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Existing structures, new businesses, biosociety, or the national interest?

Identification of the ways of thinking clarifies the discussion

Critical attitudes towards forest policy

Four different ways of thinking about the future of the forest sector

A survey undertaken by the Future Forum on Forests was able to discern four very different ways of thinking about the development of the forest sector in the future. They address existing structures, new businesses, biosociety, and the national interest. The differences and the significance of the ways of thinking were discussed in small groups in a Future Forum on Forests seminar held in November. The concluding discussion of the seminar addressed the issue of how to develop forest policy and the forest sector's innovation activities.

Existing structures, new businesses, biosociety, or the national interest?

The Future Forum on Forests' expert survey was able to discern four different ways of thinking about the development of the forest sector. Each one is a logical and well-grounded entity, although they are based on differing ideas of the future of the world and the forest sector.

Existing structures: The way of thinking rests on the assumption that the development of the forest sector continues to follow the current trend also in the future. The costs and the growth of the markets will define the location of the production facilities. The Finnish forest sector will succeed as part of the forest cluster, if the production can be boosted sufficiently. The main objective of forest policy will be to ensure the supply of wood into the markets.

New businesses: The way of thinking rests on the assumption that globalisation will dramatically damage the competitiveness of the Finnish forest industry. It will therefore be a huge risk to cling on to the old industrial production structure. Investments should be made in new markets and new businesses by removing old structures, e.g., those of the traditional forest industry.

Biosociety: The way of thinking rests on the idea that in the future, the principles of sustainable development will have an increasingly important role also in financial decision-making. The forest sector can succeed in the biosociety, which embraces sustainable development. The production structure will need to be developed towards more efficient solutions in the use of energy and raw materials. The forest policy must genuinely adopt pluralistic values.

National interest: The idea rests on the assumption that globalisation will increase the risks of international business, which is why the forest sector should invest in a stable Finland. It is essential for competitiveness that the cores of forest industry and forestry know-how remain in Finland. Moreover, in facing the risks of the future it is central that forests are used to their full capacity and forest resources increased.

Although the forest sector actors see the sector's future very differently, the differing views have not been interpreted and exploited properly. A strategy that would combine the above views is missing, because the development of the forest sector has traditionally been justified by cost-efficiency, productivity, and price competitiveness of the primary forest industries. These justifications, however, only support the views addressing the current sector and the interest of Finland.

Identification of the ways of thinking clarifies the discussion

The Future Forum on Forests seminar held in November discussed the significance of the different views. The identification of the four different views was considered helpful in understanding the own and the others' positions, and it should be used to bridge the gap and ease the contradictions when preparing for the future of the forest sector.

The seminar participants felt that all the views should be taken into consideration in various decision-making situations which define the sector's future. This is possible, because the views do not exclude, but rather complement one another. The participants did, however, suspect that the prevailing and existing institutions are likely to continue to have

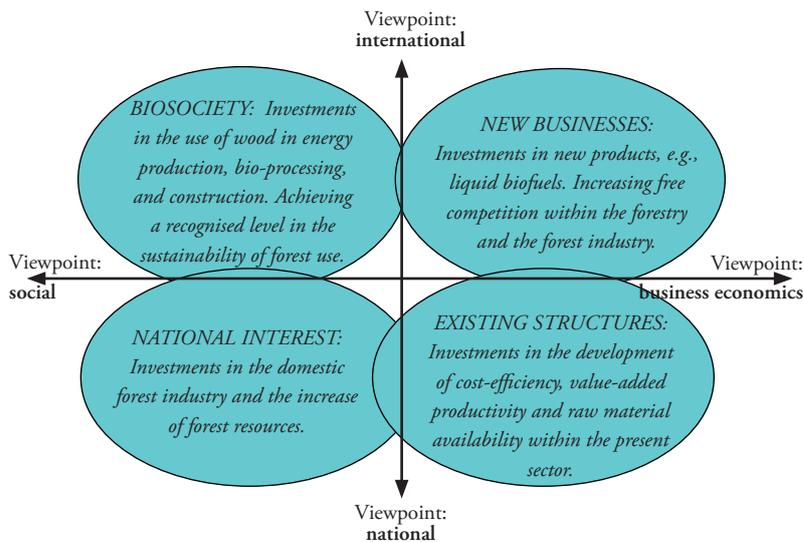


Figure 1. Four different ways of thinking on the development of the forest sector (Häyrynen et al. 2007).

a significant role in deciding which views will be emphasised when preparing for and building the sector's future.

Critical attitudes towards forest policy

The concluding discussion of the seminar addressed the issue of how to develop forest policy and the forest sector's innovation activities.

Forest policy was seen to be too much based on the aim to increase wood production, which stems from the needs of the paper industry. To develop the innovation activities, business objectives should be emphasised instead of cubic metres. For instance, freer competition in service operations within the forest industry could open up new opportunities to develop businesses exploiting forests and wood.

The participants felt that the preparation of Finland's National Forest

Programme is more concerned with the protection of interests than creating a development programme for the forest sector, which was considered problematic. The programme promises to benefit all, but lacks prioritised goals.

The recent development of the forest sector's innovation activities was discussed in a much more positive atmosphere than forest policy. As a whole, the innovation activities within the forest sector are seen to need "creative madness", cross-sectoral decision-making and "good players". The Forest Cluster Ltd was seen as a welcome reform, although there were doubts that, due to the financier being the paper industry, it will merely strengthen the old production basis. It was hoped that the wood products industry would also be included in the forest cluster collaboration.

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Publisher:
Future Forum on Forests
University of Joensuu
P.O. Box 111
FI-80101 Joensuu

Editor: Saija Miina
saija.miina@joensuu.fi

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