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Weak signals as a challenge

Future Forum on Forests starts gathering and analysing information on the weak signals affecting the forest sector. Finnish experts working in international tasks with connections to the forest sector will be invited as observers of the weak signals. A foresight network in which alternatives on the development of globalisation and successful factors in the forest sector will be assessed starts in the beginning of 2006.

Which direction will globalisation lead us?

Globalisation is one of the most important factors affecting the future of the forest sector. The public discussion on globalisation has, however, been quite one-sided. Although globalisation is a very complex phenomenon, it is still unambiguously believed that world economy will become more liberal and the international labour division will increase.

In reality it is rather uncertain in which direction will the globalisation take its course or how it will affect the Finnish forest sector. In the context of different alternatives of globalisation the developing of the forest sector may be rather varied. For example, the demand and the risen price of oil as a consequence of the increase in the world economy may offer new possibilities on the use of bio-fuels. As a result, the synergy benefits in the production of bio-fuels may be remarkable for the forest industry.

At any rate, it is essential from the viewpoint of the forest sector to analyse the current global developments more in detail and thus to decrease the instability related to the globalisation. The assessments on the global developments combined with the analysis on the changes of the successful factors in the forest sector will improve the possibilities to develop the forest sector in Finland.

In the beginning of 2006 Future Forum on Forests will start a foresight work which aims at assessing different alternatives on the development of globalisation and the successful factors in the forest sector. There will be experts invited to join the foresight network from different fields of the forest sector as well as diffe-

rent fields of globalisation such as those of economic, political, societal, cultural and environmental factors. The results of the foresight network will be available in late 2006.

First signs of the change

The first important indications of a change are the weak signals. The benefits of weak signals can be seen when assessing their significance in an organisation or a field concerned and analysing how the phenomena reflected by the weak signals should be reacted on.

The observer of the weak signals is believed to be in a better position than others when preparing for the phenomena of the future. Observation of weak signals enables one to be in the frontline of the developments as well as to foresee any unwanted changes and to prevent those when needed.

When interpreting weak signals the forest sector is in a special position. Long-term investments and functions are typical for the sources of livelihoods in this particular field. In a short time period it is difficult to change the functions although the phenomena described by the weak signals were to take place.

Future Forum on Forests will start to gather and analyse information on the weak signals possibly affecting the forest sector. There will be a large number of Finnish experts working in international tasks with connections to the forest sector invited as observers of the weak signals.

Weak signals and the analyses based on their changes will be available at the Forum's website from the beginning of 2006 onwards.

	Small impact	Large impact
Low probability	Noise	Weak signals
High probability	Trends	Megatrends

Figure 1. Future phenomenons by probability and impact (Mannermaa 2004).

Activity in the forest management

In the first phase of the Future Forum on Forests there arose a concern on the availability of wood to the forest industry. The wood availability cannot unambiguously be compared to the price of wood although the pricing is probably the most essential factor in the increase of wood supply. Other factors affecting the availability of wood besides the price are the forest owners' activity to manage and use their own forests, the information and guidance services as well as the usefulness of the data on forest resources.

Currently the Forum is preparing a report on the means by which the preconditions on wood availability in Finland could be developed further. In the preliminary results tax incentives, individual information services and the developing of joint ownership are emphasised as important factors increasing the activity in forest management. By applying these particular means it may be possible to achieve better economic results in the viewpoint of both the forest-owner and the forest industry.

The question of forest sector's appeal as well as the acceptability of the use of forests has also arisen in the report. It would be easier to justify the forest management and the use of forests, if the management and felling practices applied were to be accepted and valued in the society also in the future.

Other current news

The revising of the national forest pro-

gramme by the year 2015 has been started. The work will be divided into three phases. The future survey will include an analysis on the changes of the forest sector's functional environment and an analysis of the assessed vision of the future. The strategic part of the work will define a vision on the use and conservation of the forests, the strategic goals as well as the aims of the programme, among other things. The report on measures will include the means to implement the programme in practice.

The Finnish Society of Forest Science will organise an event 'Forest Science Day in Finland' (Metsätieteiden päivä) on 18 October 2005 at Säätytalo in Helsinki, Finland. The topic of the event will be 'The future of the forest sector' which will be the main theme in both the general seminar in the morning as well as in the separate seminars in the afternoon. Further information on the seminar is available in Finnish at www.metla.fi/org/sms/

Wood Technology Centre Puugia, Centre of Expertise in Wood Technology and Forestry will organise in cooperation with Future Forum on Forests a seminar on 'World's forest industry and the future of the Finnish forest industry' on 25 November 2005 at the auditorium of Joensuu Science Park in Joensuu, Finland. A book by Prof. Matti Kärkkäinen, 'Forest Industry of the World - background for the assessment of the future of the Finnish forest industry' (in Finnish) will be presented in the seminar.

FinnSight 2015 - Science and technology in the Finland of 2010s is a foresight project implemented in 2005-2006 by the Academy of Finland and National Technology Agency of Finland (Tekes). www.finnSight2015.fi

Foresight network by the Finnish Government and Ministries in 2005. Finnish Government's foresight network report 1/2005. www.ennakointiverkosto.fi (in Finnish)

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