

Newsletter

1/2010

Do carbon capture and storage affect consumer decisions?

How to increase the demand for wood in construction?

National Forest Programme after the economic crisis

Help for the further development of product and service concepts

Can wood compete on the construction market?

The environmental benefits of wood products are emphasised in the development of the wood products industry, although ecological values play only a minor role in the choices of construction companies and consumers. Indeed, to be able to make wood products which meet the needs of construction companies and consumers, it is important to know their preferences. The inclusion of environmental effects in construction guidelines and legislation would promote the use of wood as a construction material.

Do carbon capture and storage affect consumer decisions?

Studies show that wood as a construction material has indisputable climate benefits in comparison to other materials. The carbon captured and stored by wood products mitigates climate change and the production of wooden structures consumes less energy than for example the production of concrete structures.

“Unfortunately, ecological values are not something people want to pay for,” was the description of consumer attitudes given by Mr Jaakko Lämsiluoto, Head of Development and Planning of Metsäliitto at the Forest Sector Future Seminar in February 2010. Construction companies often regard ecological values as something expensive and extra.

Why, then, are sustainable development and carbon capture and storage emphasised in the wood product industry’s development programmes, when they are known to play only minor roles in the choices of construction companies and consumers? Or, are the programmes just ahead of their time: will carbon capture and storage and carbon emissions of construction materials move to a more prominent role in consumer decisions in the future?

It is also possible that the development programmes are overly optimistic in assessing the significance of carbon capture and storage for consumer decisions. So far, the programmes have merely encouraged positive discussion around the good carbon capture and storage properties of wooden structures.

However, the internal dialogue within the industry is not going to affect the choices of construction companies and consumers. It is possible to promote the use of wood only by first learning what the criteria by which

construction companies and consumers make their choices are and by then offering suitable products. For construction companies, price competitiveness is currently the number one priority. The criteria by which consumers make their choices can be found in their everyday life. If consumers are looking for cosiness, comfort, safety and user-friendliness; how can those needs be met?

How to increase the demand for wood in construction?

The seminar participants worked in small groups to find ways of increasing the use of wood in construction. The inclusion of environmental effects in construction guidelines would promote the use of wood as a construction material. Moreover, lobbyists should work to promote the inclusion of environmental values in the criteria for making construction decisions at the municipal, state, church and association levels. Legislators, on the other hand, should set increasingly strict environmental requirements for construction materials, as construction companies are known to change their material preferences only after an act or decree so demands.

Moreover, researchers are expected to produce synthesised knowledge about the environmental performance of different construction materials. Indeed, unbiased and reliable research data is needed when marketing and lobbying to promote the use of wood in construction.

Companies should pay attention to the product development and price competitiveness of wood construction, as price competitiveness continues to be more important than environmental performance when choosing construction materials. Companies within the wood products industry also need to be able to offer construction companies suitable wooden

components and interior design materials, which the companies can then present as alternatives to their customers.

The developer organisations should promote cooperation between small and medium-sized wood product companies and their better networking with construction companies. For large construction companies, consortia involving several small companies are often more desirable partners in cooperation than small companies alone.

National Forest Programme after the economic crisis

The Forest Foresight Unit concluded a survey for the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry on the effects the economic crisis and the changes of the forest sector had on the National Forest Programme and the survey also addressed the programme's development needs. The results of the survey will be used in the interim assessment of the National Forest Programme in spring 2010, as well as in the foresight review of the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry in autumn 2010.

The survey gives five recommendations to develop the National Forest Programme (NFP):

1. NFP should be more carefully targeted. The programme should define its clear strategic goals, e.g. strengthening of the forest sector's competitiveness, improvement of the profitability of forestry, and increasing of forest-based well-being. Furthermore, the programme should define its areas of focus on the basis of the strategic goals and then outline and allocate resources for the measures needed to achieve those goals.

2. NFP should be more flexible to adapt to the changes in the operating environment. Although the programme should be a long-term programme which aims at reaching the strategic goals, it should nevertheless be more flexible to adapt to changes when necessary. However, when making changes to the programme the coherence of forest policy should be ensured.

3. NFP should launch a think-tank to brainstorm, assess and suggest market-driven and other new operations models which are suitable for carrying out the measures of the programme. The new operations models are also a means of executing the programme even if state funding for forestry should decrease.

4. The commitment to the realisation of NFP of various ministries, companies and bodies outside the forest sector should be enhanced. The commitment of the different actors in the realisation of the programme should be described and identified in the programme documentation.

5. NFP should be strongly linked to international forest policy and to the EU's forest-related decision-making. The nationally important forest policy goals and measures should be promoted on various international policy forums.

Help for the further development of product and service concepts

The innovation workshops of the Forest Foresight Unit have shown that creative group work methods inspire the participants to create new service and product concepts. The problem, however, is how to further develop ideas which are still in their very infancy. Micro, small and medium-sized companies in particular have difficulties in finding the resources and expertise needed in the further development of ideas.

The 'Product Gateway Service' (Tuoteväyläpalvelu) of the Foundation for Finnish Inventions is a way for experts to work in cooperation with product developers to find new solutions for further developing a product or service. Anyone with an idea for a product or service can have it assessed. To support the evaluation of the product's commercialisation possibilities, the local Product Gateway team can carry out additional surveys concerning for example the novelty of the idea or invention, its technological aspects or prospective markets. The use of the Product Gateway Service is free of charge.

Forest Foresight Unit's Newsletter

Publisher:
Forest Foresight Unit
University of Eastern Finland
P.O.Box 111
FI-80101 Joensuu

Editor: Saija Miina
saija.miina@uef.fi

Forest Foresight Unit in Internet:
<http://www.metsaennakointi.fi>

The Forest Foresight Unit Newsletter is sent to all Newsletter subscribers. If you wish to join or leave the mailing list, please send an email to saija.miina@uef.fi.



UNIVERSITY
OF EASTERN
FINLAND



REGIONAL COUNCIL OF
North Karelia



European Union
European Social Fund

JOENSUU SCIENCE PARK



Leverage from
the EU
2007-2013

