A VISION OF COOPERATION AND NETWORKING IN THE FIELD OF RISK AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT ACROSS EUROPE

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Context

In recent years, Europe's forests have suffered increasing damage from weather extremes and their consequences. In particular, old-growth forests of socio-economic and ecological value are at risk, and associated significant changes in the structure of European forests are to be expected (Forzieri et al. 2021). Current climate projections also raise concerns that forest damages will become more frequent and severe.

As one-third of Europe's land area is covered by forests, climate change-induced damage will have an increasing impact on economy, society, nature conservation and environmental protection. It is therefore of paramount importance to increase the resilience of forests to disturbances such as wildfires, storm damage or insect calamities. To achieve this, the framework for sustainable forest management established by FOREST EUROPE should be further developed including integrative risk and crisis management. This should aim to address the climate change-induced uncertainties in forest management through policy and practice.

Crisis Management Strategies

In the above context, the key to adapting forests to climate change lies in increasing resilience to disturbances and extreme climate events. Since silvicultural adaptations of forest stands are long-term processes, the previous focus on increasing resilience of forests through silvicultural redesign must be coupled with risk-minimizing management of the existing forest structures. Crucial elements here are the prevention and mitigation of direct forest damage and mortality, taking into account the social, ecological and economic consequences of damages. Climate adapted forestry must therefore establish a proactive crisis management.

This is in line, in particular, with the priorities of the UNDRR Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction. The Framework emphasizes investing in disaster risk reduction to strengthen resilience (priority 3) and preparing for disasters to "rebuild better" (priority 4) (UNISDR 2015).

Further relevant risk management standards (i.a. ISO 31000) provide guidance on how to identify the role of stakeholder engagement and multi-stakeholder communication as one of the principles of a contemporary understanding of how to manage risk.

Since climate change will inevitably lead to new damage situations in hitherto less affected areas and disturbances do not stop at national borders or language barriers, the mutual exchange of experience, joint learning and cooperation between countries and institutions needs to be facilitated in order to create resilient forests and adapted forest management systems.

Networking as a Management Option in Crisis Management

Research studies confirm that it is difficult to accept help from third parties, especially in a professional context. Knowing about a colleague's expertise does not necessarily mean asking them for advice. Also, the awareness that processes that take place in other parts of the world should also take place in one`s own region is not well developed. Therefore, the establishment of a risk culture and the confidence to ask for help in times of need are crucial to not only get advice but can be the initial spark for desired cooperation. Trust that is built on constant exchange and cooperation can help in addition to information in databases.

Non-hierarchical networks such as the Community of Practice approach (Wenger-Trayner and Wenger-Trayner 2015), in which people come together to pursue common issues and goals, show how important

it is to build sustainable structures in which trust can lead to mutual help.

In the past, several nationally and internationally funded projects have successfully promoted the exchange between crisis management experts in forestry. Projects such as FRISK-GO , NET RISK WORK and SURE , which preceded the FoRISK approach, all helped connect individuals and organizations through vivid exchange across national borders and language barriers. Expert knowledge was passed on across institutional hierarchies in an atmosphere of trust.

However, all projects suffered from the limited duration and the fact that acquaintances were made, but were forgotten in the subsequent day-to-day business due to the end of the project. Based on prior experience, however, a sustainable exchange can only be guaranteed by a permanently committed and mediating facilitation point.

Networking across sectors and borders – chances and barriers

Across sectors and borders, numerous information and collaboration gaps need to be closed (Fig. 1). The transfer of knowledge between scientists at national and international level usually works well, as evidenced by diverse scientific networks and think tanks. Yet, cross-sectoral cooperation and knowledge transfer is much rarer and usually requires the support of neutral brokers, often supported, for example, by the research projects mentioned above, in order to achieve success.

Figure 1: Information and collaboration gaps between forest related sectors and parties
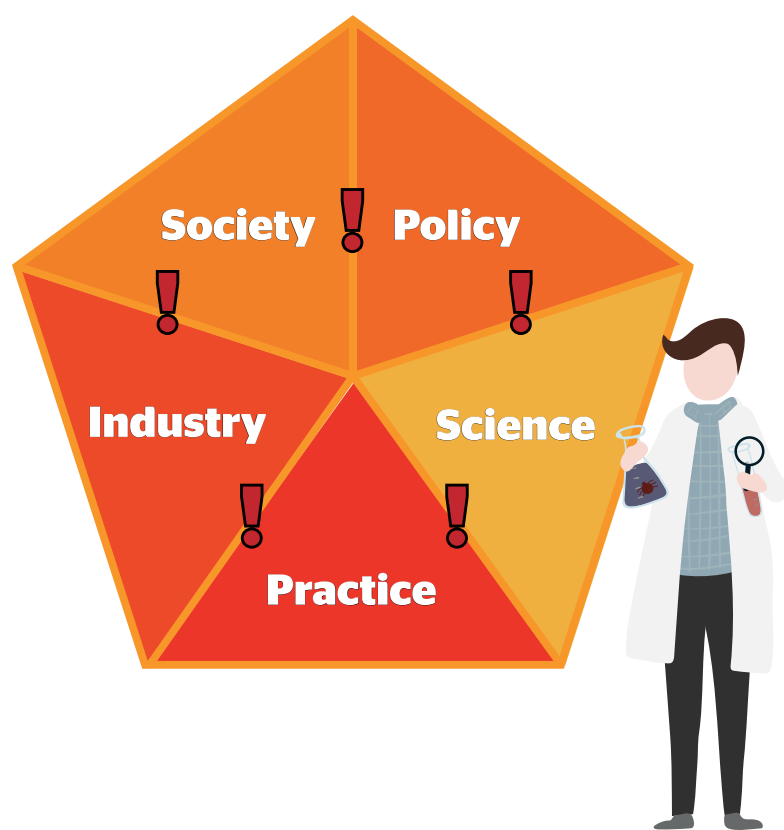
There are several reasons for these information and collaboration gaps. First and foremost, the presentation of scientific knowledge is often not well adapted to the needs of decision-makers in policy and practice. Furthermore, the need for public acceptance of adaptations in forest management, especially proactive crisis management, should not be underestimated. Every sector has its own language, pace and decision-making culture, especially when it comes to international collaboration. Therefore, critical points and essential success factors must be considered:

Particularly at national level

Shared vision. A clearly defined and common overarching goal is needed to join forces for proactive risk and crisis management across sectors. It starts with a common definition of the problem and ends with a clear vision that includes all stakeholders and institutions involved.

Participation. Stakeholder involvement and broad participation of all relevant actors is key to ensure optimal impact. Sometimes there is a need for new cooperation structures, e.g. between forest administrations and civil protection authorities. Involving already active platforms, institutions or networks is equally important to strengthen acceptance. For wide-ranging, long-term participation, financial and organizational requirements must be kept at a tolerable level.

Advocacy. Strong advocates are often key to reaching practice partners and legitimizing adapted policy and management actions both in society and in practice. Data and facts are always the basis, but motivation and persuasiveness come from committed individuals (champions) and institutions.

Proactivity. The focus should be on each phase of the crisis management cycle (prevention, preparedness, response and recovery) to ensure ongoing cooperation, particularly in the proactive phases during quiet times when no disturbances are forcing stakeholders to react. A shared terminology, definitions, good practice examples and a common database on disturbances, important actors and resources can be important steps towards joint proactive action.

Leadership. A shared leadership is the key to secure partnerships on an equal footing, yet, established hierarchies in all sectors involved must be taken into account when founding new collaboration structures. Alternating roles, responsibilities and hosting of events are helpful methods to engage actors at all levels.

Particularly at international level

Communication. Language and communication barriers can be addressed through a dissemination concept between regional, national and pan-European networks. New translation technologies can be an easy way to connect people with different mother tongues. Live translations, multilingual publications and a modular structure based on topics of interest can also help to overcome communication barriers.

Connection. Regular cooperation and engagement in specific joined events and practices are extremely important to renew networks that otherwise would not stay in touch with each other. Regular updates such as EU- and country reports on hazards, evaluations on crisis management processes on several policy levels can be key to keep important actors informed and committed.

Long-term perspective. There is a need for connecting and building networks between individuals or institutions that maintain contacts between regional and, or national hubs. Therefore, permanent financing of a pan-European network facility is strongly recommended. Its role is to oversee events, projects and other developments of regional and national, as well as pan-European, importance. The coordination of the knowledge transfer is as important as its role as the first point of contact for new and existing partners and networks at all levels.

Policy integration. Collaborations between practice partners should be closely supported by their policy peers and administrations, as new and innovative management solutions often require policy adjustments at regional and, or national level. This point is particularly important to ensure a long-term planning perspective, which is crucial in times of climate change.

Good practice examples for cooperation and networking on different policy levels

National cross-sectoral node
The National Platform for Natural Hazards (Nationale Plattform Naturgefahren, PLANAT) was created in 1997 by the Swiss Federal Council to coordinate concepts in the field of natural hazard prevention. The main objective of the extra-parliamentary commission is a paradigm shift from protection against hazards to management of risks.

European topical node
The European Wildfire Risk Node (EWRN) has the purpose of becoming the network of all networks. Linking existing, formal and informal, networks and communities of practitioners with expertise in wildfire risk management. Its goal is to become a European Think Tank that serves as a reference in the field of wildfire.

The importance of long-term cooperation strategies in Europe

In view of future challenges such as global and climate change, long-term solutions and stable structures are required to ensure networking and cooperation across sectors and borders. Stability requires a permanent structure that supports the actors involved with appropriate exchange opportunities. This is crucial to ensure sustainability and build trust at all levels. The exchange concerns all active levels of forest management, i.e., practitioners, forest policy and support from research.

Networking of experts, which leads to an interaction between research and practice, is essential for this approach. The focus should be on the exchange of experiences and management tools. The policy level should pave the way for regional and national management solutions based on the shared knowledge. Activities then take place on a national level or in the respective language area.

Figure 2: Overcoming the knowledge and communication gap between science, policy, practice and society with a permanent networking structure
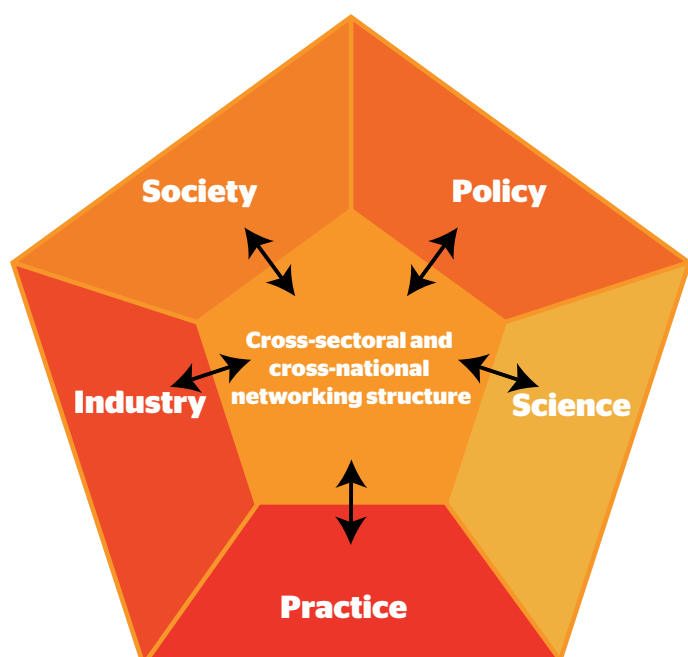
Policy recommendations for effective cooperation and networking across sectors and borders

Be proactive. Effective risk and crisis management strategies help to rapidly increase the resilience of European forests in times of climate change.

Develop a risk culture. Networking in times of no crisis and exchanging views on common topics and goals helps to gain trust in the idea of supporting one another across sectors and borders.

Bridge the knowledge and communication gap. Networking of individuals and institutions helps to maintain contacts between regional and national hubs in a European risk network. Permanent structures are needed to maintain communication and commitment at all levels.

Integrate all levels and needs. Communication and activities between policy and practice partners must be tailored to their specific needs. Language barriers, different cultures or political structures can be addressed by promoting different networks nodes at different regional levels or thematic levels. Shared leadership also helps to overcome hierarchical barriers.

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