

West-Hungarian University

Main points of the PhD-thesis

**ANALYSIS OF THE STATE-RUN FORESTRY'S PUBLIC RELATIONS IN
RESPECT OF FOREST PARKS AND FORESTRIAL FOREST SCHOOLS**

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1. Necessity of development in the public relations of the forestry branch

Hungarian silviculture experienced several ups and downs in its history. By the late 1990's the forestry branch got into an unfavourable position in aspect of its governmental financing situation and in aspect of public opinion as well. Despite of that in Hungary forest area is permanently growing and the continuity of farming is guaranteed, politics and from public life puts a high pressure on forest farmers.

In the professional and directional systems of silviculture there are several issues that make a launch of an extensive and institutional PR of the branch difficult. Economical supervision of state-run forestial shareholding companies is done by the National Privatization and Investment Management Company /ÁPV Zrt./, thus forest farming companies have to face tough requirements. Forest farming professional planning, management and supervision was/is done by the 'Forestry Office', later the 'Department of Silviculture and Hunting', at the moment by the 'Department of Natural Resources' at the Ministry of Farming and Rural Development.

Due to sophisticated requirements and controversial professional and financial priorities the companies often have to face difficult situations – e.g. in case of maintenance and operation of forests dedicated to public welfare, forestial forest schools. The fact that productivity of the branch is infinitesimally low compared to the GDP lobby power of the forestry branch is weak in our country.

However, there are several great opportunities to increase the position of forestry. Since the Treaty of Trianon forest area is permanently growing in Hungary and reached two million hectares by today. Dimensions of public welfare tasks within forest farming are also exceptional. The forest parks and forestial forest schools operated by silvicultural organisation ensure the whole country. Forestry contributes too many activities in environment protection and

it is important that the Hungarian institutions of environmental protection originate in initiatives of forest farmers and were developed out of silviculture. The silvicultural has a great influence on regional development. These benefits and positive aspects may be utilized in favour of the branch to build up an effective and strategic communication in order to make forests, forest farming, and forestry as a profession popular and accepted, to increase support and lobby power of the branch.

The essay introduces less utilized PR-opportunities of state-run forestries and forest farming organizations via analysing their communication activities at forest parks and forest schools, their forms and contents. The author was looking for answers to the following questions

- What communication elements are applied in forestial PR activities, how much do these meet the requirements of professional public relations activities?
- How good are utilization and affectivity of communication opportunities on the studied field?
- By development of which field can the PR activity of the forestry branch be increased?
- Which are the most affective communication elements in the forestry branch?

2. Hypotheses of the research

The silvicultural sector is characterized by recurrent and protracted communication crisis.

During the history of the Hungarian forestry, a number of large-scale public relations campaign were completed, which did not achieved a comprehensive and long-term results of a positive assessment of the sector.

The most effective platform of the awareness raising and education is the school. In this scene the public relation of the forestry branch has also several opportunities.

It is likely that the reasons of the forestry communication crisis can be searched in the shortcomings of the existing communication elements (publications, websites, media publishing), and in the contradiction of the organizational leadership and relationships of silviculture.

The largest contact area between the society and the silviculture are the forest parks. The forest park as an effective communications scene can play an important role in the public relations of the forestries.

One of the most important elements of the conscious communication is the communication strategy. The lack of the strategy or the division within the trade could have a negative influence on the whole communication of the sector.

The public relations of the silviculture can show a new, previously untapped trends and possibilities, which is taking into account the specific feature of our age and society.

3. Methods of the research

There are numerous ways and fields of communication between the forestry branch and the public. Accordingly the thesis uses many element of research-method. The form of the research is an appreciative research, which contains formative and summative elements as well. There is a qualitative research.

As a first step the author of the essay examined with using a deductive research method which elements of PR are or could be present in the communication of forestry.

After studying the related topics of professional communication he collected articles and reports on public relations of the forestry branch published in the Forestry Magazine (Erdészeti Lapok) since its foundation (1862). He examined publications on branch history of the National Forestry Association (Országos Erdészeti Egyesület) from the same point of view. After processing the history of forestial communication he revealed the origination of forest parks and the public welfare activity of silviculture. In this phase of the studies he worked up brochures on history of tourism, books and writings on history of forest farming companies and articles on this topic from the internet. Based on documents on founding of forestial forest schools as a last chapter of the historical part he introduces the affect of the appearance of forest schools on forestial communication.

In order to evaluate the situation of forestial communication in the near past he made a comparative analysis intending to show the frequency of articles published in the media on forestry and environment protection, as well as quality and value of professional messages appearing in the media. The analysis was made by analysing two volumes of the daily newspapers ‘Magyar Nemzet’ and ‘Népszabadság’, the weekly magazine ‘168 óra’ and examination of Hungarian websites from 2002 to 2004 and from 2005 to 2007.

Information materials, brochures published by the silvicultural organizations are important elements of professional communication. The thesis made a detailed analysis of fifty-nine issues from the last few years in aspect of communication affectivity. The author examined several factors which are determinative for a PR brochure, such as implementation, quality, aesthetics, and professional contents.

Using the internet is a normal, daily practice for over a half of society by today. E-PR, PR through this channel is a mightily developing field of communication. The author examined the websites of state-run silvicultural companies, and some websites on silviculture (29 sites in total), how far they meet the basic requirements of online communication. He designed an evaluation table, where he separately evaluated sole elements of the pages according to several aspects (branch-related professional and E-PR requirements).

To make the research more complete the author of the thesis designed a survey, which he sent to the state-run forestrial companies. The summary included questions in three main topics: organizing forestrial communication, main data of the forest parks' information, maintenance, and main data of the forest schools' maintenance.

The author drew the conclusion on the basis of the national welfare inventory (2007) made by the Development for Forestry of Ministry for Farming and Rural Development.

From the frame numbers of the sponsorship provided by the Ministry of Farming and Rural Development for the cause of investment and maintenance support of forest parks from 2002 to 2006 the author of the thesis analysed the annual proportion and internal structure of the submissions in the examined period and he compared the data with the investment and maintenance figures on the surveys sent to the forestrial companies.

4. Results of the research

The author started studying the public relations of forestry through natural preserve forests and forest education in 1999. There were several positive changes in forestry communication in the past nine years. Despite the positive changes the lobby power and role of forestry branch went on loosing weight.

During the detailed analysis the fact – which became affirmed later on by the surveys – occurred that most forestry did rarely or did not apply the professional PR achievements and recommendations in their communication through publications and web pages at all or simply ignored them. In this aspect real message-propagation and awareness-promotion effect of these publications stays far behind what is possible indeed. The forestry branch has no general and institutional code of directives regarding communication via publications, according to which they could design a consistent PR-image. PR-messages are often missing from brochures, or they lack of accentuation, or they are presented in a too much professional point of view.

Analysis of web pages brought the same results. E-PR and digital communication has special PR-technical aspects, not applied by most of the forestries. Internet presence becomes more and more important in regards of social scale communication, thus this issue needs institutional progress in large format. Also in this field publication of forestry messages would need to become more accentuated and more definite. Several company websites are not more than a digital layout of some printed media which misses the possibility of interactive communication through digital technology, the greatest opportunity in E-PR.

According to answers given by forestries to survey questions it is a general practice that company PR-tasks are solved as attached activities. Apart from two exceptions, where a separate fulltime communication specialist is employed the employed person has a non-PR degree.

On the basis of information on forest parks it can be stated, those forestries maintain much (ca. three times) larger forest parks, than the forest areas primarily assigned to social welfare. In the forest parks sign boards telling about the maintainer of the forest park and his public utility activities can hardly be found.

Forest education done by forestries does practice PR activities within organised educational frames with means of the most effective – the interpersonal – communication. Messages transmitted by forest educational sessions reach 140-145 thousand people directly and approximately half a million people indirectly each year. At the same time the most important organizers of forestries' social events are in general in connection with forest schools (e.g. the event series called Forests' Week).

According to results of the studies the author recommended PR-measures of the branch, including the following, most important elements:

- Definition and creation of a coordinated, institutional PR-strategy of the branch,
- Designing subjects of an institutional communication and image
- Intensive internal PR-activity,
- Creation of a central communication group of the branch.

In the end we can state that under the present circumstances forest parks, thematic parks and forestial forest education are the possible brake-through spots of PR-activity of the forestry branch. With organized and frequent PR-programmes a huge mass of people can be reached and won for the cause of the forests and forestry through these channels.

5. Theses

1. During the research of the forestry public relations events the author explored, that in the last 140 years the sector faced to a communication crisis average in every twenty years. Neither of the large-scale social communications initiatives and campaigns, which were working up and put into practice to solve the crisis, did not manage to achieve a more generation long-lived positive mind-change in the view of the forest and silviculture.
2. By research of the forest school he revealed, that forest schools may be the most effective means of an extensive branch-related PR-activity. This educational form involves 140-145 thousand persons, mostly children annually. Information being forwarded by them the spreading of the message may be tripled, which nearly means half a million persons per year. Schools giving a professional message directly and authentically may achieve a long-lasting level of knowledge and a shaping of public approach on long term as well. In the forest school forest messages must be integrated into the education programme as subject of forestry. I listed the forest topics for kindergarten children, elementary and grammar school students with definitions of contents according to the National Basic Curriculum (Nemzeti Alaptanterv) and the pedagogical programmes applied in elementary and grammar schools.
3. With a detailed study of forest publications (59 publications) the author of the thesis revealed several deficiencies in aspect of PR: most publications failed to have an aimed message or important elements of communication were presented insufficiently. Due to unexplained technical expressions brochures often happen to be unclear for non-professionals. The number of forest brochures accessible for the public is insufficient; most of the existing ones miss to have a professional message.

4. Through a detailed analysis of forestial homepages (30 homepages) the author indicated that in spite of the favourable increase in the number of homepages on forestial issues companies only utilize a little proportion of E-PR opportunities. Even general directives of homepage designing are not always met. Homepages are often too much professional and offer just few information for the general public. Homepages of several forestries do not run. Two-way communication is often only formal, there is no real public discussion through these homepages.
5. With the appraisal of the surveys filled up by the state-run forestries and analysis of the national welfare inventory the author established, that in spite of the fact forest parks have high priority from the point of view of communication, the forestries maintain do not take advantage of their direct and indirect public relations value. To compare the dates of the registered visitors and the national welfare inventory he revealed, that forest parks and forest areas assigned to social welfare as silvicultural public relations scenes have the specific lowest cost and reach the most people.
6. In spite of last years' great PR-actions, affectivity of forestial communication is low. Through studying two national daily newspapers, a weekly magazine and Hungarian websites I discovered that media presence of the forestial branch decreased even in the last two years. Number of publications which indicate a rather negative affect on public opinion on forestry did increase. Compared to media presence on environment protection I had to find out that there is a fivefold difference in favour of our related branch.
7. In the last decade were prepared four national forestries strategic projects (ÁPV Rt., NEP, ÁESZ, OEE). To study the identities and the differences of the strategic plans it was found by the author, that the ÁPV Rt's document

and the NEP offer into the details worked out communication trend, which based on a professional consensus. The other two plans have universal validity, considering the communications methods apply their own methods to the sector. From the answers of the survey concern of the communication of forestries, the author of the thesis revealed, that in spite of these public plans, the great part of the silviculturer perform the PR-activities with employees in enclosed duty on grounds of own plans, which reduces the efficiency of the communication in the branch.

8. To sum up the results of the analysis and researches the author established, that the social opinion form has to be conducive in any case with active work by the Hungarian silviculture sector. This work and he efficient communication is not able to carry though with the traditional methods and views. The participants of the silviculture from the management level to the producer level need an essential paradigmatic change int he field of public relations. The methods of the silviculture and the communication have to be changed over the traditional views and habits.

The industrial methods of the silviculture, the plantations, and the forest sections must be undertaken, and their reason must be presented obviously, and it has to be dissociated from the natural or nature conservation silviculture.

9. Researching the new trend of the communication we can find new main communication-points, which could be the role of the forest in the environmental protection (CO₂ settings), environmental certificate and the introduction and communication of subsidiary certificate of high priority, and their use on the occasion of extreme demands in the forestry communication.

10. One of the big attempted point could be the establishing of silvicultural and wood-industrial thematic parks, where the visitors can to slip into the forester's or hunter's 'clothes', to comprehend the system of the silviculture. The animateurs of the parks and the experts in forestry could take part in the handover of the factual knowledge. Messages of forestry could get to large crowd with the establishing of silvicultural and hunting paths as a tourism attraction in the forest.

6. Proposals to develop the PR-activity in the sector

During the history of forestry communications were many program experiment implementation in the field of comprehensive public relations. The result of the study's analyzes proves, that the sector needs to reform the public relations activities, and to launch more intensive communication. To resolve the identified pr-situation of the sector, the author proposes the following action plan.

1. Define a uniform public relations strategy of the branch: Through a dialogue prepare a plan which could be adopted by any enterprise, and can give a direction to the silviculturers to bring their own pr-activities into harmony with the pr interests of the sector. In recent years were a large number of similar attempt, but these effects had limited impact, because the recommendations were not accepted uniformly by the professions. It could happen that in the same time two or three professional teams were working in the silvicultural branch independently from each other, to define the forestrial pr-strategy. To prepare the plan a professional communication specialist should be involved, who has sufficient knowledge and affinity for silviculture. In this plan should be defined the content and the form of the sector's messages, how to achieve certain targets and what are these specialties. The dominant participant of the silviculture sector, have to share the elements of the public relations strategy, taking into consideration the real mission and interests of the organisation.
2. It is necessary to form a flexible, but consistent appearance frame for silviculture (publications, websites, information boards etc), which could be filled with the own special information by any silvicultural organisations.

3. The silviculture needs to execute a big paradigmatic change in the field of communication. It must be organized intensive internal PR activities for the workers in the forestry sector to accept the necessity of communication. The featured item of internal-pr is to evolve the unified communication attitude of senior management. Without this a comprehensive public relations activity of the branch cannot be organized.
4. Organize meaningful trainings for pr-employees of firms to raise the awareness to the news and the possibilities of the public relations area.
5. Create a centralized, professional communication group in the silviculture sector. The members of this group should keep the contact fluently with the enterprises, the media, the social associations and the participants of political groups to help on the organization of the communication of certain areas. The most useful form of this group, which could be founded and sponsored by the participant of the silviculture, would be a non-profit organization.

It must be examined, that it is possible to found a legitimate department within the National Forestry Organisation, to carry out this job. The proposed number of members is three people: a master level forest engineer who is accepted by the profession and has extensive contacts in the industry, a professional communication specialist and a communications assistant.

7. Publications

Publications, articles:

Varga, T. (1996) Ideas about the environmental education. Forestry Magazine 243. p.

Varga, T. (2000) The forestial forest schools. Soproni újulat 6. p Study Forestry Shareholding Company. Sopron

Varga, T. (2002) Purposes of the forest. Environmental education in the forest. book detail (37-44 p.) Eco-Forum Foundation. Bp.

Varga, T. (2004) Forest of Sopron, people in Sopron. Wold of Forester in Sopron book detail (5-9. p) Study Forestry Shareholding Company. Sopron

Varga, T. (2004) Sopron: in the embrace of forest. Wold of Forester in Sopron book detail (10-16. p) Study Forestry Shareholding Company. Sopron

Varga, T. (2005) Archaeology and ethnography of forest and wood. Conference-booklet Sopron, (28-30. p)

Presentations:

Varga, T. (1999) The role of the forest schools in the education. National Days of Speech Therapy Conference, Sopron

Varga, T. (1999) The Forestial Forest Schools. National Agricultural Conference

Varga, T. (2002): The value of the forest. ‘Our environmental the forest’ Further vocational training course, Sopron

Varga, T. (2003): Man and forest ‘Our environmental the forest’ Further vocational training course, Sarkadremete

Varga, T. (2004): Woodmythology, forest and belief. ‘Our environmental the forest’ Further vocational training course, Sopron

Varga, T. (2004): Forest as a life-museum. 'Our environmental the forest'
Further vocational training course, Paks

Varga, T. (2004): Functions of the forest. Environmental education in the forest -
Further vocational training course Eco-Forum Foundation, Sopron, Youth Camp
Brennbergbánya

Varga, T. (2004): The Forestial Forest Schools. National meeting of
Environmental Education in the Forest Further Vocational Training Course.
Eco-Forum Foundation Sopron, Museum of Forestry

Varga, T. (2005): Formation of forest image. Environmental education in the
forest further vocational training course. Eco-Forum Foundation Sopron, Youth
Camp Brennbergbánya

Varga, T. (2005): Forest and game. Meeting of Environmental Teachers.
Sopron

Varga, T. (2005): Our environment the forest. West-Hungarian University,
faculty of Forestry, Institute for Forest-Property Management. Sopron

Varga, T. (2006): Protection of forest. Environmental education in the forest.
Further vocational training course. Eco-Forum Foundation. Sopron

Varga, T. (2006): Forest as a life-museum. 'Our environmental the forest'
Further vocational training course, Paks

Varga, T. (2007): Forest in weekdays. Forest and museum pedagogy in the
Museum of Forestry. Conference for Museum Pedagogy Sopron.