

Het lammetje dat de gastvrije Bedouïenen sjeik ter jouwe ere voor jouw ogen, slacht waar je even tevoren het schattige dochtertje van je gastheer nog mee hebt zien zitten spelen. Het ongerepte veen van Ierland dat na 10.000 jaar ongestoorde groei in luttele jaren tijd verdwijnt om de Keniaanse verkwistingeconomie te onderhouden. De massaliteit van de 'dood' in de moderne slachthuizen, om van de liquidatie van hele veestallen besmet vee maar te zwijgen. Toch smaakte dat lamsvlees mij wel goed en waardeer ik op zijn tijd

een mals gebraden karbonade. Als bosbouwstudent eind veertigerjaren slaagde ik er dan ook reeds enigszins in, mede gehard via wat rauwe oorlogservaring, eelt op mijn ziel te kweken en zo mijn meer romantische kennissen duidelijk te maken dat een prachtige oude Eik nu eenmaal kaprijf was en best geveld mocht worden. Maar van harte ging dat toch niet. Wat keek ik er toen van op toen we omstreeks 1948 op een officiële excursie in het Edese bos boswachter Staff (op dat moment reeds de vader van de toenmalige Minister van Oor-

log Staff), hoorde zeggen; ..."heren deze Beuken zijn nu (HELAAS..!) aan de beurt om gekapte worden; ... echt jongens... dat doet je wat als je ziet omvallen." Dat was voor mij als pril bosbouwertje een openbaring. Dat mocht je dus als ervaren bosman, ook toen al... vinden.

In de komende lezingen komt zowel het begrip 'NIMBY' (*not in my back yard*) als de 'slachthuis paradox' aan de orde. Dit heeft alles te maken met dit aspect van het gebruik van natuurlijke hulpbronnen.

Heiner Schanz, Wageningen University, Forest Policy and Forest Management Group

If timber production did not require cutting down trees... communicating timber management in society

Even a sketchy look at different forestry settings reveals that the societal appraisal of timber production differs markedly between different regions. It is obvious that in countries such as Sweden or Finland, with large areas of forested lands and with a forestry sector still contributing in a significant way to the national economy, timber production is still appraised by the society. But even in such regions the situation has significantly changed within the last decades. In the context of the highly industrialized and urbanized countries of Western Europe this development has resulted in the fact that the societal appraisal of timber production seems almost marginalized in relation to other forest uses, such as recreation and nature protection (see for example Nas 1998).


In regions with low appreciation of timber production, timber management is seemingly quite often associated with exploiting and destroying nature. The screaming chainsaw cutting into an old tree is probably the most prominent picture expressing such a perspective. This negative image holds true even in the light of an intensification in information campaigns and PR-activities in forestry in the last years. The only reasonable conclusion seems to be that the appraisal of timber management by society would probably be quite different if timber production at least did not require cutting down trees. However, as this remains in the sphere of wishful thinking it seems worthwhile taking a closer look what really affects the appraisal of timber production in society.

Importance of Communication

Powerful social changes, such as industrialization, urbanization, or increased job specialization, have led to an alienation from their land-basis for the majority of people in most Western and Central European societies. As a result, many people have hardly any direct perception of forestry (in the sense of activities taken place on forested land). And if people still do so, these experiences are limited to very special aspects, such as recreation or nature provision, or to "special" situations, such as leisure time or during holidays. Perception of timber production therefore happens almost exclusively in an indirect manner. Communication sciences distinguish three different ways of indirect perception.

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Societal appraisal of timber production is continuously changing and with it the adequateness of communication ...

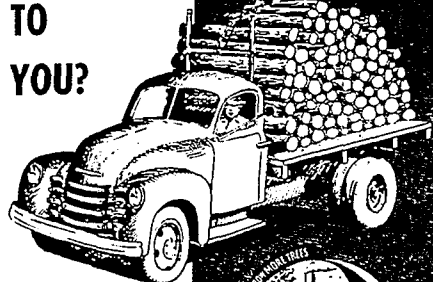
The first way is social interaction as the exchange of information and opinions in people's direct environments. The recipient of the message can directly react to it and express his or her possible contradictory viewpoints. The second way is the provision of information and opinions through mass media, with only very limited possibilities for the recipient to express contradictory viewpoints. Events such as meetings or presentations correspond to the third way. They take an intermediate position between the first two, as reactions to the perceptions are generally possible (see SUDA et al. 1998). Communication plays the central role in all three forms of indirect percep-

tion. Understandably, communication is therefore one of the key determinants for the appreciation of timber production in society.

In general communicative actions have to be interpreted as specific forms of social actions with which competent actors try to achieve certain purposes or attain special interests. In giving legitimacy to a certain practice – and societal appreciation or social acceptability of timber production can hardly be interpreted as anything else than this (BRUNSON 1996) – dialogue processes play a unique role, in as much as they are the only two-communication activities. Several forms of dialogue processes can be iden-

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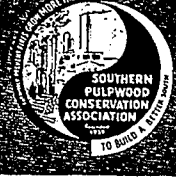
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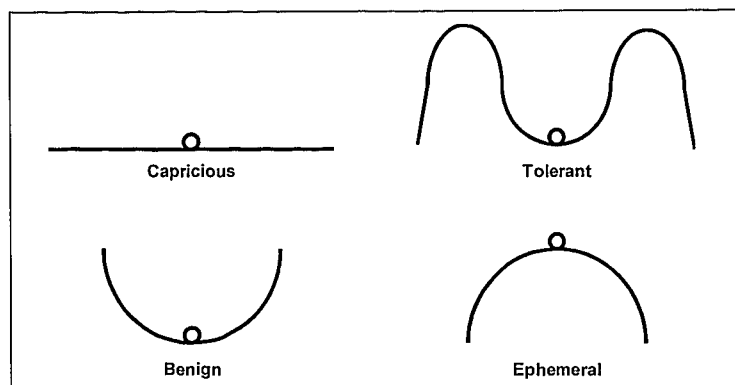
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... probably not even in densely forested countries these postus would be seen as adequate communication messages today.

tified: (1) Briefing/instructions; (2) Interactive advertising; (3) Argumentation aiming at consensus (even where probably only compromise is attainable); (4) Argumentation aiming at compromise (see ZERFASS 1996: 30ff). Briefings/instructions as well as interactive advertising tend to be pseudo-two-way communication processes, since dialogue contents are oriented at the information status of the recipient, but above all are shaped by the communication needs of the sender. In this sense only argumentation processes can be seen as real two-way communication structures, with dialogue contents mutually referring to one and the other and with a symmetric struc-



World-view based on four 'myths of nature': different interpretation of ecosystem stability graphically represented by a ball in a landscape (cf. Thompson and Schwarz 1990: 5). Think what is happening with the ball if you intervene (in nature) ...

ture between sender and recipient. If communication of timber management in society is aimed at giving legitimacy, therefore particularly argumentation processes have to be taken into account.

Challenges in communicating timber management in society

As has been shown with the understanding of sustainable forest management, differences in people's appraisal of forestry can be traced back to different levels of knowledge/information, different interests, and different world-views (SCHANZ 1996). It seems therefore reasonable to assume that this also holds for societal appreciation of timber production. However, as people are not forced to show a direct reaction to timber production - you do not have to think about forestry when using paper or a wooden desk - it seems necessary to add an additional point, namely different levels of avoidance strategies, which from an observer's perspective can be perceived as paradoxes.

Different levels of knowledge/information

All kinds of groups and organizations ranging from environmental groups to state agencies put a considerable amount of effort into informing the public about fores-

try issues, including timber production. If not solely aiming at manipulation, these efforts are based on the assumption that the different views and attitudes in society are at least partly the result of ignorance or lack of information. This view is supported by the fact that increasing specialization in industrialized societies has been accompanied by an increasing alienation in knowledge, particularly about the management of natural resources. The level and the quality of information about forests and forestry differ significantly as a function of people's physical proximity and personal references to forests. It is therefore only logical that in a highly urbanized country with a rather low forest cover a large number of people do not have detailed information about forests.

On the other hand it could be argued that, along with the alienation of the majority of people from their land basis, new and effective information services, e.g. television and the Internet, have resulted in a broader public awareness of topics, including timber production. Surveys indeed show that the public in industrialized countries gets its information about forests and forestry mainly from mass media (e.g. ELSASSER 1996). However,

the paradox of the information age lies in the antagonism between the universal requirement for publicity and limited attention span. This results in the fact that mass communication can only be realized by temporary ignorance of most information offered and a reliance on images rather than detailed information (MERTEN and WESTERBARKEY 1994: 199).

This explains on the one hand why certain associations concerning timber production become dominant in society, making it difficult to provide other information. But on the other hand it also indicates that, for some aspects related to timber production, there might be only limited personal and societal capacities for information processing. Reducing information to images might not be satisfying from a specialist's perspective and definitely bears the danger of manipulation. Nevertheless, in light of the many efforts aimed at informing the public about forestry but very often not producing the desired effects, it seems necessary to ask whether these communication activities are taking the limited information capacities of the recipients seriously enough into account. Timber certificates, for example, can be seen in this respect as informing the public, even though they might in most cases not be informative from an expert's perspective.

Different interests

Out of experience it is easy to comprehend that interests determine perceptions. Taking into account the huge variety of interests that people in urbanized countries have in forests, it becomes clear that the perception of the same forests can take place in quite different categories. People who fear for endangered species perceive a different forest than people who have the feeling that experiences such as quietness or beauty are endangered, not to mention people who are thinking about forests in categories of endangered products such as timber. Whereas for people interested in timber production the trees forming a forest play the central role in perception, the general public - in reversal of the old saying - obviously does not see the trees for the forest. Empirical results show that the majority of forest visitors do not notice nature indices or indicators for the existence or abandonment of timber production, such as form and dimension of the individual trees (SCHRAML 1999 and the empirical studies quoted therein).

The challenge for communicating about timber production in society is that these many different interests and perceptions are unavoidably leading to a huge variety of attitudes and statements about forests and thereby also about timber production. However, as long as different attitudes and statements are not the result of basic interests, such as the necessity to earn a family income, these different statements are open to discussion, where the exchange of pros and cons finally might lead to changes in position. An adequate communication strategy of timber production in relation to different interests in society therefore focuses

on argumentation processes. As the communication is about pros and cons these argumentation processes seem most likely to be successful if they are aiming at consensus, even if only compromises might be achievable.

Different world-views

Perceptual biases are closely related to worldviews. Many discussions on forestry reveal that, above and beyond the various interests of the various actors, there are different convictions as to how the world is. This is not to say that everything is fluid; however it is revealing that even though we all live in the same physical world we make completely different sense of it. Studies show that "facts" are not only used politically, but are also formed politically in the sense of a mutually reinforcing congruence between social relations and world-views (SCHWARZ and THOMPSON 1990). In principle there are as many different world-views thinkable as there are people. However, as these world-views are continuously contested against each other in the interactions with the social and physical environment, their number is limited to only a few, nevertheless at least partially contradictory ones. It is important to keep in mind that none of them can be disproved by the others, as all can be backed up with empirical findings.

Depending on their different world-views, people come to completely different conclusions even when in the same situation. The challenge for communicating timber production in society is that, due to their social determination these different world-views are always simultaneously present in society. Any successful communication strategy has therefore to take into account its effects in the light of the different

worldviews. As there is no right or wrong world-view, discussions can only be about the more or less adequate solutions that the different world-views offer for a specific situation. Choosing a communication strategy that aims at consensus about the effects of timber production on nature is therefore useless. As the different world-views will be "endlessly affirmed, endlessly acted upon, and endlessly pitted one against the others" (SCHWARZ and THOMPSON 1990: 61/62) the different world-views only allow for argumentation processes aiming at compromise.

Paradoxes

Another challenge when communicating timber production in society results from what has been described as the "slaughterhouse paradox" (PAULI et al. 1998, SUDA et al. 1998). Empirical studies continuously reveal that people have a positive image of forests as well as of wood. However, timber production as the necessary step in between is in the best case disliked. This seems to reflect the same pattern as in relation to meat production: most people like animals, and most people like to eat meat, but slaughtering is disliked by most of them.

Paradoxes in general are characterized by the simultaneous presence of contradictory, even mutually exclusive elements. Ignorance strategies are a classical reaction towards paradoxes, in order not to be forced to actively deal with the inherent contradiction in one's behavior. Not-in-my-backyard mentalities reflect such ignorance strategies quite well. Taking this reaction into account, many communication efforts have aimed at creating a positive image for timber production (or forestry in general) by

maximizing communication on the positive elements and leaving the paradox relation between them out. By doing so, however, prevailing avoidance strategies in society are strengthened.

Management theories recommend coping with paradoxes not by maximizing, but metamizing in the sense of bringing the contradictory elements in the form of *Thesis* and *Antithesis* together to a *Synthesis* (see BLEICHER 1994 and the literature cited therein). For communicating about timber production in society this could mean introducing discussions on other grounds (or levels) - not by pointing to the existing contradiction in public behavior, but by bringing the two contradictory elements in argumentation processes explicitly together and pointing to the synthesis. That metamizing can be an adequate communication strategy is backed up by empirical findings: response denial rates stayed the same when associations were asked for forestry in isolation and for forestry in a sequence of timber-forestry-forests, but negative associations in relation to forestry such as forest depletion or forest destruction dropped dramatically from 17% to 3% (SUDA et al. 1998; PAULI et al. 1998).

Conclusions

Communicating about timber management in society must be seen as a multi-layered challenge as all of the factors determining societal appraisal are always in effect at the same time. Communication which for example only focuses on information providing or taking different interests into account runs the risk of being irrelevant or even counter-productive when different world-views underlie the discussions. It might not be possible to optimize communication in all respects, as some of the factors influencing

societal appraisal require at least partially opposite communication activities. However, in order to increase the likelihood of success, the development of communication strategies should at least take into account the effects a certain activity might have on each of the main factors influencing the societal appraisal of timber production.

Communicating timber management in society must furthermore be seen as a continuous challenge. As a consequence of the reciprocal, interactive and mutual congruence between the factors influencing societal appraisal of forestry and dynamic social relations, the views on timber production (as well as forestry in general) are also continuously prone to change and with them automatically the appropriateness of the communication activities.

Last but not least it has to be pointed out that communication is always related to aspects of power exercises between different actors involved. Dialogue is only one of the possible forms of communication activities. Other communication forms, such as persuasion or manipulation might be even more effective in achieving a certain form of appraisal. However, beside their moral dubiousness, it should be noted that such activities might show only short-term effects and eventually turn into negative results, as soon as the power to influence discussions diminishes. It is credibility that counts in the long run, and real two-way communication processes provide an excellent basis for this.

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