

Forest Research Management in an Era of Globalization

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The ultimate goal of research is to improve the wellbeing of society. However, globalization has changed the framework conditions and nature of forest research. Societal questions around forests and forestry are increasingly complex. At the same time budgets are declining. This condition is requiring research organizations to use their financial and human capital resources more efficiently. Consequently, the role of managers in forest research has become even more important as they will have to make sound policy choices for the future of forest research.

Against this background, the IUFRO Directors' Forum (IUFRO Research Group [6.06.00](#) – Management of Forest Research) had its second meeting from 18-19 April 2007 in Washington D.C., USA. The forum serves as a global platform for directors of forest research institutes and deans of forest faculties of universities to exchange views, share experiences and discuss strategies for the future. The results of the IUFRO Directors' Forum will contribute significantly to the further development of forest research management globally.

Setting the forest research agenda – identifying science priorities

Globalization has brought about major changes in the process of setting the forest research agenda. One major observation is that agenda development becomes an increasingly strategic process for forest research institutions. Among the most important examples for research topics are the increasing demand for stakeholder involvement and opportunities for input, the introduction of "agendas of scale" such as agendas set on the basis of global demands and national needs as well as the growing emphasis placed on long-term planning, and the consideration of temporal research scales. All these factors inevitably make research both more timely and relevant.

An increasing number of research organizations are already taking these factors into account and use clearly structured processes in order to develop research strategies for their respective institutions. In this respect, criteria such as relevance, feasibility, timelessness, scope of benefits, innovative potential, credibility, and legitimacy are helpful when selecting items to be included on the research agenda.



Photo: A. Buck

Quality research and efficiency are crucial

Knowledge management is becoming a more and more important element for the improvement of efficiency of forest research institutions. However, traditional research frameworks often separate researchers from the practitioners and decision makers.

A professional communication of results to beneficiaries and guidelines for researchers who work at the science/policy interface are valuable mechanisms for making research more efficient and meaningful, especially for decision makers.

Moreover, performance indicators help to determine the efficiency of research. Such indicators are

highly desirable; adequate methodologies are currently developing. In general, indicators have to take into account both the task to be evaluated and the institution concerned in terms of size and type of tasks assigned to an institution.

Where does the money for research come from?

The financial situation of forest-related research organizations throughout the world varies significantly. As a general trend it can be stated that forest research institutions in Europe and North America have had to face declining budgets over the past few years. At the same time, especially Asian countries have experienced rising research budgets.

One major challenge is the increasing need to compete for budgets with other institutions and sectors while core budgets in general are diminishing. Nevertheless, innovative approaches, including new partnerships, could help to overcome some of these constraints and play an integral role in ensuring sustainable funding.

Finally, in order to stay in touch with reality, the business model of forestry needs to be updated. Forest research has to focus more strongly on consumer and stakeholder demands and needs. In this context, it is highly relevant to develop a coherent strategic plan and prioritize expenditures according to that plan.