

8 April, 2004

Forest-based Industries
Working Group on Communications

Communications Strategy for Forest-based Industries in the EU

Background information

Forest-based industries (FBI)

Forest-based industries consist of the wood products industry (sawn wood, wooden panels, plywood, wooden boards, joinery industry, house-building and wooden furniture), pulp, paper and paperboard industries, and the printing industry. The forestry sector is an essential part of the forest-based industries.

The total production value of €505 billion makes the forest based industries one of the most important industry sectors in Europe covering about 10% of the total production value.

Forestry and forest-based industries have gained importance in the EU in particular since Austria, Finland and Sweden joined in 1995. It's estimated that the FBI sector and related industries in the EU (15 member countries) employ about five million people.

The forest cluster's place within the EU's industrial and forest strategies was acknowledged when the European Commission issued a communication in 1999 on the competitiveness of the European Union's forest-based industries. In the report one obstacle to competitiveness was the lack of positive image and difficulties to attract young people to make a career in these industries.

Organisations

There are a large number of industrial organisations representing the forestry and forest-based industries in Brussels. Furthermore each EU country has national organisations for different industry sectors. All these organisations put their emphasis on different issues. But they have one in common: all the industries face the same image problem.

The communications strategy should therefore be built on the approval of common goals, messages, target groups and methods.

The communication strategy and related projects linked to it will be co-ordinated at EU-level. National organisations will, however, support and promote the activities envisaged by the FBI Working Group on Communications, as well as validate and implement actions nationally.

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Introduction

The European Commission's Directorate-General for Enterprise was commissioned by the pulp and paper industry to carry out a **survey** on how the forestry and forest-based industries are perceived by citizens in the 15 member states of the European Union.

The results of the study indicate a major **lack of knowledge** amongst the general public, in particular young people, on the FBI sector.

With regard to the **environment**, the findings show that the public is not sufficiently aware of the important measures and efforts that have been taken by the forestry and forest-based sector to improve their environmental performance. Information measures should therefore be continued and consolidated.

Some forest-based sectors (particularly the pulp and paper and the printing industries) are strongly associated with *pollution*; there is no general awareness or acknowledgement of the efforts being made to improve.

The European citizen, still strongly believing in the myth of the original, natural forest, often has serious doubts about the reality of *sound and sustainable forest management*.

The topic of *recycling* is more familiar, but the actual recycling rates achieved are sometimes underestimated.

As far as **modern technology** is concerned, Europeans tend to assume that the sectors covered by the study have adopted higher-performance production methods and equipment, but do not associate them with advanced technology. Only sectors which have fully integrated information and communications technologies in their activities (printing) or in which design plays an important role (furniture and packaging) have the reputation of being modern and innovative.

With regard to **employment**, the forest-based industries are rarely seen as major contributors to job creation or, indeed, to the national economy. The various sectors' ability to attract employees is rather weak.

These findings have prompted the main organisations of forest-based industries, together with the European Commission, to develop a common communications strategy, which could be implemented by the forestry and FBI sectors and by member countries.

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Vision

In 2010 the forest-based industries are considered as an attractive employer and the level of know how of the industries has grown. The negative perceptions especially among young people have decreased substantially.

Objectives

The main goal of the communications strategy is to make the forest-based industries more attractive, by:

- Raising public awareness on the forestry and FBI sectors
- Pointing out these industries' economic importance
- Creating transparency
- Creating identification with its products
- Creating trust in the efficiency of the forestry and FBI sectors

Key messages

1. The forest-based industries are of **economic importance**

- The FBIs are important for the economy, in terms of employment and wealth generation with an important contribution to GDP
- It is a major contributor to the sustainability and the economy of rural areas (esp. forest management and wood products industry)
- Wood and wood-based products are essential for everyday life
- Investment in the forestry and FBI sectors is profitable

2. The forest-based industries are **sustainable**

- Forestry and FBI sectors are sustainable and committed to environmental improvement
- Wood and paper are renewable, recyclable materials, and produced by a responsible industry
- The FBIs have a unique sustainability potential and are committed to sustainable forest management
- The use of wood and fibre saves resources via effective packaging and substitution of non-renewable materials
- The FBIs play a major role in the climate change challenge as wood and paper products and sustainably managed forests can be considered as "carbon sinks"

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3. The Forest-based industries **are innovative and offer potential**

- Wood and paper are hi-tech products for the future
- The FBIs are global, innovative and hi-tech
- The FBIs continually improve performance
- The FBIs offer interesting jobs and careers for young people

Target groups

The target groups included decision-makers in business and policy, journalists and young people and teachers.

After carrying out a mapping among the forest-based industries national members, the conclusions showed that most of the work done was aimed at decision-makers and journalists. The biggest gap overall was a lack in communication towards young people and teachers.

Therefore, in order to not duplicate work that is sufficiently covered at national level, this strategy mainly targets young people and teachers.

Approach

The FBI Working Group on Communications will act as an initiator and co-ordinator of the overall strategy. Its work should, however, be validated, supported and implemented at national level. The forest-based industries national members are requested to endorse this strategy and to be actively involved in its implementation.

The FBI Working Group on Communications will report on the progress in implementing the strategy to its national members.

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ACTIVITY PLAN 2004

Youth-related projects and websites

In 2003 the working group gathered existing youth-related FBI projects which have proved to be successful in various countries and printed them in a brochure.

More projects need to be gathered and descriptions will be published on the following website.

www.f-bi.org

Websites also for e.g. exchanging views and professional experiences should be established. It would be a good information platform as well as a part of an international network.

Labels

A European FBI label/stamp will be awarded to high quality youth related projects, events, exhibitions, fairs, seminars, materials etc. The aim of the label is to give added value to all activities which fulfil certain conditions and criteria set by the FBI Working Group on Communications. Applications for getting the permission to use the label will be sent to the Working Group.

The projects and activities are mainly carried out by national associations but co-ordinated at European level.

The label is:

"Wood & Paper – Opportunities for Generations"

And the derivations are:

"Wood & Forests – Opportunities for Generations"

"Paper - Opportunities for Generations"

"Printing - Opportunities for Generations"



Brochure/Leaflet

A small and simple leaflet was published to outline the aims and work of the FBI Working Group on Communications in order to commit all possible organisations and national associations to the communications initiative.

Decentralised seminars

The FBI Working Group on communication suggests decentralised action in the form of seminars; organised in collaboration with the Euro Info Centres (EIC). These seminars are aimed at young people and/or small and medium sized entrepreneurs to whom business people in the sector will talk about their experiences of "good practices" in communication, education and innovation.

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Events

Important global events will be used as a forum for exchanging views and introducing European youth-related projects.

Project co-ordinator

A temporary full-time project co-ordinator started implementing the communications plan in February 2004 and the whole project is now up and running.

The work involved

- making the leaflet
- selling the idea to the national associations and members of working group members
- collecting examples of youth-related projects
- uploads on the websites
- making the label visible and well-known
- overall co-ordination work

Resources

1. Human resources

- Temporary project co-ordinator
- Branch organisations
- Forest- Based Industries Working Group on Communications
- Commission
- National organisations

2. Financial resources

- Branch organisations
- National organisations

Feed-back and evaluation

All labelled national projects will be evaluated annually by sending a form to be completed.

The driving force for future activities is feedback from national organisations and project co-ordinators in different countries.

A new survey should be carried out before 2010 about the perceptions of the citizens in the member states of the European Union.

Indicators

- number of best youth-related projects
- number of people reached by various projects
- participation in meetings and events