

Citizens in Greater Bilbao regard the services of the Green Belt ecosystems as highly beneficial

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Izaskun Casado, is a member of the research group into Landscape, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services of the UPV/EHU-University of the Basque Country, and author of the work. Credit: UPV/EHU

According to Izaskun Casado-Arzuaga, ecosystems provide more services than what many people believe. And their value is not in fact limited to the possibilities they offer in terms of landscape, aesthetic

aspects or leisure. Casado is one of the members of the research group into Landscape, Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services and, in her opinion, it is important to remember the other services offered by ecosystems. Among them she refers to supply services, like food, water, energy and materials, as well as regulating services like, for example, to guarantee water and air quality and protect against flooding, etc. In this respect, "we regard many of these services as being free, but the benefits, which are invaluable, are highly beneficial and necessary," says Casado.

As the researchers explain, even though Metropolitan Bilbao has undergone many changes, the green belt takes up 75% of the [surface area](#). "There are mountains, forests, [reservoirs](#), rivers and streams, beaches, marshes and dunes, cliffs and scrubland," they point out.

But how do citizens rate the services offered by these ecosystems? To find out, the researchers drew up a [questionnaire](#) comprising 30 questions, and interviewed 500 people.

In view of the responses, nearly all the respondents are aware that ecosystems provide services and they value and appreciate them. However, even though nearly 80% of the respondents identified the cultural services (leisure, landscape, tranquillity, etc.), only a third of them identified the regulating services, and even fewer (1.8%) identified the supply services.

The survey also highlighted the fact that the most highly rated services are the improvement in [air quality](#) and biodiversity conservation. By contrast, most of the respondents (88%) are prepared to collaborate in preserving the area. The [socioeconomic characteristics](#) that exert a positive influence on this decision are, among others, being from an urban background, being young, visiting the protected areas and being a woman.

Citizen participation is needed

In view of the results, the researchers observed that many citizens are unable to identify the supply services; the farming activities are in fact very scarce in the area. However, they are highly rated by the citizens, since most of the [respondents](#) came out in favour of promoting the rural areas. And they are making a request to those responsible: that they should highlight the value of the ecosystems in the Green Belt and apply the right regulation.

The researchers have in fact said that research and the promoting of citizen participation are necessary to decide the future of the ecosystems. In their view, "to be able to decide about the ecosystems in Greater Bilbao, we need to have as much information as possible and the deepest possible knowledge about the current situation and the possibilities for the future."

So they believe that it is essential that research of this type be conducted and that their results should be taken into consideration by those responsible for making decisions. "Once the services offered by the ecosystems and the opinion of citizens are known, we will have available a solid base to work out what future we want," they conclude.

More information: The whole piece of research has been published in the *Journal of Environmental Management* "Perception, demand and user contribution to ecosystem services in the Bilbao Metropolitan Greenbelt." www.sciencedirect.com/science/.../S0301479713003885

Provided by Elhuyar Fundazioa

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