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What the international dialogue on forests has changed in the role of production in promoting sustainable forest management (SFM)
Introduction Session

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Summary

Over the last 15 years, the international dialogue on forests has changed perceptions of the role of production in forestry development.

In the earlier conventional approach, production was clearly opposed to protection, with contradictory objectives and means. A first position, promoted by radical environmentalists, explained that protection should not take into consideration any change in the ecological structure, such as production can bring. Another strategy, promoted by the foresters, was trying to compromise as much as possible between production and protection. But in both cases, the two concepts were conceived as antagonistic.

The Bruntland report in 1987 introduced a major change by stating that the two concepts are basically complementary: sustainable development may only be the result of ecological, economic and social considerations. In this new conceptual frame, economic sustainability is considered as such, and production has become a positive part of SFM. Specific criteria and indicators, relating to the economic field and linked to production, are promoted in the certification schemes in order to

promote sustainability. Ecosystem management has progressively gained some positions in this regard.

As for the theory, one controversial issue remains the mechanisms for production to build multifunctionality, which is usually viewed as a condition for sustainability. On this matter, two conceptual positions are still confronted:

- a) A first one where the marketable value (usually assimilated to wood production) is one part of the “full value” of the forest, which may be not the essential value, but is the only part which may be objectively assessed;
- b) A second one, where the “wake effect” of the marketable (especially the wood) production on the procurement of other utilities is determinant.

To these two theoretical patterns, correspond different possible policies for promoting a sound use of wood, depending on the local situations. But one of the main limitations to such strategies is the widespread survival of positions which still oppose conservation and production, even among the producers.

A new concept of production promoting SFM has still to be built up in order to help policy decision makers.

Key words: forest policy, forest economics, wood production, wake effect, multifunctionality, sustainable management
