International Union of Forest Research Organizations
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IUFRO SPOTLIGHT

***IUFRO Spotlight*** *is an initiative of the International Union of Forest Research Organizations. Its aim is to introduce, in a timely fashion, significant findings in forest research from IUFRO officeholders and member organizations to a worldwide network of decision makers, policy makers and researchers. IUFRO will encapsulate, and distribute in plain language, brief, topical and policy-relevant highlights of those findings, along with information on where/how to access the full documents.*

*Occasionally,* ***IUFRO Spotlight*** *also presents special activities such as sessions at major IUFRO congresses or the work of the IUFRO Task Forces. These focus on emerging key issues that contribute to international processes and activities and are of great interest to policy makers and to groups inside and outside the forest sector. With those criteria in mind,* ***the Spotlights for the next several months will highlight the undertakings and goals of the IUFRO Task Forces****. The* ***IUFRO Spotlights*** *will be distributed in a periodic series of emails as well as blog postings.*

*IUFRO Spotlight #81 / September 2020*

# Developing evidence-based cases for planted forests

Plantation forests get a bad rap.

That's the assessment of Christophe Orazio, who is coordinator of the IUFRO Task Force (TF) on Resilient Planted Forests and, after having led the Planted Forests Facility of the European Forest Institute (EFI-PFF) until its closure in 2019, is now director of the European Institute for Cultivated Forest (IEFC).

*Polycyclic mixed plantation, 5 years old, in Veneto (Italy). Photo by Paolo Mori*

"Planted forests, with about 7% of the world's forested area, produce more than 30% of global timber, serving society by providing raw material – wood, paper, resin, energy – for the bioeconomy. Plantations also are used for restoration and protection purposes – protecting soils from wind erosion, producing non-wood products and acting as an intermediate step for natural forest restoration," he says.

But owners and operators of these "green businesses", Mr. Orazio says, are often criticized by the public for the size of a clear-cut, and-or the ecological impacts of monoculture forest plantations including the negative impacts on genetic diversity, among other things.

"The negative reputation," he says, "comes from two main reference points not uncommon in the public mind. One is an idealistic image of untouched primary forest – that actually exists only on a very small scale, even in the tropical Amazon region or in the northern boreal forest. The other is large-scale intensive agriculture.

"What we call intensive forest management is far removed from intensive agriculture." In fact, he adds, chemical use in the forest is so low compared to agricultural crops that if planted forests were considered farmlands, most of them would be granted the 'organic' label.

*Photo by IEFC*

That is what makes initiatives such as his TF important. "With the IUFRO TF and with the IEFC network, we can analyze the science, pull out relevant facts and make them available to stakeholder organizations and other interested groups and add evidence-based support to discussions on the issue.

"Dialogue is the key – for both sides – to improve producer practices and to explain to the broader society how much it benefits from planted forests," Mr. Orazio says.

His TF – one of nine currently operating under the IUFRO umbrella – is entitled: ***Resilient Planted Forests Serving Society and Bioeconomy.***

It explores the implications for the sustainability – including resilience, biological diversity and economic viability – of planted forests in the context of changing climate, the increasing demand for forest products from a growing global population and the emerging markets of the bioeconomy.

The TF is using a three-pronged approach to present science-based evidence to support the role of planted forests in serving societies by:

- providing science-based evidence to demonstrate how planted forests can serve societies through multiple ecosystem services and social benefits;
- demonstrating how planted forests can contribute to the bioeconomy and a future carbon-neutral society; and
- exchanging best management practices for forests and their genetic resources to improve the resilience of rural landscapes through planted forests.

Acknowledging that in different areas of the world there are different types of forests with different stressors and different management challenges, Mr. Orazio says: "When the landscape structure, the history of the region, the presence of natural forests and-or the speed of growth rates of trees varies so much because of differing climates and socio-economic conditions, it's challenging – and probably unrealistic – to produce globally uniform messages and recommendations on planted forests.

"That is why we are diversifying the TF deliverables and events to address relevant topics in different local contexts," he says.

In the short term, Mr. Orazio expects the TF's work to benefit scientists, policy makers, NGOs and media since they will all have access to up-to-date, science-based information that will allow for more nuanced decisions and actions, rather than a polarized "primary forests good; planted forests bad" position.

And, he adds, "in the long run we hope that any stakeholder investing in a planted forest will benefit from the TF work; not only for the green image, but also to improve practices in terms of sustainability and also to anticipate, and begin to move toward resolving, challenges that lie ahead, such as climate change, risk management and biodiversity conservation."

The TF has been adversely affected – as was the rest of the world – by the coronavirus pandemic. Planned events in 2020 were postponed and, Mr. Orazio says, that's difficult because "especially for stakeholder interaction in NGP workshops, for example, we need physical contact. Field visits, even an appropriate atmosphere for debate, are not easy to achieve remotely."

He thinks the pandemic will have some lasting effects on forest plantations. "From recent exchanges I've had, I'd say yes – but it is difficult to identify anything specifically. On one hand, Asia is buying more bio-resources than before, such as natural resin. And the rest of the world is not consuming so much. But, at the same time the expectation of locally sourced products could benefit local panel, paper and wood furniture companies relying on local plantations."

When asked what he would consider a successful conclusion to his TF, Mr. Orazio came up with an impressive – and, perhaps somewhat optimistic – wish list:

- An international Congress of Planted Forests in the USA;
- An increase in successfully established and sustainably managed forest plantations worldwide; and
- Increased acceptance by the global society that planted forests are good for the climate, human health and the economy.

*Find out more about the IUFRO Task Force on Resilient Planted Forests Serving Society & Bioeconomy: https://www.iufro.org/science/task-forces/resilient-planted-forests/*

*The IUFRO Task Forces are established on a temporary basis during each 5-year IUFRO Board term and focus on emerging key forest-related issues. The nine current TFs will run till 2024 at which time their relevance will be assessed in relation to the forest issues of the day.*



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