

Forest Policy Workshop of the Scandinavian Society of Forest Economics (SSFE)
at the IUFRO Division VI Symposium: Integrative Science for Integrative Management
Tuesday 14.8.2007, Saariselkä, Finland

<http://www.metla.fi/tapahtumat/2007/ssfe/>

Coevolution of forestry and society in Finland: A transition to industrial forestry

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Abstract

Finland is the second largest net exporter of forest products in the world, but has the highest forest cover in Europe. How is this paradox possible? The purpose of this paper is to investigate the coevolution of the Finnish forestry and society with the de jure and de facto transitions from preindustrial to industrial forestry since the 14th century until the 1950s. Finland had this change during the first half of the twentieth century based on the transitions to de facto and de jure sustained yield of timber, and on the excess of the industrial use to the non-industrial use of timber. Unexpectedly, de facto transition took place a few decades prior to de jure transition. Therefore, it was inferred, that the Grand Land Reform (Isojako) and the increasing forestry incomes and the real value of forests were the major factors causing this transition and not any specific forest policy. Wars, imports of technology and know-how and various other foreign impacts and scientific paradigms have also played a role in the transition to industrial forestry in Finland. The wars have promoted privatization of forests and increased demands for forest products. Private property rights are theoretically most efficient for sustainable management. Colonization of forests by land reforms and privatization of forests have been the longest trend in the history of the Finnish forestry. Accessible low-value forests are mostly deforested and degraded but high-value forests sustained. The increasing forestry incomes and the value of forests have also decreased poverty and decreased the opportunity cost for sustainable forestry. Public policies have been a necessary but not a sufficient condition in this transition.