: (1) looking into perceptions of NFR at local level and (2) investigating governance approaches and strategic practices at regional/national level. The research is based on interpretive policy analysis, using qualitative social science methods and building on empirical data from almost 60 in-depth interviews with actors in the fields of agriculture, conservation, and forestry.

In the presentation I want to discuss the results, which show that NFR on abandoned land is (1) often negatively perceived by local actors, (2) usually poorly or not addressed at all at the policy level and (3) considered potentially beneficial by some actors related to new forest resource as well as for rewilding management. Additionally, a better integration of the sectors involved - namely agriculture, forestry and conservation - is considered key by actors in the field to address NFR at the policy level.