Public perception of forestry and forest-based bioeconomy in the European Union

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Background & Motivation

- **Forests are increasingly important** in European policy agenda, media and public discussion

- **Different expectations towards forests** and forest-based sector - climate change mitigation, biodiversity, bioeconomy, etc.

- **Agenda & discussion is shaped by public** (≈voters) perceptions about forests and their use

- **Important to know public perceptions** of European forests and forest-based sector
New EFI study on Public Perceptions

• Several studies on public perceptions of forests, forestry, forest-based sector

• The new EFI study provides a synthesis (meta-study) of the existing studies: what are the key messages coming out of these?

The forest-based sector in a bioeconomy: services, activities, products

Ecosyst. services  Forestry  Industry  Products

Primary survey data
Conducted in EU27 + UK
Published 2010-2019

The 77 reviewed studies

- Few studies on industry
- Target groups
  - population
  - forest visitors
  - students
  - consumers
- Mostly quantitative & convenience sampling

Figure 1: The reviewed studies by country and topic
Forest ecosystem services are highly valued

- **Environmental benefits** more important than social and economic ones
  1. Global climate & biodiversity
  2. Recreation & experiencing nature
  3. Timber production

- **Women, higher educated, urban citizens, no sector involvement** emphasized environmental aspects
Preference for forest protection and diversity

• Worried about forest health vs. well managed

• Negative perception of **intensive use**
  – clear-cuts, exotic tree species, chemicals

• Preference for mixed forests and different ages classes

• **Women, higher educated, younger respondents** value conservation & diverse forest
Scepticism towards the environmental performance

- Few studies – topic under-represented in academic literature
- Limited knowledge

- **Sustainability is questioned**
  - Certified & legally harvested wood
  - Environmental responsibility
  - Overall sustainability performance rated as good
Wood products perceived as environmentally friendly

- **Little awareness** of new wood-based products and few studies
- Renewable, high quality, healthy material but **question climate benefits**
- **Purchasing decision**
  - Product information: safety, labour conditions, wood origin
  - Performance and price more important?
- Higher levels of **income, education and environmental awareness** led to higher valuation of wood products
Forests contribute to bioeconomy. Wood products too?

- Support **environmental benefits** in forest policy & improve communication on **wood harvest**

- Communicate **product information** and track development through sustainability assessments

- **Research gaps:**
  - systematic research/monitoring of forestry in EU
  - new wood-based products & industry, purchasing decision
Further info:
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