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Does the forest sector have enough foresight?

How will the people who depend on the forest sector for their livelihoods cope with the changes that will inevitably follow the ongoing process of globalisation? Will globalisation bring problems and force changes, or can the sector anticipate the changes and plan for them? These and other issues of global change will be discussed and considered in the first seminar of the Future Forum on Forests in November.

Livelihoods in global change

Future Forum on Forests will organize a seminar on "Livelihoods in the maelstrom of globalisation" on 13 November in Helsinki. The seminar programme can be found in Finnish at www.metsafoorumi.fi/tapahtumia/.

The seminar will focus on the trends of global and European change that will be of particular relevance to livelihoods in the forest sector in Finland. The seminar will introduce topics and presentations on global climate change, tradable carbon emission permits, development of wood energy consumption, and possible future strategies of forest industries. The seminar will also collect views on how the economies and societies of Russia and EU will develop in the future.

In the workshop part of the seminar, opinions about the future of the forest sector will be examined. The seminar participants will identify the threats and opportunities of the forest sector in three think tank groups: (a) changing climate and forest based livelihoods; (b) global and European trends of change; and (c) forests and energy production.

The main speaker of the seminar will be the Permanent Secretary of State Raimo Sailas, who will discuss the prospects for developing the state economy in the long term. He will also discuss the role of the forest sector in the state economy today and how it is likely to develop in the future.

Foresight is part of good management

The Future Forum on Forests organized a special training course on the methods and best practices in different forest sector organizations on 25-26 August 2003. The

aim of the course was to expose participants to modern methods and techniques for foresight and future studies in management and decision-making. The trainer of the course was Docent Mika Mannermaa from Future Studies Mannermaa Ltd. The course material is available in Finnish at www.metsafoorumi.fi/muut_tul.htm/.

The main conclusion of the course was that foresight work is especially useful in strategic planning at organizational or sectoral levels. For example, scenario-based foresight – which was one of the methodological approaches introduced in the course – is applicable in management planning at the organizational level as well as in policy development planning at the sectoral level.

Other methods available for foresight work introduced in the course were future barometers, future studios, identification of weak signals for future changes, and the analysis of effectiveness of potential future changes. More information on the methods that can be applied in foresight work can be found in: Mannermaa, M. 1999. *Tulevaisuuden hallinta*. WSOY. 227 p.

In looking to the future, it is essential to analyse systematically what changes may occur and adjust own activities as necessary on the basis of the findings. If the organization's ability to react to forthcoming changes and the ability to manage the change are both strong, the organization is 'visionary and creative' (Figure 1). In these organizations foresight work is a fundamental part of management, and future changes are seen to bring opportunities rather than threats. The key question for the forest sector is "Does the sector have the ability to be visionary and creative, and to see the future as an opportunity?"

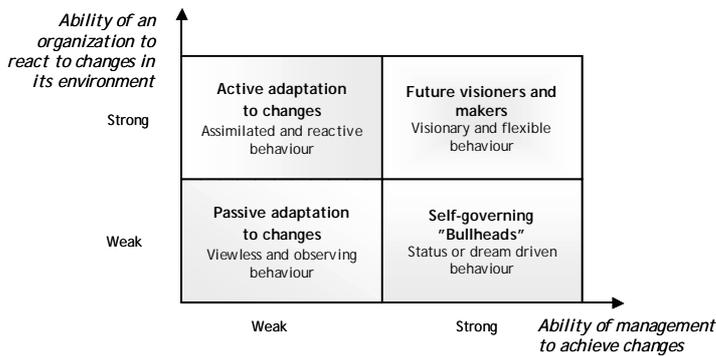


Figure 1. Differences in preparation for future (CAPFUL 2002, www.capful.fi).

From long-term planning to foresight

The recession of the 1990s was one motivation for the rise of foresight work in Finland. The recession led to a conclusion that despite advanced long-term planning, the factors affecting livelihoods and the development of the society were not possible to fully control. It was understood that it could be rewarding to analyse how the factors might change in the future, and then plan for the changes.

The Office of the Government has published a summary report of the discussions of a series of meetings that focused on the challenges and issues of the future development of Finland. The report is available through the Government Office at www.vnk.fi and mentions the forest sector mostly from the point of view of forest cluster know-how, wood energy opportunities, and the potential for innovation in the wood industries. The key issues for the development of Finland in the future include issues such as strengthening the know-how of the people, further development in technology, diminishing services of the public sector, and the role of innovations in creating future welfare.

The Finnish National Fund for Research and Development (SITRA) imple-

ments the Finland 2015 – programme that aims to develop skills and know-how of the Finnish top-level decision makers. More information about the programme and other SITRA's foresight activities can be found at www.sitra.fi.

Finland Futures Academy (FFA) is a national network of the universities offering courses and training on future studies www.tukkk.fi/tutu/tva.

The Science and Technology Foresight operates under the European Commission, Directorate General Research, and is the main coordinating unit for foresight work at the European Community level. Through its network it is possible to find information on the foresight activities of the European Commission and European Science Foundation: www.cordis.lu/foresight/home.html.

Additional information from national and international foresight and future studies programs and publications is updated to the web service of the Forum at: www.metsaforumi.fi/tietoa.htm. We hope that the readers of Forum News will send information on foresight works and study reports on future research of any kind through the feedback function of the Forum web-service.

Other interesting links:

The Parliament of Finland, The Committee for the Future
www.eduskunta.fi/efakta/vk/tuv/tuv.htm

ETLA www.etla.fi/english/forecasts

The Finnish Society for Futures Studies
www.futurasociety.fi/10english.html

Finland Futures Research Centre www.tukkk.fi/tutu/default_eng.asp

World Future Society
www.wfs.org

Institute for the Future
www.iftf.org

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The newsletter of the Future Forum on Forests aims to provide updated information on the activities and results of the forum. This informal newsletter is produced and distributed electronically and you can find it on the Internet on <http://www.metsaforumi.fi/news.htm>. You can also order it to your email address by sending an email to saija.miina@joensuu.fi.

