

Making the forest owner happy with his forest

A discussion article

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ABSTRACT

In the richest part of the world the migration from the countryside to the cities has nearly come to an end. Relatively few are living permanently in rural areas but all citizens' wants to be able to use the offers of the open landscape.

The personal characteristics of the small-scale forest owner have changed in developed countries over the last 30 years. Fewer and fewer are professional farmers. More and more consider their holdings a place to spent leisure time and not a place to stay permanently. The concepts of privacy and exclusivity are increasing. The joy of ownership is essential.

The perception of what commodities and benefits the forest produces has also changed. To day it is generally accepted that the values produced in the forest are as divers as e.g. traditional wood based products, berries and mushrooms, carbon sequestration, effects on real estate values, clean ground water, hunting opportunities, biodiversity, recreation, jobs, the framework for tourism, public health.....

Co-operatives and extension services have always justified their existence by making the forest owners happy. Today this might be by investing in the forest instead of "just" harvesting and cashing in a profit for the owner. Feeling good is often what it is about.

Keywords: Change in values, public demands, private deliveries, access to forest products

INTRODUCTION

Overall subject: What makes the small forest owner happy with his property, how does it correspond with public demands, is there a willingness from the owner to share it or from the public to pay for it.

Dealing with landowners that decides to create a new forest reveals the true nature of their personality and dreams. It is one of the most challenging activities for the forestry advisor.

Interpretation of less precise expressed wishes and wake idea's is a fine art. A forest serving a multitude of purposes is most likely to be the outcome.

Major products of such a forest will be scenic beauty, rich biodiversity, lots of open space, places to relax, reflect and enjoy being, good hunting opportunities supplies of fire wood, silence and solitude but first of all something to be proud of.

These are exactly the products that are in demand by the public authorities on behalf of the majority of the population living in the cities.

Who can claim ownership and users rights to such values? Can they be shared? Can they be priced?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This paper is based on the experience of the author, who within the organisation Danish Forestry Extension (DFE) has been working with forest owners associations in a number of countries in Western and Eastern Europe, former Soviet Union

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and the third world for nearly 25 years. DFE¹ was founded in 1904 as the first private Danish forest owners association focusing on providing a comprehensive extension service to typically farmers who also had a small forest. The association was established to improve the output of small forests by introducing proper silviculture and better utilisation of the products. Since 1993 DFE has been engaged in establishment and development of forest owners and tree growers associations outside Denmark.

Informal interviews of representatives from forest authorities, forest owners association, nature protection organisations and local politicians in the five Nordic countries concerning products and values of forests was conducted by the author in May to June 2005. Impressions here from are incorporated in the article.

WANTS AND NEEDS

Small-scale forestry was traditionally a supplement to farming activities. The forest produced fencing poles, firewood, timber for construction etc. Most of the products were used on the farm only little sold. The farmer did most of the forest work himself.

The small forests² of today fulfil much more divers and less well defined needs for the owner. The forest is typically a fully integrated part of the property whether the owner stays there permanently or only part time. It is no longer just trees growing in odd corners or on the poorer soils of the farm. It is rather a large extension of the

garden, the wild but also “carefully” managed part of it. Even untouched forest patches are often a product of a very well considered choice aiming at having ones own little piece of primeval forest and optimising biodiversity.

Everybody experience wants and needs³ and try to have them fulfilled. The driving force is to obtain improved livelihood - quality of life. This goes for the legal owners as well as those who would like to exercise users rights. The first category is declining in total numbers the other rising. Wants are rising in both groups. Owners become more and more eager to protect their rights and users more and more eager to gain access to the “pressures” places.

The public authorities (politicians) follow the voters and recently doctors have begun to prescribe walks in the forest for their patients to cure stress and a number of lifestyle illnesses.

Who owns or have the rights to those many less tangible products which it is now recognised that forests produce and that is becoming more and more a priority for the owner to optimise.

Questions like:

- Who should be allowed to capitalise the value of biodiversity?
- If property values increases due to closeness to forest should they be shared between the property owner and the forest owner?
- Who should be allowed to generate income based on locals and tourists recreational use of a forest?

becomes more and more relevant to pose.

The row of questions is of course much longer; the amount of unambiguous answers comparatively shorter.



Family brunch in the “Hundred Acres Forest” is a product that makes the owner happy with his forest.

FOREST PRODUCTS

The author interviewed during the month of May and June 2005 civil servants from central forest authorities, representatives from nature protection organisations, forest owners associations and local

politicians (municipality level) in five of the Nordic countries.⁴ The interviews focused on products of the forest and their importance and value for the society as well as individuals. Impact of the presence of forest.

Table 1.

Values/products	Finland	Sweden	Iceland	Norway	Denmark
Wood based products (timber, saw logs, Christmas trees, cellulose wood etc.)	Major importance for the society and individuals	Major importance for the society and individuals	Some importance	Big importance for the society and individuals	Some importance mainly for individuals
Berries and mushrooms	Big importance mainly for individuals	Some importance for individuals	Some importance for individuals. Mushrooms has become fashion	Some importance for individuals	Some importance for individuals. Mushrooms has become fashion
Property values forests owner and neighbours	Depend on production potential. Only limited effect on neighbours	Depend partly on production potential. Only limited effect on neighbours	Big importance. Not depended on production potential	Depend on production potential. Only limited effect on neighbours	Big importance. Nearly not linked to production potential
Clean groundwater	No importance	No importance	Some importance for the society around larger cities	No importance	Big importance for the society some for individuals
Hunting	Big importance for individuals some for the society	Big importance for individuals some for the society	Increasing importance for individuals	Big importance for individuals some for the society	Big importance for individuals little for the society
Biodiversity	Important for the society les importance for individuals	Important for the society les importance for individuals	Important for the society les importance for individuals	Important for the society increasing importance for individuals	Big importance for the society for individuals also but under the term "varied nature"
Protection against noise	Some importance in the cities	No importance	No importance	No importance	Some importance in the cities
Taxation	Big importance for the society and individuals	Big importance for the society and individuals	Some importance to the society les to individuals	Some importance to the society les to individuals	Big importance to individuals little to the society
Recreation	Major importance to society and individuals. Huge potential	Big and increasing importance to society and individuals	Major importance and priority to society and individuals	Major importance to society and individuals	Major importance to society and individuals

Values/products	Finland	Sweden	Iceland	Norway	Denmark
Public health	Importance recognised by the society and individuals	Considered being of great importance by society and individuals	Considered being of great importance by society and individuals	Considered being of great importance by society and individuals	Considered being of great importance by society and individuals
Turisme	Major importance to the society and some individuals. Big potential	Major importance to the society and some individuals. Big potential	Becoming increasingly important to society and individuals	Major importance to the society and some individuals. Big potential	Major importance to the society and some individuals. Big potential
Allemansrät ⁵ (access to nature)	Holly and inviolable	Very important pt. up for debate	Important and generally accepted by individuals	Is taken for granted. The influence of bigger events are being discussed	Public access to is constantly under debate. Society and individuals (owners) have different views
Job creation	Decreasing importance to society. In some areas very important for individuals	Decreasing importance to society. In some areas very important for individuals	Importance to society. In some areas very important for individuals	Important to society and individuals. Regional differences	Decreasing importance to society and individuals
Settlement	Before of big importance	Before of big importance	Considered important by society and individuals	Before of big importance	Some importance
Secure deposit	No importance	Some importance regionally	No importance	No importance	Some importance
Nature interpretation/education	Some importance to society and individuals	Big importance to society. Les to individuals	Big importance and priority to society. Les to individuals	Big importance to society. Les to individuals	Big importance to society. Les to individuals
Protection of cultural heritage	Big importance to society. Les to individuals	Big importance to society. Les to individuals	Some importance to society and individuals	Some importance to society and individuals	Big importance to society. Les to individuals
Infrastructure	Major importance to society and individuals in remote areas	Big importance for recreational purposes to society and individuals	Only of recreational importance to individuals	Major importance to society and individuals in remote areas	Big importance for recreational purposes to society and individuals
Grazing	Big importance to society and individuals in areas with reindeer breeding	Importance to society and individuals in areas with reindeer breeding	Some importance	No importance	Some importance

Values/products	Finland	Sweden	Iceland	Norway	Denmark
Erosion and shelter	No importance	No importance	Big importance to society and individuals	Modest importance	Shelter has importance for recreation – society and individuals
Aesthetics	Big importance to individuals and society				
Carbon sequestration	Only of importance to the society				
Contribution to fulfilment of international strategies	Only of importance to the society				
Gene conservation	Only of importance to the society				

Coincidence between what individuals and the society consider important when it comes to forest products and values seems to be relative frequent except for the more abstract concepts as carbon sequestration, gene conservation and fulfilment of international conventions and strategies. There is a difference in focus on some of the forest products between the three countries with plenty of forest and the two with only limited forest resources (Iceland and Denmark). This is mainly due to the difference in socio-economic importance of forestry in the countries.⁶

A forest produces by its mere existence a number of additional benefits many of them without a clear address on the owner and/or beneficiary.

A few examples:

The forests importance for production of environmental values



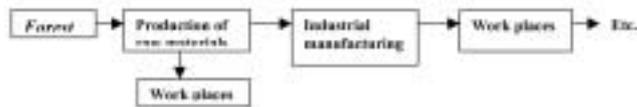
VALUES GENERATED

All the above mentioned more or less tangible products represents values and it seems as if the values considered most important increasingly becomes the softer ones which are difficult to price in terms of money. Especially the not legal owners of forest consider a number of the values public goods.

In general the smaller the forest is the more relative important is the sheer joy of ownership, the exclusivity in terms of right to use and influence the appearance of the forest and hold decisive power over the product mix it should deliver.

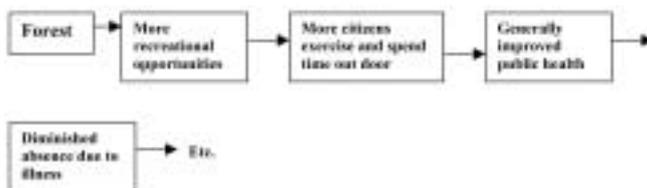
The forest as a frame for events is one of the keys to tourist development and recreation. Tourism is one of the worlds fastest growing industries and is locally of paramount importance to the economy. Often it is based directly on the natural assets and values in an area. It is seldom that the supplier of the nature values has any direct economic benefits from being a supplier. Joint public private planning efforts and models for benefit sharing might lead to less conflicts of the type: No Trespassing Signs. Unfortunately examples hereof are not that many.

The forests importance for job creation



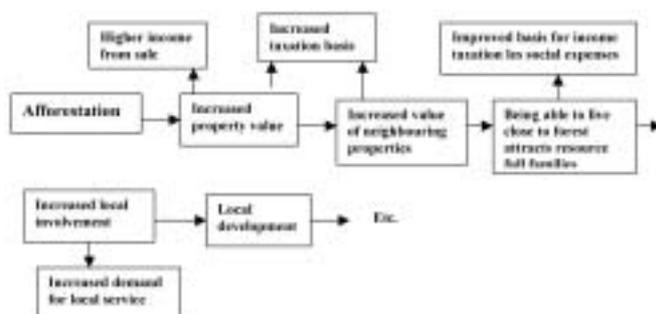
This is a classic value adding chain. Jobs are not only created by growing raw materials but also in the processing industry and the service sector supporting production. Jobs in forestry support rural settlement and economy. There is to some extent competition between a focus on traditional wood based products and environmental benefits. When priorities change it will typically lead to a decline in jobs in the short run.

The forests importance for public health



The costs related to absence from the work place due to illness has in Denmark roughly been estimated by different authorities to more than 1.3 billion €. In Denmark doctors prescribe exercise and out door stay in forests/the open landscape to their patients. An old saying goes like: “Green is good for the soul” – your mental life.

Forests importance to property values and



In the long run a development as described above would at least in the way the Danish taxation system is composed lead to a general lower level of taxation of inhabitants in the community.

PUBLIC INTERESTS IN THE FOREST

Forests have in general a big impact in the communities. Around larger cities people are willing to travel quite some distances to enjoy the products and values of forests. If a forest hosts something extraordinary it easily becomes a tourist attraction and people are willing to travel long distance to experience the waterfall, the oldest tree in northern Europe

The population in general know by heart that many forests are privately owned but tend to consider the forest a public good and their willingness to pay as individuals for any kind of consumption of at least the less tangible forest products e.g. recreation, shelter or aesthetics is very low.

The general trend is that the bigger the forest is the easier it becomes for the owner to share it with the informal visitor. When it comes to organised use for e.g. sports events the case is different. The small forest owners tend to care more about privacy on their properties and exclusive users rights. The closer to the house the forest is the more noticeable this is.

City dwellers, the vast majority of the voters, through their different green organisations claim more and more unrestricted access to the open landscape. Politicians follow up with legislation that normally does not compensate the forest owner for any losses economical or otherwise when access rights are liberalised.

WHAT MAKES THE SMALL FOREST OWNER HAPPY WITH HIS FOREST

There are some typical trends⁷ in what makes of the small forest owner happy with his forest whether he lives on the estate or use it as a weekend cottage. They are based on the fact that he

does not depend on a stable income from the forest and that he is Danish.

- That the forest is unique
- That the forest can provide the owner with products of his need and that they can be offered as appreciated gifts to friends and relatives - typical fire wood and hunting
- Exclusivity, the joy of ownership
- Something to be proud of
- Scenic beauty
- Sheltered places to rest and good views
- Biodiversity mainly in terms of wildlife like birds and larger mammals. If the owners is a hunter it might be the overriding objective for management of the forest to increase hunting opportunities
- Names of locations that relates to the owner or tells a story
- That he takes part in practical activities in the forest on a level that does not produce a bad conscious and is "fun"
- Different types of personal "monuments" – "Territorial marking"
- That he unconditioned feels he can trust his advisors and believe they are the best

In general those who is not at all engaged in farming are most eager to invest in and shape the nature/forest "content" of their properties - to have a dream come through.

The above list does not claim to be complete but deals with the core of what makes the Danish small forest owner happy with his forest. It is the authors believe that this is very much also the case in many other rich countries.

DISCUSSION

- How to capitalise especially social and environmental goods in high demand is a challenge that has to be dealt with.
- It is needed to find generally accepted and objective methods to define all the "new" forest products of today.
- It is important to take an open discussion on what can be considered public goods or common assets.
- Can the society accept that a landowner should be paid to secure e.g. clean ground water?

Strangely enough there is not a very big gap between what is in demand from the society and what the forest owner would like to produce. It is when it comes to sharing it unrestricted that constraints are developed. This has to do with feelings and the loss of control over some thing the landowner has invested in personally, combined with the fact that the majority of the population in the Nordic countries basically do not fully accept that the open landscape is not all common property.

The structural changes in agriculture, bigger and bigger farms, and the extreme urbanisation in the rich world has lead to a situation where relatively few people own and control the majority of the countryside. In scarcely populated areas this might not create conflicts over access but around cities the conflicts are already present at least in Denmark.

An open discussion about what privates should be paid for or provide for free in the public interest when it comes to forest products must be taken and over all public acceptance of the outcome of such a debate has to be achieved.

A certain relocation of the public and private owned forests might solve some of the conflicts if the public owned forests are mainly situated in the most densely populated areas and close to the cities.

CONCLUSIONS

The personal characteristics of the small-scale forest owner have changed in developed countries over the last 30 years. Fewer and fewer are professional farmers. More and more consider their holdings a place to spent leisure time and not a place to stay permanently. The concepts of privacy and exclusivity are increasing. The joy of ownership is essential.

Most things have a price. A small forest owner that is happy with his forest is also proud of it and would in most cases like to show it to the public. If his in control of decision making related to his property and don't feel threatened to change behaviour conflicts are less towards the society. If he produces public goods based on an agreement it has an independent value for him. Buying products

is a more straight way for the society to obtain its goal than subsidies, which often creates a blurry situation of ownership. A very simplified version of the carbon sequestration (sinks) trade scheme under the Kyoto protocol might provide inspiration to deal with public goods produced in private forests.

Co-operatives and extension services have always justified their existence by making the forest owners happy. Today this might be by investing in the forest instead of “just” harvesting and cashing in a profit for the owner. Feeling good is often what it is about.

Joint public private planning efforts and models for benefit sharing might lead to fewer conflicts. Small forest owner’s co-operatives might have an important role play here.

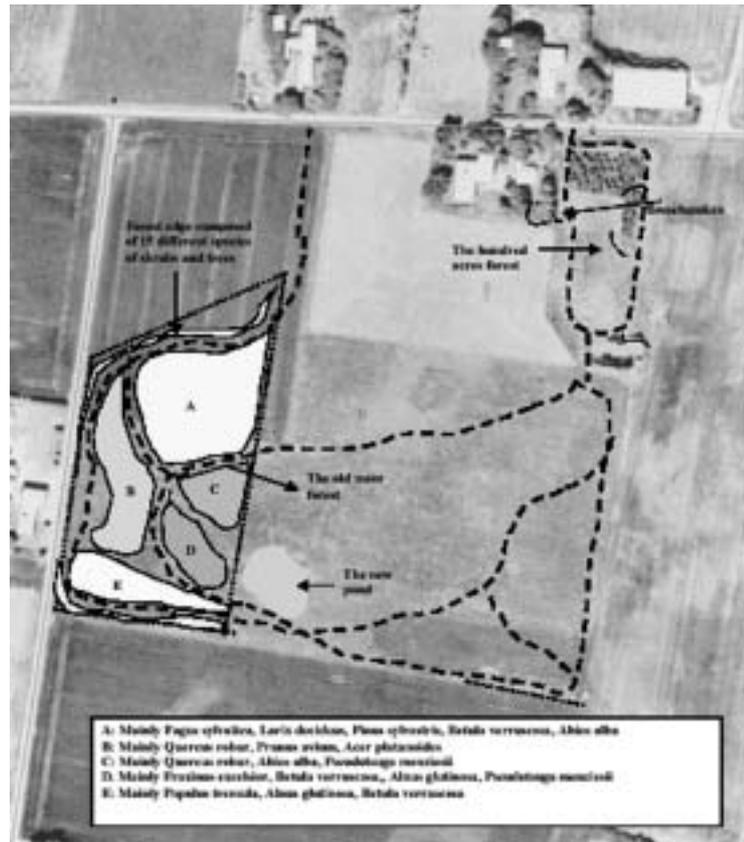
No doubt legislation has to set minimum standards for behaviour, which is also accepted amongst decent human beings – the majority of world population.

Notes

- 1 Today DFE consists of 8 local units covering all of Denmark. DFE offers its members Extension Service, marketing of their forest-based products, contracting of forest related work and supply of seedlings, fencing materials etc. Approx. 1/3 of Danish forest owners has chosen to be members of DFE.
- 2 Forest in this paper is small-scale forestry in the rich part of the world where the direct economic output is of minor importance to the owner.
- 3 Wants can be wishes and things you might be willing to pay for – just not right now. Needs are things you are willing to pay for today.
- 4 Denmark, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland
- 5 Allemansrät: In Sweden, Finland and Norway any individual is allowed without permission to

A CASE – OF HAPPINESS

The forest has been planted in the period from mid nineties until today 2006. The owners are both teachers, the property is the birthplace of the wife. They use it as a weekend cottage. The couple has got two girls 8 and 10 years of age. Property 7 hectares forest approx. 2 hectares.



walk and camp for free. In principle staying more than one night in the same place calls for permission by the landowner. Making fires are allowed and one can freely collect firewood from dead material and pick berries and mushrooms.

- 6 For in debt description of forest products and elaboration on the outcome of the interviews please refer to the authors report “Skovenes værdi i lokalsamfundet i Norden” elaborated for the Nordic Council of Ministers August 2005
- 7 The list is random and expresses not prioritisation of the subjects