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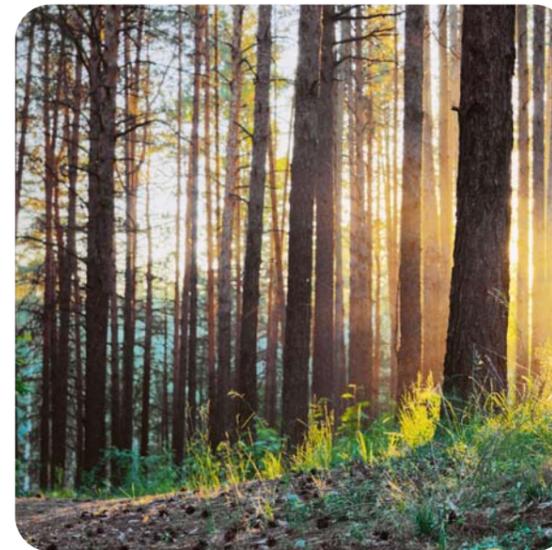
Project Description

Traditionally forestry has primarily been seen as an economic activity and most forests have been managed or established to supply wood and timber. However, the role of forestry as a provider of a wide range of other goods and services has become more pronounced during the past decade (FAO/ECE/ILO 1997). Some new jobs have been created and new skills have to be acquired, for example in the areas of recreation and of environmental education. This will be more apparent in the future as more and more of the decisions concerning planning and conservation will be left to the forest worker or the contractor.

The trend towards forestry becoming a service industry will remain. This will put new challenges to the forest companies with more emphasis on producing non-wood goods and services for the public (<http://www.unece.org/timber/docs/dp/dp-29.pdf>). This multidisciplinary approach of the sector could ensure the competitiveness of the new forest based activities.

In 2003, the Study: “Barriers to the Enhanced Use of Wood in Europe” revealed two principal concerns for the forest industries: the deficient technological development of the sector, and the lack of appropriate education, training and skills. The characteristics of the companies who works in the sector (most enterprises are small & medium enterprises (SMEs) or even micro firms, and consequently, most of them have low capacity for investment in R&D & education) make the future growth of the sector difficult. The study concluded that eight key skills should be promoted: technical knowledge, management skills and ICT skills (among others). For that, it proposed the collaboration among companies and education and training institutions for promoting a education and training strategy focused on the exchange of best practices, and the elaboration of training packages in the Framework of the lifelong learning concept.

Thus, promoted by ASEMFO and in collaboration with partners of six different countries, iForest project try to set a collaborative working environment that promotes the innovation of the forestry sector companies through the development of informal training materials.



Innovation Report Results

The overall objective of the project iForest is to produce an interactive learning tool to support innovation management and development in the forestry sector.

In order to detect the most important needs of the target group of the project - i.e. the entrepreneurs operating in the forestry sector - the second work package was directed at the investigation of the current characteristics of innovation management in the forestry sector, identifying the most relevant management-related issues. In order to achieve this result, the iForest partnership carried out a widespread analysis regarding the (innovation in the) forestry industry in the five countries involved in the project (Bulgaria, Germany, Greece, Slovenia and Spain) and the general European approach to innovation, with particular regards to the field of analysis. The present article briefly summarizes the main findings of the analysis, providing a short overview of the most impacting facets of innovation management in forestry in each of the countries involved in the project, in addition of a quick anticipation of the next steps the conglomerate will be engaged in for the realization of the project.

First of all, it must be noticed that the starting point of innovation management in the five countries involved in the project is quite different: the spread between an innovation leader like Germany and a catching-up country such as Bulgaria is relevant and naturally affects the needs and requirements of the forestry sector. The European Union is working hard to provide the continent with a solid financial and cultural base to promote and support the development of innovation: the recent publication of the "Innovation Union" flagship initiative under the umbrella of the Europe 2020 Strategy for growth and employment is only the latest step of a wider political and strategic approach which is supposed to make of the EU an innovation leader in the world. However, according to the 2010 "EU Industrial R&D Investment Scoreboard" of the European Commission, only 7 forestry companies appear in the top1000 innovation companies in the EU, the highest of whom occupies the 216th place.

The need for innovation of the sector is therefore crystal clear, but - as stated above - varies from country to country. Considering the five participating in the iForest project, the best placed is undoubtedly Germany. Here, forestry plays an important future role in the economy, with particular regards to the production of clean energy. The German forestry sector is therefore highly developed: actually, it employs more workers than the machine manufacturing industry and it counts on a well organized vocational education and training (VET) system, whilst the sector's education in innovation management is still rather underdeveloped since forestry is traditionally a commercial business. As a result, the iForest project in Germany shall be directed at the improvement of innovation as driver to enhance sustainable development and, more in general, to the promotion of a higher innovation culture in the sector.

Whilst Germany's focus will be on the strengthening of the characteristic of an already well-structured economic sector, Bulgaria, Greece, Slovenia and Spain set the stress on the economic recovery. As a matter of fact, all these countries have been strongly hit by the economic crisis, even though with quite some differences, resulting more affected than Germany. Consequently, the forestry sector's operators are mostly interested in the short-term issues, such as the survival on a constantly more competitive and complicated market. In this sense, innovation can play a major role: actually, most of the entrepreneurs who participated in the analysis carried out by the iForest's conglomerate recognize the importance of R&D and innovation to mark a step towards a new economic and business pattern. However, the appropriate definition of "innovation" is widely reckoned as either unknown or unclear, and the steps to set up a proper innovation plan are still blurred.

However, it is clear to everybody that innovation is the key to provide an exit strategy from the current economic crisis and to enhance sustainable and green growth. Nevertheless, innovation paths must be differentiated from country to country according to the specific conditions of the market and of the socio-economic base: for instance, whilst in Spain and Bulgaria the focal point is the recovery from the economic crisis to strive for a better future of the business, in Greece the focus should be put on the attention the public administration and the political system should devote to the forestry sector, while in Slovenia there is a clear need for the analysis of the indispensable pre-requisites to set up an innovation plan.

This is why, in conclusion, the iForest project has to come up with a flexible and concrete tool, able to match the above mentioned requirements and needs of the forestry sector. The characteristics and the content of the final product will be now developed by the project partners in accordance with the outcome of the analysis, whose final report has been made available on the official website of the project (www.iforest.eu).



Interview with Miguel Ángel Duralde, President of ASEMFO

"Innovation plays a primary role to face the current negative economic conjuncture"

1. In forestry, what does innovation mean? Do the companies of the sector clearly understand how to manage innovation processes?

Even though everybody talks about the importance of the innovation in any business sector, it's hard to provide a proper definition of the term "innovation". In particular, this is complicated in our sector, forestry. This lack of knowledge is reflected in the difficulty of developing innovation plans within the companies.

I am sure that some managers and entrepreneurs have realized small 'innovations' or changes within their own organizations without realizing so. This is particularly true if we consider the attempts to adapt to the current economic situation by looking for new fields of activities or by simplifying administrative or iterative time-consuming processes.

Undoubtedly, the entrepreneurs would benefit of a guidance tool in the process of development of an innovation plan helping them in the management activities and supporting the potential identification of new fields of interest and of further innovation opportunities. In turn, this process would produce a positive impact on the firm and on its employees.

2. Considering the current economic context, what is the role innovation can play in order to enhance the development of the forestry sector?

Spanish forestry companies, in particular sectoral SMEs, are suffering of a dramatic reduction in public tender, which is the most important source of contacts in the country. The consequence is that the entrepreneurs are focused on the struggle for survival in the short term.

Innovation plays a primary role to face the current negative economic conjuncture because it allows to generate more opportunities for growth and to reach new markets. Entrepreneurship spirit, promotion of new challenges of business management and constant evolution are the musts companies have to follow to ensure their own survival.

3. Which are the main innovation needs of the forestry companies?

Any kind of support to innovation generates a positive effect since the entrepreneurs reckon the importance of the introduction of innovation at all levels (human resources management,



project planning, budget control, etc.) for the future of their businesses. For instance, training and support are relevant for the analysis of the effectiveness of the innovation within the organization, or for the implementation of SWOT analysis, or for the development of innovation plan.

4. Can the project iForest support the forestry companies in the innovation management? If yes, how?

ASEMFO has presented the iForest project with the very intention of helping the associated firms and the other companies of the forestry sector to improve the management of innovation.

I hope this project can be useful to contextualize the concept of innovation and its processes, in addition to the realization of a quite developed practical tool helping the entrepreneur to design and implement an innovation process within his or her organization. ASEMFO's intention is to collect a detailed analysis of the different possibilities of innovation and improvement in order to obtain innovative solutions to face the current economic crisis and to define new medium- and long-term market strategies.

5. What do you think about the transnational focus of the project iForest? Is it important? And why?

It is important to have a look beyond borders, to know what other entrepreneurs and professionals do even in other fields, under different market conditions. It makes you discover that everybody faces similar challenges, and it also provides the opportunity of teamwork, with defined goals and schedules, among firms belonging to diverse market fields and sociocultural contexts.