

Why we need for more forest sector foresight

The forest sector has extensive experience in projecting forest growth, and assessing the availability of forest resources for expected wood-product markets. Today there is a growing complexity of issues at stake for forests and the forest sector in Europe. Natural resources are under increasing pressure; the global developments include foreseeable challenges, but also uncertainties of a new scale due to, for example, climate change as well as social and political developments.

The crucial role of the forest sector

In the Europe 2020 growth strategy, the EU defines its target for a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy. The forest sector plays a key role – together with other natural resource sectors – in achieving the goals for a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive bioeconomy. Furthermore, forests are important in ensuring employment in the rural areas and in providing a variety of social benefits for both rural and urban populations.



Foresight is a systematic, participatory, future intelligence gathering and medium-to-long-term vision-building process aimed at present day decisions and mobilising joint actions

There are on-going, major policy deliberations regarding forests at both an EU and pan-European level e.g. a new EU forestry strategy, and the Forest Europe negotiations on legally binding instrument for forests. These processes require timely, research-based information, but also new tools to define the common targets and the European added value for forests; even if there are different starting points across Europe.

In order to enable the forest-based sector to maximise its potential and thereby provide a response to the grand challenges, we need to build capacities to tackle possible futures beyond the extrapolation of past trends and developments. More flexibility and preparation are required from the decision making in the areas of administration and business, as well as in research and development.

The research goals include the following:

- Improve foresight tools and methods used in forest sector investigations;
- Improve utilisation of the foresight results already achieved in exercises at national level and in other sectors;
- Connect the needs and priorities in different parts of Europe to definitions and added value for the forest futures on a European-level.

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Forest sector has a good story to tell for bioeconomy and for seeking solutions to the grand challenges

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The COST Strategic Workshop Series (SWS) on Foresight on Future Demand of Forest-based Products and Services 2010-2011, has been the first European level forum to share the expertise of national forest foresights and the exercises carried out in certain areas, e.g. the environment, rural development, agricultural research and energy sectors.

Foresight on Future Demand of Forest-based Products and Services underlines collaborative learning

The strategic workshop series had two aims:

- To produce futures information based on expert workshops and internet surveys;
- To connect foresight experts and practitioners in the forest sector and other relevant fields.

The process of collaborative learning as such is important: we cannot predict the future, but we can investigate alternative pathways in a structured manner and thereby improve our ability to understand the factors of change. Some of these factors are already visible as emerging issues (weak signals), some of them have come as a surprise (wild cards) and have had a major impact on our lives. Energy questions are a major theme of today's world, and are equally current in the forest sector; but tomorrow's headlines may be different. The very concept of a sector based on forests is evolving together with the changing global needs and demands. The COST exercise concludes three lines of action to strengthen and develop the foresight know-how in the forest sector:

- COST Action to share expertise and know-how of foresight exercises carried out in several countries in the forest sector and in other relevant sectors;
- Research project(s) to deepen understanding of the role of forests in the bioeconomy, to develop foresight tools and methods, and to connect forest sector investigations with the foresight community and the field of futures research;
- Policy-related foresight exercise(s) to provide tools for vision building and the definition of common goals.

These activities are developed in conjunction with the network built up during the COST exercise.