

VALUE FOR MONEY: ECONOMIC VIEW ON EMERGENCY SERVICES (III), HOW PROTECTION PRODUCES VALUE - FOREST CASE -

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Abstract

Progressively, and after years, the new public management increased its influence in French public bodies' management. Citizens' exigency, but also governance and state incentives, let eventually build a continuum of processes and methods to monitor quality of provided services and global performance of public institutions.

Fire and emergency services didn't escape to. In the same time, the difficulty to witness of the "value for money" emerged: how to describe on an economic point of view, a non-monetisable service?

In the last five years, some studies focused on value of saved lives, and the transfer some already existing statistics to evaluate the value of residential surfaces saved by the fire department. Last year, studies gave evaluation to the spared losses during wildfires fighting. Ongoing works are, currently, aimed on industrial and collective public access buildings to complete the scope.

With some illustrative study cases, authors will focus on forest protection.

One of the studies carried out targets the value of spared losses by firefighters in the case of forest fires. The calculation of this value is characterized by a greater difficulty, because the forest represents a non-monetisable good. However, the forest includes a multitude of assets that can be valued in economic terms, including: the value of the hectare, the value of wood. For other values, such as the touristic value or even the value of ecosystem services and climate regulation or other intrinsic values like the existence value, the option value and the leg value must be added to the value chain, but their economic estimate is more difficult to determine.

In this context, therefore, the action of the firefighters safeguards the aforementioned elements but for a better estimation of the value of the saved it is necessary to add all the costs that would have occurred in the event of a natural disaster (think of the CO2 emissions related to fire and costs of rehabilitation of the affected area).

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Literally, from the conservation of ecosystems and habitats derive benefits and services that can also be quantified economically. In the study carried out by SDIS 13 and AgroParisTech School a method of economic evaluation of forests is proposed with both a theoretical and practical approach.

Forests perform important ecosystem services that meet, directly or indirectly, the needs of the human species and guarantee the life of all other species. If we are not able to seriously connect the economy and ecology in our development models, it will be really difficult to take steps towards a more sustainable world.

Nevertheless, if this kind of evaluation is typically uncertain and not easy, authors demonstrate the real added value to do on large scale with –at least regional- common ratios. The idea is to provide to each emergency service, very simple calculation models, based on usual service statistics, to give an approach to this economic value.

This virtuous practice could give some curbing ideas to policy makers having intended purpose to cut resources to emergency services. It could also demonstrate the “value for taxes” to citizens.

Keywords: forest fires, fuels, CO₂, wildfires, fire service, ecological value