



The international forestry students meeting in Nancy, France, May 2007

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Abstract:

The students of ENGREF Nancy, members of the IFSA, organised an international meeting from 10th to 12th of May, 2007, gathering 26 student organisations from all over Europe. 120 people have had conferences and debates on concrete issues of the European forests, like competitiveness of the forestry field, wood energy, evolution of the forest's jobs, climate changes, forestry certification, hunting, governance, public sensitizing and student exchanges throughout Europe. This meeting has been an unique opportunity for all to have discussions on European issues, in a frame of exchanges and sharing of points of view. Of course, like every IFSA meeting, it was also a good opportunity to meet many people and friends, and to have a lot of fun!

Context: the European Forest Action Plan

The European forestry sector is made out of a big diversity, with various strengths and weaknesses.

The multi functionality is a very important point, but to meet economic, social and environmental demands on the sector is a challenge for the forest, and especially their managers.

This is why the European Commission recently adopted the EU Forest Action Plan. It emphasizes the needs for co-operation, co-ordination and communication between all actors of the forestry sector. The forestry education, despite of being the basis of tomorrow's management and policy takes only little place in these processes. Students of the French IFSA Local Committee thought that a meeting based on discussions and debates about the main points of the Forest Action Plan could be one first step towards their involvement in the implementation of this plan.



*A part of the organisation team:
Louis, Rémy, Sylvain, Nicolas and
Michaël | © M. Rivoire*

Enriching presentations, discussions and debates

Actually besides of the 80 French students of the French institute of forestry, agricultural, environmental engineering (ENGREF), which hosts IFSA France, students came from all over the European Union, but also from other countries. Germany, Hungary, Romania, Italy, Portugal, Denmark, Bulgaria, Croatia, Slovakia, Czech Republic, Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, Russia, Bosnia and Ghana were represented, as well of course as Brazil, by the IFSA president at that moment, Susan Seehusen.

The high number of European countries represented led to fulfilment of the first aim, which was to gather students from the EU to speak about the main themes of the Forest Action Plan. But the presence of our friends from outside the EU allowed interesting comparisons, discussions and even more enriching exchanges.

Introduction day

Of course Wednesday evening, when everybody arrived, was already the opportunity to exchange and to meet people. But the true meeting began on Thursday, May 10th, at the city town hall of Nancy with an introduction speech of Mr Roman-Amat, head of the forestry faculty in Nancy. He presented the university and the centre of Nancy, as well as the Forest Engineer Training (FIF), which is the main training in Nancy. Then it was the turn of Mr Rossinot, mayor of Nancy, to welcome all the students in his city and to explain how important the forestry sector is for the city and the whole region.



Introduction morning at the town hall of Nancy © M. Rivoire

Susan Seehusen, IFSA president at that time, and Sylvain Dupire, president of IFSA-France at that time (who meanwhile succeeded to Susan at the direction of IFSA) reminded of the purpose and the aims of the meeting, as well as the will of forestry students to exchange experiences and points of view, and to be involved in international processes.

After a short visit of the city (see below "The usual great atmosphere of IFSA meetings"), the event went on in the afternoon, still in the city town hall, with presentations made by students. Topics were the different forestry contexts and the different forestry education systems. This allowed everybody to have a better idea of the huge diversity existing in Europe in this field.

The discussions about nine themes of European relevance

From Friday morning to Saturday morning, 9 themes were discussed by groups of three simultaneous themes per half day, so that one student could attend 3 discussions during the whole meeting. In each discussion group, two to four scientists, university professors or professionals from the forestry field coming from several European countries made presentations, in order to give a basis for discussions. The themes were chosen in order to follow the axis of the Forest Action Plan. Let's have an overview of these debates and the main outputs.

Evolution of the forest's jobs

Moderators were Roland Kautz (Austrian), from the Austrian Federal Forests (Österreichische Bundesforste AG, ÖBf), Marc Ameels (Belgian), from the paper industry company Burgo and Siegfried Lewark (German), representing the International Union of Forest Research Organizations (IUFRO).

The discussions focused on the facts that on the one hand technicians become more and more specialised, and on the other hand academic foresters, engineers, have to be competent in more and more different disciplines.

This leads to recruitment of people who have got a non-forestry background, who use their knowledge in a specific domain of the forestry sector (logistics, informatics for instance). The advantage is the input of different ways of thinking in the forestry sector. But do these changes are done only for economical aims, or are they also profitable for environmental and social roles of forests?

Exchanges and students' mobility

This discussion was led by László Jager (Hungarian), from the university of West Hungary and Susan Seehusen (Brazilian), IFSA president.

The presentations and discussions stressed the fact that international exchanges are not only a benefit for the student, but that they also lead to innovations for the whole society.

IFSA was presented as an example of existing network. Moreover, Mike Bobik (Polish) and Renats Trubins (Estonian), both doing the international Master program "Euroforester" in the Swedish university of agricultural sciences in Umeå, presented this degree as an example for other kinds of exchanges and students' movements.

Competitiveness of the European forestry field

Mr Kautz from ÖBf and Mr Ameels from Burgo (see above) made presentations and led the debates of this discussion group.

Privatisation of public forest management organisations, improvement of the supply chain through research for technical solutions for a better access to forests, maintenance of the competitiveness of the material wood through research for new wood utilisation were the main aspects pointed out during this session. Since ownership does matter for the competitiveness, it has been discussed, and it appeared that the ownership structures are very diverse in the different countries represented.

Anticipation of the climate changes

The different aspects of this issue have been detailed by Michel De Galbert, from the Regional Forest Ownership Center (CRPF) from Rhône Alpes, László Jäger from the University of West Hungary, Manuel Nicolas and Myriam Legay, both French, working for the French National Agronomics Research Institute (INRA) in Champenoux.

The discussions about climate change have been trying to define the scientific arguments of the different theories of the CO₂ release's effects as well as the importance of the phenomenon.

The direct effects on vegetation have anyway been established (impacts on insects, sanitary problems on the forests, perturbation of vegetation cycles ...). The different ways to launch a global mobilisation have hence been discussed.

Hunting: role, evolution, countries' differences

The speakers taking part in this debate were Yves Lecocq (FACE: "Federation of Associations for Hunting & Conservation of the E.U."), Chavdar Zhelev (IFSA councillor, Organizer of the SERM 2006) and Boris Gospodinov,

(Vice President of the Bulgarian Forestry Engineers' Union, Director in chief of the Bulgarian magazine "Forest").

As far as hunting is concerned, what appeared very clearly was the diversity among European countries, above all from a cultural point of view. The main functions and values of the activity differ from one region to another (food supply, social event, sport...), the great range of geographic and landscape contexts were also mentioned. It's specifically because of this diversity that no specific European legislation exists for this issue. In the discussion group the Bulgarian example has been treated in detail.

The wood, a new energy source?

This theme was introduced by H elene Lundvist (Deputy co-ordinator of the IUFRO Education Group) and Victoria Varga (ex professor at the west Hungarian university).

Concerning wood energy the positive (renewability, CO2 stock, price, etc.) and negative (soil erosion, export of nutrients, etc.) aspects have been compared. The use of wood energy has been increasing significantly the last few years. In this context, the possibility of conflicts for land use has been discussed. This whole debate is actually a part of an even bigger one concerning the entire energy supply question, one of the main aspects of which is to sensitize the public.

Participative management: new data

G erard Buttoud (Director of the Laboratory of forest policy of the ENGREF) gave some information about the aspects of the evolution from government to governance in the forestry sector. The outcome of the discussion was that the new "bottom-up" management policies are really effective but the separation between actors and decision makers should be improved. The importance of transparency and links with the political spheres was also underscored.



Forestry certification

The discussions were led by Bernard Roman-Amat, director of the ENGREF center of Nancy and president of the regional forestry certification association of Lorraine (representing PEFC at the regional level) and Pasi Miettinen, from Finland, member of the Finnish FSC association in Helsinki.

The two greatest European certification systems, PEFC and FSC have been presented and confronted. The stress has been laid on the fact that, even if the labels are different, the advantages and the aims are the same. That's why a future recognition and even co-operation between the different certification labels appears to be a big step towards better communication and the improving of the whole system.

Sensitising the public to the forest issue

The speakers were Anne Marie Granet, France, Mission "Social functions of forest" French Forest Office (ONF), Dan Cadle and Joanne Thomson, Scotland, two Community and Environment Rangers from the Scottish Forestry Commission.

What appeared the most clearly during the debate was how the public suffered from a lack of information about the main forest issues. Their misunderstanding of most of the forest management practices leads too often to a negative view of the forest sector. Two different types of action have been presented. This was an opportunity to show on which different scales there can be acted to improve communication: local, national or even international.

The different ways of how the forestry students could try to have a local positive impact have been treated, and some students have showed their enthusiasm about this kind of projects.

Closing afternoon: conclusions and broadening presentations

On the Saturday afternoon, everybody met again in the city town hall of Nancy. Mr. Patrice Harou, former invited professor at the ENGREF, made a presentation about the Society of American Foresters (SAF). It seems that this effective network permits a very good collaboration among foresters from different states of the USA, despite of big differences in law and organization. So Pr. Harou discussed the possibility of implementing such a system in Europe, to strengthen the links between European foresters from different countries.

That afternoon was also the opportunity to learn about a total different context, through the presentation made by Eric Amoadu Boateng on investment opportunities in protected areas in Ghana. After the discussions about Europe, which were the central theme of this meeting, it was also good to keep the mind open and to stay aware that on other continents some issues are very different from the European ones. In order for everybody to have an idea of all topics discussed, and not only from the three each people could attend, the organisation committee made a short conclusion and summary of the three past half days.

Finally, Susan presented the IFSA and insisted on the number of possible activities through the association. Sylvain closed the official part of the meeting with a true president and leader speech.

The usual great atmosphere of IFSA meetings

Besides the hard work and concentration everyone had to perform during the discussion sessions, time has also been kept for meeting people and having fun. The first true opportunity was on Thursday morning, during the visit of Nancy. The little groups, walking around the streets and trying to solve an enigma prepared by French students of the FIF, "broke the ice". Very amused and apparently happy students arrived at the university canteen for lunch. The following evenings and nights were enlivened by two concerts given by students, a picnic in the « Forêt de Brin » (the forest of the ENGREF) and finally, of course, the traditional "International evening" where everybody brought something typical from his country, for eating and drinking. Good idea to put this event on the last evening ...

As usual, these events and free time moments were opportunities to have a lot of fun, make new friends and, which seems to be the most important, to learn a bit more about other people, countries and cultures. Everybody could profit from the diversity of the EU and its near and far neighbours! Just a little trick for next time: an "official" dinner was organized in town for all the invited professionals (scientists, professors, people working in the forestry field ...) while students were having picnic in the forest.

The organisers thought they would find it nice. But many of the professionals told the organisers that they would have preferred to go in the forest with the students. Sorry about that, ladies and gentlemen ... and good to know for coming events.



The outcome of the meeting

Not only were these few days in Nancy an amazing opportunity to meet people, to share experiences and to have a lot of fun together, but it was also a way for us to really get involved in nowadays most discussed European forestry issues. The conclusions of the debates, even if they not always brought solutions to the problems, at least gave the students a clear overview and even sometimes some practical ideas. One of the consequences of the discussions was the creation of a project on "youth sensitisation to the forest issues" by the French students of Nancy. We hope that other students will try to concretise what they heard in this meeting too, in one way or another, that's the big deal of IFSA.

We however still deplore the little interest the European commission put in our project, above all since we are the ones who are going to be working with all the new policies. But at least we showed the will of the forestry students to be part of the discussions and to be active in this European construction!

Acknowledgements

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Links

- To learn about the European Forest Action Plan:
http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/fore/action_plan/index_en.htm
- To read the very interesting point of view of our friend Adrian Valerius about this meeting:
<http://wladmeister.livejournal.com/11684.html>