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Has the acceptability of the forest sector become a problem?

Historic grounds for acceptability

How could the acceptability of the forest sector be improved?

Other current news

The acceptability of the forest sector to be weighed

Notices given in Finnish forest industry, investments made abroad, and the discussions on the social responsibility of the enterprises, on sufficient forest conservation and on the effects of the forest management processes on the different forms of forest use reflect the altered relations between the forest sector and the society. It is essential to understand the needs of the society to secure the acceptability of the activities of the forest sector also in the future. Emphasising only the investors' viewpoints is not sufficient enough to maintain the current acceptability.

Has the acceptability of the forest sector become a problem?

The Future Forum on Forests held a seminar titled 'The Changing Society and the Forest Sector' in March 2006. The seminar was based on the results of the Forum's work group on social sustainability. The main topics discussed were the acceptability of the forest sector and the means to improve its potential.

Researcher Jakob Donner-Amnell from the University of Joensuu emphasised the fact that enterprises, different organisations and the administration ultimately operate on the approval and trust of the interest groups. Without a sufficient approval and confidence in the forest sector, the benefits offered by the society may be diminished. These particular factors have a great effect on the commitment of the people and the groups towards the objectives of the forest sector.

To secure the factors of production the forest sector needs support and approval from various quarters, such as the authorities, forest owners, sponsors, employees and the local residents. Mr Donner-Amnell emphasised the fact that it is not possible to maintain the acceptability by only acting from the viewpoint of the investor due to the immensity and the multiple nature of the forest sector.

Has the acceptability become already a problem in the forest industry or forestry? At least according to the results of the questionnaire sent to the participants beforehand, acceptability was not deemed as a vast problem. On the other hand, the news received after the seminar as well as the threat of increasing number of notices given in the forest industry may have decreased the acceptability of the forest sector rather quickly.

Historic grounds for acceptability

The forest sector has enjoyed the confidence of the Finnish people for a long time. The confidence has been based on the economic significance, national ownership in the forest industry, high level of domestic input, wide ownership in small-scale forestry, public rights of access to forests and relatively even distribution of income between different groups. The acceptability is also seen in the fact that forest sector has received support in various ways. Investing in education and research in the forest sector as well as support for forestry has been found justified since the forest sector has produced wide benefits to the society.

However, according to Jakob Donner-Amnell, the relation between society and the forest sector has changed. Other significant branches of industry have emerged beside the forest sector and thus the positive effects on employment have decreased. Internationalisation of the forest sector has affected the distribution of income and the confidence in forest sector's acting for the good of the whole country and all of its citizens has diminished. It remains to be seen whether the decrease of benefits of the forest sector in the society affects the amount of public investments to the forest sector in the future.

How could the acceptability of the forest sector be improved?

The participants of the seminar were asked to assess different changes in the forest sector. They were also asked whether the changes described were significant on improving the acceptability of the forest sector and how likely were those changes to occur. It was estimated that increasing investments on research and

development of new wood products as well as forest-based services would be the most significant objectives in improving the acceptability of the forest sector. Social sustainability and increasing regional equality in the programmes of Metsähallitus (a state enterprise administrating state owned lands) as well as improving the well-being received from the forests for the citizens were also found to increase the acceptability (Figure 1).

The importance of the equitable division of well-being was emphasised in the discussions on improving the acceptability of the forest sector. For example, taking into account the tourist trade and the well-being of the recreational users of forests was found to be significant when making decisions on the use of forests. Since tourism and the recreational use of forests only affect rather limited areas of the forest lands it would be fairly simple to take those also into account in decision-making.

The importance of images was also emphasised in the discussions. The sustainability of forestry, the vision of national forestry programmes or the know-how in forestry were proposed to be chosen as the positive brand of the forest sector. These suggestions were based on the ideas of Prof. Göte Nyman, one of the speakers in the seminar. It was also introduced that the brand credibility may be difficult to achieve if the basics of forestry, such as forest reproduction, cannot present better results

Other current news

A joint foresight work group representing both the employers and the employees in the paper industry started its work in December 2005 under the Secretary of State Raimo Sailas' lead. Information on observing the changes in the paper industry's operating environment due to globalisation will be produced within the framework of a dialogue. More information available at: www.forestindustries.fi and www.paperiliitto.fi

Table 1. Assessments of the seminar participants on the significance and probability of the objectives improving acceptability. Significance (S): 1 = no significance at all ... 5 = great significance; Probability (P): 1 = improbable ... 5 = undoubtedly probable. Average responses reported.

| Objective | S | P |
|---|-----|-----|
| To increase investments on research and development of new wood products and forest-based services. | 4 | 3.2 |
| To emphasise the social sustainability and regional equality in the programmes of Metsähallitus. | 3.6 | 3 |
| To improve the citizens' possibilities to gain well-being from the forests. | 3.4 | 3.2 |
| To secure better terms and conditions of employment in logging and transportation in order to increase the appreciation of work in these particular fields. | 3.4 | 3 |
| To get rid of the poor capability and harmful reputation of employment in the forest sector. | 3.3 | 2.8 |
| Other factors apart from the economic ones will be emphasised more in deciding on the use of forests. | 3.1 | 3 |
| Public support for forestry will be redirected to make the support, services and guidance available for all possible users and uses of forests | 3.1 | 2.7 |
| Social sustainability will be emphasised in state ownership. | 3.1 | 2.3 |
| Possibilities to use forests for recreational means will be improved. | 3 | 3 |

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