

FACTS

Why the topic is important

- **Forest management** and the **forestry industry** has been under scrutiny at global level since deforestation was identified as an issue of concern in the 1970s. Although numerous initiatives have been launched to address this many challenges remain. Globally deforestation has slowed marginally but natural forests and their biodiversity remain critically threatened..
- In Europe, as well as the economic value of timber and associated jobs, forests deliver key environmental benefits such as flood control, erosion prevention and improved air and water quality. They also play a vital role in our quality of life offering treasured landscapes, access and exercise opportunities and rich habitats for wildlife. Perhaps the most important benefit of all is the role that forests play in climate change mitigation and adaptation through temperature regulation, carbon sequestration and as a sustainable source of fuel. However, this emerging "green energy" need is creating new challenges for forests as a living environment which are becoming a new source of income for both small landowners and big companies..
- Although the forested area of European has increased in recent history, it has been in terms of quantity and not quality. The principal driver on woodland has been economic and commercial pressures have imposed an industrialisation of forestry with mono-cultures, exotic species and simplified management systems which have transformed forest ecology, leaving many woodland species facing a battle for survival. As well as the direct impact on wildlife, industrial scale forestry, like industrial agriculture, has disturbed the natural balance and increased the risk of pests, diseases, fires and wind blow. Conversely, woodlands that are regarded as too small or difficult to access to be commercially viable have become neglected leading to a loss of structure and diversity that has severely reduced their biodiversity and productive capacity. Finally all woodlands are threatened by external factors such as development and nitrogen deposition which is contributing to either direct destruction or gradual degradation..
- Given the value that woodland and forests contribute to sustainability and quality of life, it is essential that we recognise the positive benefits that forests and woodland provide. They occupy a unique place in our environment and heritage and offer services to humanity and other species that are frequently taken for granted. These services would cost billions to replace or replicate but unless they are properly understood and presented to decision-makers, forest management in Europe will only be valued in pure economic terms, it is therefore vital to publicise and champion the multi-faceted potential and value that woodlands and forests can, and do, provide.
- This will require the consolidated efforts of the forestry industry, biodiversity groups and civil society groups. On a European level the work of the ARC during the last two years has shown quite impressively the importance of motivating, bringing together and consolidating civil society organisations in order to give them a voice to be heard. As an example the topic of "Access to land" is attracting increasing public interest and initiatives like Terre de Liens is raising public awareness of the situation in Europe. Perhaps an "Access to Forests" initiative is needed to do the same for our woods!.

The policy context on EU level

- Despite their environmental and economic importance, forests have a low profile at the EU level. There is an *advisory* Forestry Strategy but as forestry is a member state responsibility it represents little more than guidance. That said, all member states and the Commission are members of Forest Europe which has a longer sustainable vision which it is trying to embed in a legally binding agreement but this is some years away. At the moment the only tangible EU involvement in forestry is through CAP Pillar 2, via national rural development programmes which do not necessarily treat forestry as a priority. Although the EU seems comfortable with this rather ad hoc set up outcomes do depend on how it gets interpreted in individual states and acted upon 'on the ground'. Given that forests cross national boundaries there ought to be more emphasis on making sure that adjoining states with similar forest types have complementary forestry policies..

- Outside Governments there are research networks and professional organisations for forest owners which promote the sustainable management of forests by combining wood production with the delivery of social and ecological benefits. There is also a system of certification which is supposed to meet the sustainable forestry challenge. However, it is internal to the industry and can only truly deliver the target of

sustainability if there is a shared understanding by all woodland users of what sustainable forestry actually means.

- Forests are an important European resource, but despite delivering from an economic, cultural and environmental perspective there is no formal EU forestry policy and no EU level networks promoting exchanges on sustainable forestry within civil society

SUSTAINABLE FORESTRY

What Forum Synergies wants to focus on

- Forum Synergies' work on forests aims to contribute to the promotion and spread of good initiatives around Europe. In order to provoke debate on what sustainable forestry is and who can and will benefit from it, FS has initiated a project to promote exchanges between countries, show-casing successful examples of sustainable forestry (management and protection) in order to support and raise awareness of such work, discuss potential alternatives and, ultimately, propose a different paradigm for forests and forestry management in Europe that merges the needs of forest owners, managers and users.
- There are four key topics Forum Synergies intends to tackle in its work focusing on sustainable forestry:
 - Top down versus bottom up approaches in forest management. Which role does or should local communities and civil society play?

- The "green run" on forests. The overall call for more production in the field of "green energy" opened up forests as a viable resource of renewable raw materials. A development that fuels the conflict between big multinational companies and small companies.
- The discussion on what we mean by "sustainable forest management" is a crucial one. Society seems to be torn apart by the debate between the productive role of forests and other services. We will show through positive examples and success stories what the main factors of sustainability are taking into account ecological, economic, social and cultural aspects.
- Bridging the gap between the political level - both on EU and national level - and local realities is a key issue of Forum Synergies' work. This topic will therefore be like a red thread in our activities

Activities

Steps so far we have:

- Established a small working group to prepare a proposal for a work programme related to sustainable forestry
- Identified relevant themes and existing European forestry networks
- Convened an initial working group which discussed the proposed work programme.

The initial working group brought together representatives from 4 countries who agreed a programme to deliver four workshops based around the following topics:

1. To raise awareness of the different services provided by sustainable forest management (United Kingdom)
2. To analyse strategies of how forests can be a lever for local development in rural communities (Germany)
3. To share experiences of how rural communities are involved in looking after woodlands (Sweden)

4. To give local actors and authorities better access to practical knowledge about sustainable forest management (France)
- Through these workshops, we will gain an understanding of how sustainable forestry works across Europe and will use this knowledge to develop political proposals to regional, state and EU governments which can be promoted at the EU parliament. We will also build a compendium of good practice on sustainable forestry, which we can be disseminated as part of Forum Synergies' wider activities.

Activities planned for 2016:

March 2016 - 1st Sustainable Forest Management Workshop in Milverton, Somerset, UK.

The announcement and programme will be available at our website at <http://www.forum-synergies.eu/>

VISIONS

What we want to learn / achieve

- **Gaining a deeper insight.** We want to learn from success stories gain a better understanding of what we mean by sustainable management
- **Capitalise the existing experience.** To bring together all the lessons learned and add value at all levels from local through to European.
- We want to achieve this by **spreading** the word. Capacity building is one of the key competences of Forum Synergies. Our vision is to create more success stories by promoting our lessons learnt and capacity building through our workshops.

PRODUCTS

- **Inventory of organisations** or networks who are active in the field.
- **Success stories:** we would like to highlight some experiences and good practices of sustainable forestry management. We publish success stories on our website (visit the section "Resource Center")
- **Addressing the political level.** Success stories show how sustainable forest management can be put into reality. Those people who manage to run successful examples of sustainable forestry are those who are most capable of formulating their needs with regard to the political system - EU or national. Forum Synergies with its intrinsic capacity of moderating a constructive dialogue will support interested actors to bring forward the main findings to the political level.
- **Your opportunity to contribute.** Share with us your main concerns and questions so that we can plan our activities most effectively!. Let us know what happens in your region or country!
We would be interested to learn:
What are your experiences with sustainable forest management?
What kind of experience or contact can you offer?
Is there any key topic around which you would like to focus on?
What do you think are the greatest challenges for the future?

CONTACT & INFORMATION

Forum Synergies:

Simone MATOUCH: info@forum-synergies.eu

EuCAN CiC:

Gwil WREN: gwilwren@gmail.com