

Struggling with a Ghost

How forestry is fighting the image of its industrial sector

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Background

Forests do not appear in the media very often. When they do, they are often connected to destruction and threat. This picture of the situation of forests is repeated in the associations people have when asked what coverage about forests they do remember: It is a “*chainsaw-massacre*”. On the other hand their personal perception of forests is quite different: They don’t see any damage to forests and if they are exposed to forest-work they perceive it as maintenance-work. There is a huge difference between the personal picture people have about forests and the indirect picture they perceive through the media. But how does the forestry-sector react to the media’s construction of forests and forestry?

The anticipated effect of the media construct

For the forestry-sector timber is the main source of revenue. The important actors in forestry share the deep core belief, that timber production (economy) is the basis for ecological and pro-social behaviour. They think that in producing timber forestry satisfies the justifiable requirements of the society. Actors in the forestry sector believe that the media construct has negative effects. It is perceived as a threat to the status of forestry in society. There is the implicit assumption that a negative image of the state of forests in general leads to a negative image of the forestry-sector. Environmental organizations gain power and narrow the freedom of the economic branch forestry. These groups even could challenge the very existence of timber production. Some also assume that the bad image of the state of forests can be transferred to the image of the product. The separation of production facility (forest) and product (timber) in people’s minds is seen as a disadvantage.

Activities against the assumed effects

To counteract the assumed disadvantages there are various activities by forestry-actors. They want to adjust the media construct of forests and transport their own deep core beliefs (the utmost significance of timber production). Therefore forestry puts a lot of resources into education, public relations and marketing campaigns. These activities are designed to alter the negative image of the state of forests and define a positive role of forestry in it. This different picture doesn’t reach the population, because thinking of forests has little relevance for the public. The first-hand experience of forests and the media construct are separated effectively in people’s minds. Altering the latter to affect the former isn’t working and therefore it is indeed like struggling with a ghost.