

EDITORIAL

CROATIAN FORESTRY AT THE CROSSROADS

One of the many definitions of a forest states that: "A forest comprises forest soil coherently covered with forest trees, shrubs and ground vegetation, where wood matter is permanently produced and where non-market goods are expressed in the ecological (protective), social and socio-ecophysiological functions of a forest. A forest is characterized by harmony and mutual relationships between the living community or biocoenosis (plants, animals, microorganisms) and site (soil, climate, relief)". Therefore, when we talk about forests, we talk about air, water, climate, soil, landscape and plant and animal world. Forestry is a science, profession and art of managing this highly complex ecosystem to the benefit of mankind and nature. Croatian forestry is proud of its 250 years of tradition in managing forests according to the principle of sustainability, and of, until recently justly declared harmony of education, science, practice and even forest policies (competent ministry), united in the Croatian Forestry Association. The result of this unity is the exceptionally well preserved condition of Croatian forests.

In the past 10 years, however, with politics penetrating almost all the pores of forestry, expertise and scientific know-how has been increasingly neglected (to the point that the term "forestry" has been deleted from the name of the ministry!). Unity fostered for decades has been severely undermined. Here are just a few examples: there are differing opinions related to the construction of the Danube-Sava Canal, which seriously threatens the survival of the Spačva forests (and about which the competent bodies of the forestry operative remained silent); next, there is no agreement in connection with the introduction of the Natura 2000 protection concept, which comprises large forested areas, and the most productive continental stands in particular. For the second time, politics has decided to cut down on the means for OFKŠ (Non-Timber Forest Functions), despite the well known fact that these funds are invested into the sustenance of non-timber forest functions and forestry science. Hence, all economic subjects, who are also keen users of these functions, have the obligation to set aside the means for this purpose. The Croatian Forestry Society has discussed many topics of interest, including the worrying fact that the Forestry Strategy is still lacking. There has also been talk about the new Forest Law and about concessions on forests. Yet, professional debates which would provide guidelines to the solution of forestry problems and which would put a stop to speculation and even to justified fears for forests and forestry, are nowhere to be seen!

The fact that around 80% of the forests in terms of surface area (and almost 90% in terms of value) are state-owned and that they are managed by the company *Hrvatske Šume* Ltd, which employs about 8,000 people, including a large number of highly qualified forestry experts, justifies the interest of the profession in the policy of the new Management Board. Sadly, we still have the impression that all is shrouded in a veil of secrecy; we sometimes get a glimpse of things from an interview in the press, or else some "directives leak out". Profit is a "must" word – it is just that we are not sure that those in authority valorise profit in forestry adequately; in other words, we fear that they only value wood matter from the afore mentioned definition, naturally, respecting the management plan, and not making profit by not applying, e.g. silvicultural treatments, as has been the case recently, instead of taking into account all the other goods provided by a forest, which are far more important and valuable. We hear about surplus workforce, while at the same time "non-forest activities" will be put up for lease (does this mean that forestry workers are not capable of re-training and that private entrepreneurs have adequate specialist workforce in excess?!). A part of surplus employees would receive paid years of work, we assume, in order to "improve the structure of the employed in relation to the retired". There are engineers who are employed part time for as many as three consecutive years. Now, their contracts will be terminated despite the fact that their profile is needed in production, which is in stark collision with the proclaimed care for young experts. If it is true that in future, according to the "directives", dedication at work will be valorised with 65% and knowledge with 35%, then welcome to "Croatia – Land of Knowledge"! We have given here some food for thought; naturally, there are many more issues that need discussing, so it is only natural that we require and expect answers and solutions. Still, we have the impression that now politics is trying to save itself from itself by increased politicisation.

Finally, let us mention a slight "transformation" of our journal, which we have initiated with the goal of modernizing its visual profile and achieving its even better positioning among the current European and world scientific and specialist publications. We hope that the changes will be welcome and accepted. Naturally, we are open for further improvements. The Editorial Board of Forestry Journal wishes to retain firm contacts with its readers, especially in the hard times awaiting us all.

Editorial Board