

FOREST ACADEMY

Program for Increasing Dialogue on Forest in Society

Cross-sectoral coordination, co-operation and partnerships in forest issues are major challenges for modern forest policy. Yet, success in planning and implementing cross-sectoral activities is not self-evident. It requires social capital - trust, networks and shared views – within the sector itself, and especially with other sectors of society.

The Forest Academy communication program is based on arranging a series of cross-sectoral forums that utilise a specific structure and variety of educational working methods that are designed to promote the creation of social capital between participants from the forest sector and rest of society.

The Forest Academy communication program has been running successfully in Finland since 1996. It is now available for application in different organisations, countries and at the international level.

Social capital – a bridge to the future

The forest sector is increasingly influenced by development taking place in other sectors such as environment, energy, R&D and rural development. Forestry is often viewed as a problem for society in issues related e.g. to biodiversity or forest fires. However, from the point of view of sustainable development, responsible forest utilisation can be considered as a solution to many societal challenges.

The potentials of forests in contributing to society can only be realised, when forest policy is linked with other policy areas in synergetic ways. Accordingly, a key factor for future success of the forest sector is its ability to operate in a cross-sectoral spirit.

In Europe, for example, the mutual interdependency of forest sector policy and other sectoral policies has been acknowledged by e.g. resolutions of the latest Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE), and by the vision and strategic objectives for the EU Forest Action Plan. They both call for increased cross-sectoral communication, coordination and co-operation on forest issues.

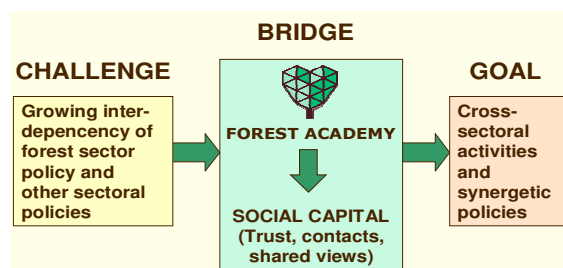
Despite an evident need, establishing inter-sectoral coordination, co-operation and partnerships is not self-evident, nor easy. In fact, when involving in interaction with other sectors, the forest sector in many countries has realised having insufficient trust, networks and shared views with other sectors of society.

Social capital refers to **trust, networks** and **shared views** that exist between one sector and the rest of society. It improves the influence, image and attractiveness of the sector in the eyes of the rest of society.

Often, the limited role of the forest sector in the national economy of a country is regarded as an obstacle to effective cross-sectoral influence. However, the social capital of a sector can be high, even though the national economic importance of the sector is low.

Social capital creates positive opportunities for influence, and an essential bridge for initiating cross-sectoral action. This is why many organisations have included the creation of social capital into their strategies, alongside with the more traditional notions of financial and human capital.

Although social capital of a sector is formed spontaneously through everyday communication, it can also be enhanced through specific, targeted projects. The Forest Academy program for dialogue on forest in society offers such an effective approach.

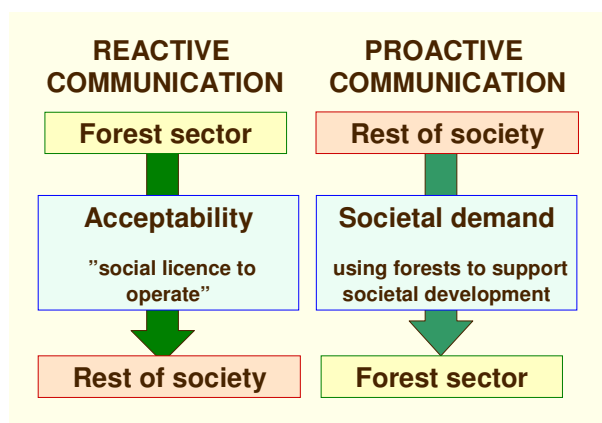


Forest Academy communication concept

The Forest Academy communication **concept** is aimed at enhancing cross-sectoral dialogue and relations between the forest sector and rest of society. For the forest sector, it is a proactive tool for building long-term social capital between the forest sector and the rest of society.

A key element for creating social capital is a reasonable mix of reactive and proactive communication. On the one hand, understanding of forest issues is enhanced by promoting the acceptability (social licence to operate) of the forest sector's present strategies and activities.

On the other hand, societal demand for the various benefits and services offered by the forest sector (e.g. in relation to rural development, employment, energy production, biodiversity, climate change) is created through identification of potentials in open, cross-sectoral dialogue.



In order to create societal demand for the services of the forest sector in a proactive manner, Forest Academy's working methods differ from most seminars, workshops and conferences in innovative ways. The working methods are designed to ensure effective information input, innovative group work results, and a relaxing atmosphere for network building. They include a variety of modern pedagogic approaches and dynamic group work designs.

Forest Academy Forums

Forest Academy **forums** bring together decision-makers and opinion leaders from the forest sector and rest of society.

The forums are primarily aimed at persons, who work outside the forest sector, but who have interest or abilities to influence forest issues, or societal issues of interest to the forest sector. In addition, they are participated by persons representing the forest sector.

A general theme for each forum is selected so that it represents a wider societal challenge (e.g. climate change, bioenergy, regional development, environmental quality, competitiveness) that can be addressed with sustainable utilisation of forest resources.

For the participants, a Forest Academy forum offers a meeting point, where they can gain new insight to the potentials that forests have in supporting the resolution of societal challenges that are in the joint interest of the participants.

Each Forest Academy forum is participated by app. 30 societal decision-makers and opinion-leaders. They are selected to form a balanced mix of persons representing politics, public administration, interest groups, business, R&D, media, NGOs and culture. One third of the participants represent the forest sector, whereas two thirds represent other sectors of society. Each forum is participated by different persons.

Forest Academy forums comprise of three days. The structure, contents and working methods are planned so that they provide multiple possibilities for gaining information, forming networks and giving an input to the societal issue selected as the theme of the forum. The different sessions and working methods are also planned so that the programme is stimulating from beginning to end. A publication is prepared from the inputs and outputs of each forum.

Although the contents of each forum may vary according to the theme of the forum, the basic structure and working methods are similar in each forum.

As a result from participating in a Forest Academy forum, the participant:

- has gained high quality **information** on forests, their importance and the possibilities of the forest sector to contribute to the resolution of wider societal challenges
- has **expanded his views** and is increasingly **interested** in the possibilities to utilise forests in support of societal development, and in particular in relation to the theme of the forum
- has created new **cross-sectoral contacts** with persons who are interested in similar societal challenges
- is aware of who are the most potential **co-operation** partners - both in the forest sector and outside - when using forests to support societal development, and knows these potential partners in person
- feels a sense of **influence** on the forest sector's strategies to support societal development in the future
- has gained new **faith** in the forest sector and its future
- has gained new **motivation** for his work

Forest Academy Program

The Forest Academy communication **program** is based on arranging regular forums that utilise the Forest Academy communication concept for promoting the creation of social capital (networks, trust and mutual understanding) between the forest sector and rest of society.

Possibilities of individual Forest Academy forums to create societal demand for forest based products and services are limited. A more profound influence requires committed application of the Forest Academy concept. Through long-term application of Forest Academy program, the forest sector increases its ability to engage in effective cross-sectoral co-operation, and to influence decision-making in various societal issues of relevance to forests. It also enhances an image of the forest sector as increasingly open and future oriented.

In return, by receiving cross-sectoral inputs from other decision-makers, the forest sector develops its own foresight abilities and is able to design more successful future strategies.

For example, group work conducted during Forest Academy forums can be directed to produce important input for decision-making on selected strategic issues or policy processes. Forest Academy forums can be easily incorporated into the preparation of various policy strategies (e.g. National Forest Programs). Yet, as a communication tool, the forums may only provide input for decision-making, they do not themselves have any mandate on making decisions.

The contents of the forums are designed so that they enable application in varying national conditions, and are suitable for addressing different types of societal issues. Accordingly, the program can be applied by a variety of individual organisations, countries, or even international bodies wishing to strengthen their cross-sectoral influence as a long-term investment.

Forest Academy Product

The Forest Academy communication concept has been customised into an easily applicable format.

When an organisation wishes to enter into a contract on applying the Forest Academy communication programme, the client is provided with the rights and knowledge that enable successful application of the concept. This includes readiness for:

1. **marketing** the Forest Academy forums to the participants (e.g. logo rights, graphic instructions, marketing guidelines and marketing materials); and
2. **implementing** the Forest Academy forums (e.g. detailed manual for implementation, model documents, training of the project personnel).

According to needs, the client is offered advice on financing strategies, customising of the concept to meet the client's individual needs, translation of the product package from English to the client's language, and consulting services during planning and implementation of the forum.

The Forest Academy product is priced so that the majority of the costs for the client lie in arranging the forums, whereas the rights, materials and training of personnel form a smaller share of the costs of applying the communication programme.



References

The Forest Academy communication concept and programme is produced by the **Finnish Forest Association** (www.smy.fi/smy/SMYeng.nsf). It is a non-governmental, non-profit cooperation and communication body joining all major forest-related interests in Finland.

The Finnish Forest Association has applied the Forest Academy communication concept successfully in Finland already for 13 years. Now the concept is made available also for other countries and international organisations. Latvian forest sector was the first to purchase and implement the Forest Academy communication program.

Since 1996, the Finnish Forest Association has organised more than 20 forums for top-level decision-makers from the forest sector and rest of society, under the project **Forest Academy for Decision-Maker**. So far, more than 700 top-level societal decision-makers in Finland, most of them acting outside the forest sector, have participated the forums, thus increasing their knowledge, networking, trust and interest in the forest sector. Owing to its input in forest sector development, Forest Academy for Decision-Makers has received several valued acknowledgements from Finnish forest sector organizations.

Forest Academy Finland was a project aimed at supporting EU's commitment for sustainable forest management, and developing mutual exchange of views on forestry's role in socio-economic development. Under the project Finland invited groups of top-level representatives of the forest sectors of the then new and applicant countries of the EU to Finland for open brainstorming and exchanging information and experiences with major representatives of the Finnish forest sector, along with other European actors. During 2003-04 four forums of Forest Academy Finland were arranged, resulting in the identification of European challenges for forest sector development, ideas for increased networking and cooperation in forest communication in Europe, and an international network of contacts for the future.

Additional information

<http://www.smy.fi/pma/eng>

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“It’s too late to form a network when you need one.”

(Harry Mildh)