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Congress Highlights Forest Science Challenges and Solutions

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Global Issues and Trends Affect Rural Communities

What at first seems to be local in scale instead may be a global phenomenon. This theme emerged at the IUFRO European Congress on "Forests and Forestry in the Context of Rural Development" in September 2007 in Warsaw, Poland. "Protecting significant forest resources for the success of rural areas," said IUFRO President Don Koo Lee, "requires understanding of how these local areas are linked to global issues such as climate change, deforestation, loss of biodiversity, and bio-energy."

In an example of potential links, policy makers in Europe are considering a bio-based economy approach to mitigate climate change. Konstantin von Teuffel, Forest Research Institute of Baden-Württemberg, described that increases in employment from such an economy could be relatively significant for rural areas.

Rural communities are feeling their links to global shifts in the forest industry. Anne Toppinen, European Forest Institute, described the merging of forest industries. Her study shows that these merges have yet to result in increased profitability perhaps due to less strategic fit among companies than anticipated and the challenges of integrating distinct company cultures. Other factors: demand for paper is being affected by the Internet and about half of the world's wood supply is from tropical plantations.

In another economic sector, tourism is on the rise worldwide. Mountain tourism, for example, is growing quickly in developing countries. Non-wood forest products also generate significant income for rural communities worldwide. For example, in a study presented by Wiesława Nowacka, Warsaw Agricultural University, 70 percent of the rural families she surveyed collected mushrooms of which 80 percent were sold.

Rural Development Topic Informs Research Agenda Setting

A panel discussion on the future research agenda followed the scientific presentations. Panelists noted from the presentations that non-wood products, environmental services, and social values are not sufficiently addressed by forest science. "Interaction between forest management and rural development must be seen from the social perspective," said Piotr Paschalis-Jakubowicz, Warsaw Agricultural University. Further, "based on an EFI study," said Risto Seppälä, Finnish Forest Research Institute, "two-thirds of European forest issues need socioeconomic research but only 10 percent of existing research is now dedicated to it."

Susan Edda Seehusen, one of 36 students attending the Congress and past president of the International Forestry Students Association responded, "We cannot solve issues



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such as biodiversity without understanding the social and economic factors that influence human decisions. These factors are what determine whether or not biodiversity and other values of the forest will exist into the future."

As the discussion continued, the topic of stakeholder involvement emerged. Von Teuffel explained, "Whereas in the past, forest researchers could set their own agenda, development of such agendas has been professionalized to include stakeholders in setting the agenda." Rural development means you have to be engaged in the community of place," explained Ann Bartuska, U.S. Forest Service. "We need new ways to engage these communities as stakeholders in research", she said.

In considering the issues facing forest scientists today, Seppälä noted that global climate change, bio-based economies, and GMOs, will be issues for at least the next 10 years. The panelists urged IUFRO to be used as a network to find who has the best capabilities for examining particular issues from a worldwide perspective and then at regional and national levels. "You have to participate globally in IUFRO, to be able to act locally in forest research," said Niels Koch, Danish Centre for Forest Landscape and Planning.

The panelists concluded with a discussion about future trends for funding of forest research in Europe. Risto Paivinen, European Forest Institute, shared that slight decreases are expected in public funding with increases externally.

About 225 researchers, policy makers, and other stakeholders attended the meeting that served as an IUFRO European Congress and the science portion of the EFI (European Forest Institute) annual meeting, sponsored by both these organizations and the Forestry Faculty of the Warsaw Agricultural University.

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