

EDITORIAL

DO FORESTRY PRACTICES DISREGARD THE PRINCIPLES OF SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT

The Forestry Journal No. 7–8/2004 published an article by Academy member Dušan Klepac in the column Current Affairs. The article, entitled "Several ideas contributing to the code of close-to-nature forest management", summarized some basic postulates of close-to-nature forest management in ten sentences: In the first sentence the author says "*The forest is a renewable natural resource; it can only be regenerated if managed adequately, on condition that the forest ecosystem is not disturbed*", and in the second "*Adequate forest management is sustainable management, which maintains commercial, ecological and social forest functions*".

We point out on every occasion that 97 % of forests in our country are natural forests and that they belong to some of the best preserved forests in the world, owing primarily to the fact that Croatian forestry, unlike some other forestries, has never abandoned the principles of sustainable forest management. Are we on the verge of gradually renouncing these principles, after two and a half centuries, in the merciless race for questionable profit? The very first sentence of the mentioned article seeks for an answer to the following question: do we disturb the forest ecosystem if we only choose the cheapest contractors who are incompetent and poorly technically equipped and if we do not even check their qualifications for certain jobs? We still recall a short-lived and unsuccessful post-World War Two attempt concerning wood processors (buyers) performing cutting and wood assortment operations. This idea is currently being introduced in the forestry practice. Examples from the field testify that unprofessionalism and incompetence are already taking place and are spreading rapidly. "*Adequate management*" mentioned in the second sentence implies timely natural regeneration and tending with cleaning and thinning of forest stands (selection in selection forests). The belatedly applied silvicultural treatments in the mentioned stages, generally motivated by the desire to cut costs in order to increase profit, are the principal causes of unsuccessful regeneration of forest stands and an insufficient use of site productivity in particular. This is already happening: it remains to be seen how the situation will escalate when a tax on non-market forest functions is abolished.

Is the professionalism and competence of contractors scrutinized and by whom, and who is responsible for supervision and sanctioning? What are the professional capacities (with a few honourable exceptions), instruments and competences of the Ministry to carry out supervision, including the supervision of the company entrusted by the owner to manage forests, not in the way the Ministry wants but, let us believe, according to professional and scientific principles. Does the Ministry at least adhere to the basic principles of sustainable management, considering that there is no forestry strategy, which should, together with the Forest Law, serve as a guide for the survival of forests and development of forestry in the future.

In addition to the sentences cited above, as well as to other sentences dealing with the adherence to the principles of sustainable forest management, the ninth sentence is exceptionally important: "*The organisational form of forestry may range from centralised to decentralised one, but undoubtedly the most favourable organisational form is that which allows the use of all direct and indirect forest benefits in the same area and in the same organisational unit*". What is the organisational form of forestry today and does it provide for all the mentioned forest benefits? A strictly centralized form, in which every minor operation requires the approval of the centre, where managers have no competences (which hampers their inventiveness and use of the acquired forestry skills and experiences and taints their reputation in front of the employees and the local community), and district rangers and other engineers are increasingly spending time in offices instead of being in the forest where they belong as leaders of production, are certainly not the components of an optimal organisational form of forestry.

Finally, the question remains, with all the above serving as food for thought, whether anybody, or better said, who will support the progress of forestry (professional and technological) when a tax on non market forest function is abolished. After all, the tenth sentence of the articles states: "*There is no progress in forestry without science and culture*".

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