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Justness and acceptability

Aspects of the societal developments in the future

Possibilities for the forest sector to support societal development

Forthcoming seminar of Future Forum on Forests

## Forest sector needs to answer to the challenge of justness

*The demands for ecological sustainability in forestry that became general in the 1980s were partly based on the success of the international environment movement as an opposite reaction to the destroying of forests in the tropic. The demands emphasised for social sustainability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are also partly based on the international developments. In the developing countries the industrial use of forests has been considered unjust as compared to the well-being of the people depending on the same forests. Also in Finland the equal division of the benefits from forests has become an essential theme in the social sustainability.*

### Justness and acceptability

In the workgroup on social sustainability of the Future Forum on Forests one of the main topics has been the societal developments and their effects on forestry. As a social sustainability in forestry has been considered e.g. people's possibilities to influence the use of forests, the benefits gained from the forests and the just division of the benefits involved.

Based on the recent developments on the forest sector it can be estimated that the benefits have been divided more unevenly than before. Shareholders, senior management and administrative services have benefited from the changes in the distribution of income. Other employees, subcontractors, forest owners and the state have lost their positions in the income distribution.

The significance of the forest sector in the distribution of economic well-being will decrease in the future whereas the more remote areas are concerned. The stumpage earnings will more and more benefit the city dwellers. In this respect developing countryside may lose its significance as one of the grounds for the improvements in forestry.

The forest sector may also have to face the debate on the justification of direct and indirect public subsidies. During the last decade the significance of forest sector to the national economy has diminished and its ties to Finnish society have weakened. This may be expected for example in forestry in which the subsidies are mainly aimed at wood production although the effects on well-being increasingly concentrate on recreation and tourism.

Thus a more equal division of the benefits and the improving of justness may be one of the most essential challenges of the forest sector in the future. Emphasising justness in the forest sector may improve the acceptability of the activities on the viewpoint of the citizens and decision-makers. A forest policy emphasising justness will widely take into account the goals on the use of forests of the secondary decision-makers (see Figure 1).

### Aspects of the societal developments in the future

The economic globalisation still causes fast transitions in international division of labour and increases national competition on investments. It also decreases the possibilities for enterprises to take into account the national viewpoints in decisions on investments. Similar to enterprises the economic globalisation presses also the welfare society thus changing its goals more market oriented. Thus it is possible that more public services will become subject to a charge or become privatised.

The most alarming trends from the society's viewpoint are regional centralising, growing social differences in well-being, marginalisation of uneducated young adults, the increase of substance abuse as well as the increase in professional crime. The forest sector has very limited possibilities to have an influence on these particular problems. It is possible that the economic crisis threatening the public sector may widely affect forestry in the beginning of 2010s. The public funding for forestry may thus significantly decrease.



Primary decision-makers

- forest owners
- forest industry
- officials in the public sector
- organisations in private forestry
- researchers (forestry)
- trade organisations and other interest groups

Secondary decision-makers

- people living in the countryside (with no land of their own)
- forest workers
- entrepreneurs in tourism
- recreational users of forests
- researchers (biology, culture and history)
- nongovernmental organisations

Figure 1. Examples of primary and secondary decision-makers on the use of forests.

### Possibilities for the forest sector to support societal development

The possibilities for the forest sector to support societal development are most influential, if the significance of local, regional and national policies is emphasised in the decision-making as a counter reaction on globalisation. Thus competitiveness on a local and regional basis would be emphasised more on societal level. At the same time the more remote areas as well as Forest Finland would be able to achieve a higher status.

The emphasis on the significance of remote areas and Forest Finland may be a part of a cultural transition in which a transition towards a more balanced economy occurs. In a more balanced economy people's way of life changes into less extravagant materialism.

Forests such as nature itself with its various values and benefits can offer a lot of free or reasonably priced well-being. In this particular context well-being consists not only of economic aspects but also of happiness and controlling one's course of life. When considering the relatively democratic structure of forest ownership, forests may also be a more democratic source of well-being than many other

structures in society. Thus forests may in the future not only support the local and regional economy but also unify the nation.

There may be a new kind of development in the sense of unification in the future. At the same time different identification and peer groups will gain more significance. A turn to a more unified community may occur if the ones retiring in the 2010s start to take responsibility on the future with the younger generations. In the forest sector this unification may occur as a wide and versatile people's cooperation not only to protect forests but also to develop forest management and wood utilisation in the rural areas.

### Forthcoming seminar of Future Forum on Forests

The next seminar of Future Forum on Forests will be held as a part of the Metsäpäivät organised by Finnish Forest Association in Lahti, Finland on 14–16 March 2005. Further information on the Metsäpäivät is available at [www.smy.fi/metsapivat2005](http://www.smy.fi/metsapivat2005) and on the Seminar on 16 March at [www.metsaforumi.fi/tapah-tumia](http://www.metsaforumi.fi/tapah-tumia). (Both websites are in Finnish.)

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