

**Referáty – Discussion paper**

**BEST PRACTICES IN SLOVAK FORESTRY  
COMMUNICATION – CASE STUDY**

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The paper deals with question of forestry communication and explains what role communicative processes play in positive perception of forestry sector. Necessity of active communication, Communication Strategy and the most significant tools of communication are introduced in the study. The best practice examples of forestry communication with public in Slovakia are briefly mentioned. Forest related Environmental Education (Forest Pedagogics) is introduced as an example of effective way for informing the public about sustainable forest management and increasing awareness about importance of forests for environment and society. Slovak Forestry Days presented in the paper are the greatest event prepared by coalition of forestry institution for broad public in Slovakia. Model of management of communication process and main actors involved are introduced in the paper as a tool for strengthening effective and proactive forest inter-sectoral communication.

**Key words:** *Forestry Communication, Communication Strategy in Forestry, Forestry Perception, Forest Pedagogy, Forest Related Environmental Education*

Príspevok sa zaoberá otázkou lesníckej komunikácie a zdôvodňuje akú úlohu zohrávajú komunikačné procesy pri vytváraní pozitívneho vnímania lesníctva verejnosťou. V príspevku sú ďalej uvedené dôvody pre nevyhnutnosť aktívnej komunikácie, potreba vytvárania komunikačných stratégií a sú predstavené najvýznamnejšie komunikačné nástroje v lesníctve. Sú prezentované úspešné príklady projektov zameraných na komunikáciu s verejnosťou na Slovensku. Lesná pedagogika – lesnícky zameraná environmentálna výchova je v príspevku predstavená ako jedna z najefektívnejších spôsobov ako informovať verejnosť o trvalo udržateľnom lesnom hospodárstve a nástroj na zvyšovanie povedomia o dôležitosti a význame lesov pre spoločnosť. Jeden z najúspešnejších komunikačných projektov je celoslovenské podujatie Lesnícke dni, ktoré zabezpečuje pre širokú verejnosť partnerský tím lesníckych organizácií. V príspevku je predstavený aj model manažmentu lesníckej komunikácie vrátane jej hlavných aktérov,

ktorého aplikácia zabezpečí posilnenie efektívnej a proaktívnej medzisektorálnej komunikácie v lesníctve.

**Kľúčové slová:** lesnícka komunikácia, komunikačná stratégia v lesníctve, vnímanie lesníctva, lesná pedagogika, lesnícky zameraná environmentálna výchova

## 1. Introduction

Fragmentation of forest policy at the EU level and image problems of the forest industry has increased forest sector actors' interest for cooperation on and coordination of communication activities (JANSEN 2007). In addition to internal communication in the forest sector at the European level (formal and informal), the desired strengthening of communication with other sector and the public at large is perceived as difficult. That means there is a clear need for inter-sectoral policy approaches.

Efforts to coordinate forest policy at the European level have recently increased. Policy statements also reflect the increased attention for improving forest related communication:

- Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe (MCPFE), fourth conference 2003 (Resolution 1: points 5 & 7)
- United Nation Forum on Forests (UNFF) fourth session 2004 (Resolution 4/1: points 3 & 30)
- Council Resolution on a Forestry Strategy for the EU (Articles 2-f and 10)
- EU Forest Action Plan approved by European Commission in June 2006 states that: *coordination between policy areas in forest-related matters needs to be strengthened* (Key Action 14), *information exchange and communication needs to be improved* (Key Action 18) and that *encouragement of Environmental Education and Informing* (Key action 10).

The general aim of this paper is to increase understanding on what role communication plays for positive perception of forestry sector and what are main reasons why strengthening inter-sectoral communication in Slovak Forestry is important. Slovak Communication Strategy in Forestry Sector is briefly presented in the paper to point out vast range of communication tools and methods. The specific questions dealt with in this paper are:

- Who are the main actors that are important for communication?
- How should be communication process arranged to be effective, proactive and well planned? What is the best management of it?

To find the answers to these questions the Model of management of communication process and main actors involved are presented in the paper.

## 2. Theoretical background

GIDDENS (1993) defined communication itself as “the transmission of information from one individual or group to another. Communication is the necessary basis of all social interaction”. Communication as being a truly inter-active and double-sided (reciprocal) occurrence can best be understood as a process of social interaction between at least two people, which comprises both an action as well as a reaction (MERTEN

1999). Communication has social, expressive, informative and controlling function (ERLIEN 1999) and should be pro-active, systematic, well planned and measurable and based on true information. Professionals with necessary competencies and using the variety of communication tools and methods should provide it.

When analysing any communication process, it is important to know the sender, which channels are used to transmit which messages and why, and in which way the receiver reacts or not reacts. Therefore a lot of emphasis is placed on determining and analysing target group. Especially when studying organizations one can distinguish two main forms of communication: internal and external communication (see for example DERVILLE 2005 or WEHMEIER 2006). Internal communication usually takes place within the organization or group or network and external communication between the organization, group or network and the rest of society.

One field in communication science is Public Relations (PR). The aim of PR is systematic, long-term, and step-by-step building and maintaining good relationship with public to develop a good image and reputation. In PR, it is necessary to deliver important facts to important bodies by optimal way in optimal time and place to achieve better relationship (ŽÁRY 1995). PR is the management of communication between an organization and its publics (GRUNING 1992). It includes various styles of communication: one-way, dialogue with specific groups, although it can comprise long term activities like education.

### **3. Increased attention for communication and Public Relations campaign in Slovak Forestry**

In Slovakia, the *communication, promoting and informing about forestry* was included into forestry policy by National Forest Program of the Slovak Republic, which was approved in 2007.

Generally there are three main reasons for strengthening inter-sectoral communication in Slovak Forestry, which is understood as a challenge for Forest-related Sector.

#### ***3.1. It is necessary to present sustainable forest management (SFM)***

At present, the way foresters manage the forests, the way they harvest the timber, and the way they process it have become matters for public comment and debate. Yet forestry is one of the most environmentally friendly activities, offering lots of benefits for the public. The perfect work of foresters in forest stands is not enough, presenting and informing public plays a crucial role and is very important to achieve positive attitude. The aim is to develop a better understanding of *what* foresters do and *why* they do it and to create a feeling of trust. (Forest-based Industries Working Group on Communication, 2004).

A remarkable tendency mostly in Mid-European countries is increasing criticism for forestry because of its “environmental” impacts. In media, this is presented as conflict between “foresters, forestry” on one side and “science, ecology, scientists” on the other. In fact, this conflict and division is not natural. Forestry is under strong

social survey, the forestry treatments are good visible in the landscape. “Forest and forestry are like football – everybody understands it” (PODRÁZSKY 2006).

### ***3.2. Emphasis on multi-role of forests/new face of forestry***

Forest management has traditionally focused on the efficient production of timber. People interested in recreation and nature conservation have criticized this policy. The recognition of these other stakeholders has moved forest management from “single-use management” to “multi-use management”. Multiple-use management means integrating different types of forest use and different groups of stakeholders. This makes it important for the management system to communicate with important stakeholders and involve them in the management process (AASETRE 2003).

In Europe, multiple-use management and sustainable forest ecosystem management now are accepted and leading concepts. These new approaches recognize the importance of the socio-cultural and environmental values of forests, apart from the economic values (KONIJNENDIJK 2003).

### ***3.3. Public participation in forestry issues; knowledge gaps***

Communication is not just sending a message. The communication process starts with listening. If you listen to the stakeholders you find out about their demands and wishes.

Participation of public in decision-making processes regarding socio-cultural and economical aspects in the frame of regions and communities are an important part of modern society. Directional forest management not taking into account the interests and needs of public is over. Instead the mutual cooperation between main stakeholders is needed. The public is much more interested in emerging issues like climate change, protection of water, and using biomass as renewable raw material, bio fuels, etc. which means for forest sector a big challenge to presents benefits which SFM is related to.

The problem is that the relevant perception survey in regular intervals on forest issues is missing. We have just results of two surveys till now. The first was titled: “*Europeans and Their Forests. What Do Europeans Think About Forests and Sustainable Forest Management? A Review of Representative Public Opinion Surveys in Europe*” and the second is „*EUROPEANS AND WOOD What Do Europeans Think About Wood and its Uses? A Review of Consumer and Business Surveys in Europe*“ which were made by Ewald Rametsteiner (BOKU University Vienna, and IIASA, Laxenburg, Austria), Roland Oberwimmer (BOKU University Vienna), Ingwald Gschwandtl (Austrian Federal Ministry of Agriculture, Forestry, Environment and Water Management and Head of the UN-FAO/ECE Forest Communicators Network).

## **4. Development of Communication Strategy in Forestry Sector in Slovakia**

The first target-oriented PR projects occurred in Slovakia in 2002. Before that the forest sector had not considered PR to be an important part of Forestry policy. Media communication was used in a passive or reactive way, just in case foresters were asked

to be interviewed. Foresters were not interested in presenting or informing people about forest management. The individual projects that have been launched since 2002, deal mostly with Forest Related Environmental Education – Forest Pedagogics.

Institute for Training and Education Forestry and Water Management Staff (a part of National Forest Centre since 2006) has organized several training courses, seminars and workshops on communications, public relations and Forest Pedagogy to increase professional competences of foresters. Besides the education process, motivation for communication and involving of foresters into communication activities were also important.

In 2006 the representatives of the most important forestry organizations created the „Working group on coordination of communication strategy“. The professionals from the Ministry of Agriculture, National Forest Centre, State Forest Enterprise, State Forests of the High Tatra Mts. National Park, Forestry Faculty, forestry secondary schools, Slovak Forestry Chamber, Association of Forest Owners, municipal forests, etc. started to cooperate dealing with communication and PR. Public relations are well planned, organized and accomplished activities, so as a sophisticated strategy was needed. The first mutual PR Concept and “Communication Strategy in Forestry Sector” were developed by National Forest Centre and were approved by the partner organizations (MARUŠÁKOVÁ *et al.* 2006).

The concept became a base for common forestry strategy of communication with various target groups with active participation of forestry organizations. It focuses on pro-active dialog with the public to increase public acceptance and positive perception of forestry sector and a profession of forester by public. As an introduction there are theory, background and analyses defining the actual situation in forestry communication and a SWOT analysis followed by aims and objectives of the Communication Strategy. Depending on target groups, PR is a process divided to internal and external communication. The individual target groups and main stakeholders are briefly characterized.

The next part of the Communication Strategy lists and describes communication toolkits in detail. Besides the tools of internal communication (intranet, company magazines, etc.) the strategy focuses on external communication, media communication or press relations. The tips and rules for writing press releases, preparing news conference or press or television interview, speeches, media trips, images for media are mentioned there. Issue management (identification of all relevant issues and themes in future) and communication in critical situation are described here. Multimedia presentation on a CD or DVD, at web pages or forest portal is also a good tool to target mostly young generation. Publishing various types of printing materials such as annual reports, magazines, leaflets, brochures are a part of Corporate Publishing. In spite the fact big events are time-consuming and costly, you can reach your target groups quickly, and there are relatively many people in a small area. Big events are fairs, exhibitions, Open day, conferences, symposiums, meetings, workshops, etc. In Slovakia, we launched “National Forestry Days” in 2007 or the “Day of the Tree”, which are understood as big events.

As the forestry sector is managing the landscape, it has a good chance to provide various types of services for public, which we consider to be a convenient tool for informing and communication. Building “educational paths”, visiting centres, various facilities for recreation and tourism, providing guided tours for forest visitors belong to the most effective way of communication. The best practice examples of such activities in Slovakia are Open-Air Museum in Vydrovo valley, which has been built and managing by state enterprise Forests of the Slovak Republic. Mutual cooperation among various organizations makes it the most known forestry project aimed at the public.

## **5. Forest-Related Environmental Education and National Forestry Days**

Special attention is paid to Forest Relate Environmental Education – Forest Pedagogics (FP) in the concept. It is considered to be the best way of forming positive relationship to forest, informing about sustainable forestry. It is based on holistic approach, promotes the understanding of the concept of sustainable development through the example of sustainable forest management. FP is based on state of the art educational methods and approaches as well as on knowledge about forest ecosystems and experiences in forest management. The main principle is “learning by doing” or “learning about forest in forest” by means of experience learning, outdoor activities and games. Target groups of FP are children, youth, adults, seniors, and families with children and people with special needs as well. It provides the public with a possibility of active use of leisure time and it could be understood as a way of ecotourism. Approximately 200 foresters have attended the training course of Forest Pedagogy and have obtained the certification from the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic.

Slovak Forestry Days are the greatest event prepared by coalition of forestry institution for broad public in Slovakia. The National Forestry days 2008 were continued by the first Forestry days 2007. The aim of the project is to form positive attitude of broad public to forests and profession of forester. The project follows up the tradition of the month April as the Month of Forests where as this action starts symbolically from 22 April, which is Earth day. National Forest Centre (NFC) in cooperation with Ministry of Agriculture of Slovak Republic, state enterprise Forest of the Slovak Republic, State Forests of the Tatra Mts. National Park, Municipal Forests of Bratislava, and BIBIANA – International House of Art for Children responded the appeal of the 5<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Conference on Forest Protection in Europe and organized national events of European Forest Week 2008 as well.

## **6. Model of management of communication process and main actors involved**

As one of the purposes of this study is identify main actors involved in forest policy and communication, it was decided to introduce the Model of management of communication process (Fig. 1). At the same time it presents the main group of actors who are responsible for proactive and planned communication process. In the model the main tasks and mutual relations of the actors are introduced. Close cooperation between all actors is crucial.

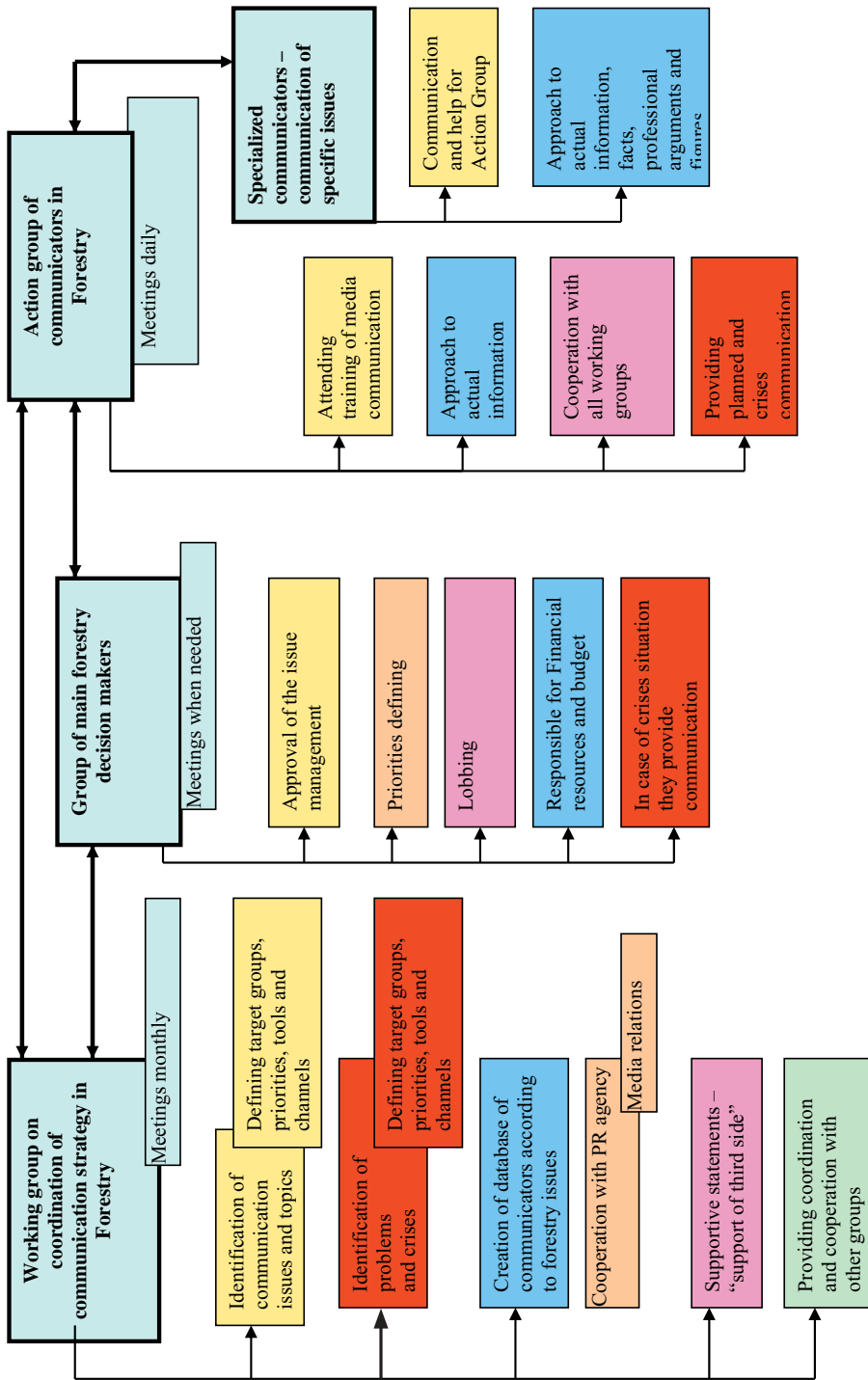


Fig. 1. Model of management of communication process and main actors involved.



Working group on coordination of communication strategy in Forestry is responsible for identification of communication important issues and topics. It takes part in international cooperation, mostly with Forest communicators Network (FSC), which was established by UN-ECE and FAO. It cooperates with Group of decision makers, which represents mostly general directors and representatives of important forest organizations. They are in close cooperation with international bodies related to forestry sector (MCPFE, FAO, UNECE, UNFF, UNCBD, IUFRO, CEPR, etc.) and are acquaintances with forest policy on European level. Besides lobbying, which tries to influence a policy-maker's decisions, also "support of third side" is important. Mostly for communication in crises positive statements or resolutions of any independent organization (university, forestry chamber, research institute, etc.), specialists or NGO's is useful. Action group of communicators in Forestry presents trained group of professionals, who are involved into practical communication process. Approach to all relevant and true information, facts, professional arguments and figures play a crucial role in communication process, which provides Action group of communicators and specialized communicators.

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