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Struggling with a Ghost

**How forestry is fighting the
image of its industrial sector**

Michael Suda & Bernhard Goodwin

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Outline

- Theoretical background
- Media image of the forestry sector
 - Perception by the public
 - Perception inside the forestry sector
- Presumed effects of this image
- Reactions to the presumed effect
- Summary and suggestions





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Theoretical Background

What does communication
science tell us about the
effects of mass-media?

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Theoretical Background

Effects of the mass-media on attitudes and behaviour couldn't be satisfactorily shown.

- Media effects are only expected:
 - When there is a **lot of media-coverage** about a topic
 - When this coverage is **consonant**
- The media have an **agenda-setting effect**:
 - The media don't tell us how to think about certain topics but what topics to think about.
- In a **pluralistic media system** the consumer can choose whom to listen to:
 - Consumers choose media with which they agree.



Theoretical Background

Effects of the presumed media effects:

- Most people think that media have a huge effect on peoples attitudes and behaviour.
- They **overestimate media effects** on other people.
- They **react to the media effects they assume** for other people.
- *Example:* A mother switches off her child's TV-set because of violent content.





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Media Coverage of Forestry

What picture do the media show
in respect to forests and forestry?

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Media Coverage of Forestry

Serious damage caused by bark-beetle

Ansbach – A very serious bark beetle plague in the southern and western parts of central Franconia has cut great holes in the forests of the region. In the past weeks hundreds of hectares of forest have been cut down to bring the plague under control; according to the Forestry Association, the cutover in the forest office of Ansbach alone will amount to as much as 2500 hectares in the end. In future the clearings will therefore be planted with mixed forest. *dpa*

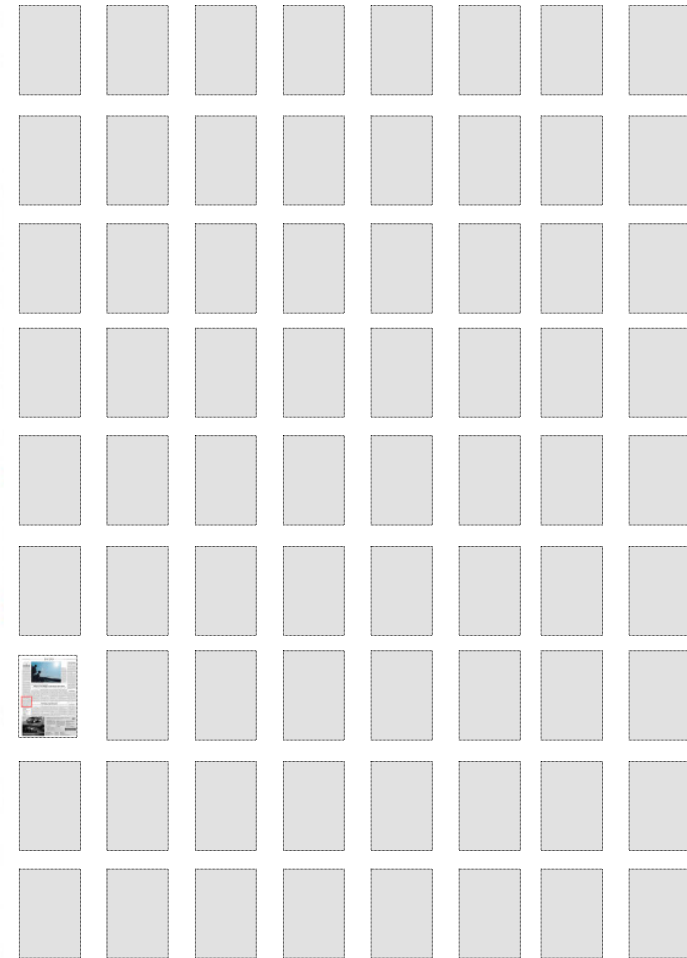
Borkenkäfer richtet schweren Schaden an

Ansbach – Die schwere Borkenkäferplage im südlichen und westlichen Mittelfranken hat große Lücken in die Wälder der Region gerissen. Zur Eindämmung der Plage seien in den vergangenen Wochen Hunderte Hektar Wald eingeschlagen worden; bis zum Abschluss der Arbeiten dürften sich die Kahlfelder allein im Forstamt Ansbach auf bis zu 2500 Hektar summieren, teilte die Forstwirtschaftliche Vereinigung mit. Inzwischen sei davon auszugehen, dass der Höhepunkt der Plage überschritten ist. Die Kahlfelder sollen daher künftig mit einem Mischwald bepflanzt werden. *dpa*



Media Coverage of Forestry

- The smallest article on the page
 - 2% of the page
 - 4% of the text
- On page 49
- First page of the part about Bavaria
- **Whoever reads this article will read hundreds of others.**



Media Coverage of Forestry

How much media coverage is there?

- Example: “Süddeutsche Zeitung” – top quality, liberal newspaper published in Munich
- 826 articles on forests in 5 years
 - This means approx. 165 articles/year
 - SZ publishes a total of 90,000 articles/year
- 0.2 % of the articles is about forests





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Media Image of Forestry

What image does forestry have
from the public's point of view and
for the forestry sector itself?

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Media Image of the Forestry Sector

- Perception by the public
 - Image of forestry
 - Differences between personal perception and media image
- Perception inside the forestry sector
 - Presumed public media image
 - Communication of the media image



Perception by the Public

- *Metaphor*: a person in a full house by day
 - Hears a lot of noise
 - Picks out the loudest or most exceptional sounds
 - Doesn't notice most of the sounds
- Image of forestry
 - Is only produced when asked about
 - Is different in real-life and media context



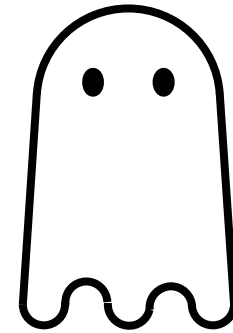
Perception by the Public

- Differences between personal perception and media image:
 - Personal experience: 5% of the respondents reproduce concerns about the state of forests.
sample: 607 persons interviewed after a forest-visit in Bavaria
 - Media experience: 88% of the respondents reproduce negative media coverage about the state of forests.
sample: 1017 persons interviewed via telephone;
- **No connection between personal perception and media image.**



Perception inside the Forestry Sector

- *Metaphor*: a person in an empty house by night
 - Can't interpret the different sounds correctly
 - Overestimates the sources
 - Reckons there is a ghost
- Presumed public's image of forestry
 - Is thought to be totally different from own view
 - Is thought to be negative
 - Reason: negative media image
 - Trauma: *Waldsterben* – resulting from media coverage 25 years ago



Perception inside the Forestry Sector

- The media coverage of forestry is communicated via additional channels
 - Acquaintances, friends and relatives
 - Colleagues and superiors
 - Press reviews
- **These channels only work because the recipients are inside the forestry sector, they don't work for the public.**





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Presumed Effects

How does the forestry sector
believe that the public react
to its image of forestry?

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Presumed Effects of this Image

Problems for the forestry sector:

- Bad media image of the state of forests is transferred to a bad image of **forestry**.
- The resulting bad image of forestry leads to **less influence** in society.



Presumed Effects of this Image

Problems for forestry's product:

- Bad media image of the state of forests is transferred to the **product** (timber).
- The resulting bad image of timber leads to **less revenue** for forestry.



Presumed Effects of this Image

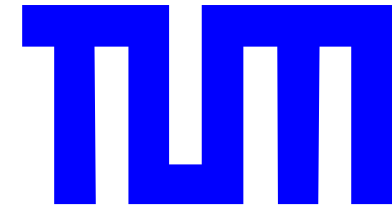
Problems for forestry's communication:

- Bad media image is resulting in **less credibility** for the forestry-sector.
- This leads to **less influence** on the media image in the future.





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Reactions to the Presumed Effects

How does the forestry sector react
to its perception
of its own public image?

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Reactions to the presumed effect

- *Metaphor: Whistling ghostly sounds away*
- Reason for activities by the forestry sector
 - Adjust media construct
 - Transport own attitudes beliefs into the media
- Result: **Resources for education and public-relation campaigns**



Reactions to the presumed effect

Why do these activities fail?

- *Metaphor*: The ghost doesn't really go away because someone is whistling. It returns as soon as it is quiet again.
- Usually a **positive picture** about the state of forests is drawn. But: Bad news is good news.
- The image forestry wants to have is a too **complex picture**.
- The media would **fail to change the attitudes** of the public anyway.





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Summary & Suggestions

What should the forestry
sector do in respect to their
image and the media?

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Summary

Misconceptions of media-effects:

- 1. Skewed perception** of the trigger:
The coverage of forestry in the mass-media is overestimated.
- 2. Wrong assumption** of the mechanism:
A stimulus response model is applied.
- 3. Incorrect ideas** of the wider effects:
It is thought that more favourable attitudes would lead to better conditions for forestry.



Suggestions


- Correction of several mistakes:
 - Forest's media image doesn't lead to a bad image of forestry or timber.
 - The minor influence of forestry in society doesn't come from the media image.
 - Education and public-relations campaigns don't work in the intended way.
- What to do?
 - Education and public-relations campaigns should not be stopped. But expectations towards their outcome should be lowered.
 - It should be accepted that forestry doesn't have a lot of influence on mass-media and the general society.



How to Live in a Haunted House

- *Metaphor:* When a person hears all the night time sounds, it is comforting to know, that there are no ghosts. It might be good to whistle, though, just because it is a nice sound to hear.
- You cannot control communication, you can only modify it.





Thank you very much
for your attention!

