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**JOINT FAO/ECE/ILO COMMITTEE ON FOREST TECHNOLOGY, MANAGEMENT AND TRAINING**

Seminar on  
**AFFORESTATION IN THE CONTEXT OF SUSTAINABLE FOREST MANAGEMENT**

in conjunction with the 24<sup>th</sup> session of the Joint FAO/ECE/ILO Committee on  
Forest Technology, Management and Training

Ennis, Co. Clare, Ireland, 15-19 September 2002

**A Comparison of Central European and Irish Forestry Through the Eyes of an Austrian Forester**

Basic paper by Mr. Richard H. Ramsauer

**Summary**

In general, forestry practised in Central Europe is characterised by the following features:

- continuous forest cover since the glacial period;
- most forest lands have been under use for many generations;
- very little virgin forests;
- all trees are of local genetic origin;
- few species imported, with no real importance;
- tree mixture changed by time;
- forestry methods changed by time;
- lately less plantation of young trees – more reliance on natural regeneration;
- natural seeding methods contribute up to 50%;
- forests growing fast into poor farmland;
- movement towards original tree mixture;
- ownership structure stable for long time;
- many very small area forest owners, few big private owners and big state forests;

- biodiversity is working very well;
- several national parks founded in forest areas;
- multi-functionality working very well (economic, social, environmental);
- important source for industrial developments;
- multi-species situation creates source for many types of industries;
- important source for farm income;
- important source for recreation and tourism; and
- forestry creates a wide range of income from different land use.

From an Austrian forester's perspective, forestry in Ireland is characterised by the following:

- continuity interrupted by excessive wood use;
- forestry culture has been lost in the countryside;
- forestry mainly organised by the state;
- forestry is no real source for farmers (yet);
- no real privately-driven forestry;
- small range of wood industries, due to lack of species;
- original forest cover comprised mainly broadleaf species;
- reforestation programmes dominated by Sitka spruce;
- medium- and long-term results questionable; and
- phenotypes show obvious weakness (little stability, loss of needles, windfalls).

Some questions about Irish forestry include the following:

- where are the original species?;
- how shall Sitka spruce secure multi-functionality?;
- how can old forests with tree mixtures close to the original forest cover be achieved?;
- is there a balance between short- and long-term goals?;
- how real are all the official calculations and assumptions?; and
- what are the reasons and motivations for the FSC to certify elements of Irish forestry?

Irish forestry could learn a lot from the centuries of mistakes, modifications and models for sustainable and multi-functional forestry in Central Europe, and adopt best practice for implementation in the country. The domination of Sitka spruce within the afforestation programme may not be the answer for Ireland to achieve the type of multi-functional forestry stated under official policy.

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