
Forestry professionals and academics: the need for change

Modern forestry science -silviculture- arose in the North as a result of the Industrial Revolution: forest management was separated from agriculture and cattle breeding and focused exclusively on the production of timber, considering other vital forest goods as "minor products". Plantations constitute the ultimate step in that direction, achieving the total simplification of nature with the aim of producing only one product for industrial purposes. This narrow approach, where forests are viewed as only composed of wood for industry- has been adopted by most forestry technical schools and universities, where professionals are formed. That is one of the reasons which explain why professional foresters are usually unable to see the forest in its entirety and to understand why a plantation is not a forest.

Even worse, many professional foresters play the sad role of hired "experts" who justify "scientifically" whatever needs to be justified to favour either the forestry profession's corporate interest or the interests of large forestry corporations, regardless of their relation to reality and sometimes in complete opposition to it. In their view, the knowledge and findings of rural communities and indigenous peoples, who suffer the consequences on water, biodiversity, soils, etc. resulting from the expansion of industrial plantations in their lands, is not to be taken into account, since it is "scientifically unproven".

Fortunately, the situation seems to be slowly beginning to change and more academics and foresters are beginning to realize that forestry science's approach is too narrow and that the conservation of forests requires a totally different and holistic perspective, which takes society and the environment as the starting point. Such change in viewpoint needs however to be promoted much further to allow present and particularly future professionals to play a positive role in forest conservation. Foresters need to decide if they wish to be logging and plantation experts at the service of the state and corporations or forest conservation actors at the service of local communities and their forests.

WHAT YOU CAN DO:

- Revalue traditional knowledge on forest management
- Identify socially and environmentally sustainable types of forest management
- Promote curricular changes in forestry schools, taking the above into account. Such changes need to be promoted both from within and outside such educational institutions. Student associations can play a major role in this
- Individual foresters and other academics should put their capacity at the service of local communities struggling against plantations