

Zeitschrift: Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Forstwesen = Swiss forestry journal = Journal forestier suisse

Herausgeber: Schweizerischer Forstverein

Band: 156 (2005)

Heft: 8

Artikel: The interface between forest, landscape and society in a globalizing world : views and reflections on the occasion of the retirement of professor Franz Schmithüsen

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-1098056>

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The Interface Between Forest, Landscape and Society in a Globalizing World – Views and Reflections on the Occasion of the Retirement of Professor Franz Schmithüsen

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Keywords: Biographica. FDK 902.11

Introduction

In a period of transition from the industrial to the postindustrial age, we are encountering fundamental changes in many societal, technological, and scientific systems. These changes have a considerable impact on forestry, agriculture, and other branches of engineering. Pressures of economic development, population growth, and more rational energy use challenge the sustainability of forest and forest values as never before in human history. The recent integration of the Department of Forest Sciences into the Department of Environmental Sciences at ETH Zurich (2004), as well as similar transformations at other universities, are indicative of the fact that forest sciences have become increasingly incorporated into larger spatial systems and broader economic, political, social, and scientific contexts. Franz Schmithüsen has actively promoted the innovation of forest sciences to a modern, contemporary, and advanced type of science by crossing disciplinary boundaries and creating synergies between different societal, natural, technological, and scientific systems. His worldview is not emerging only from scientific views and insights, but is also founded on his broad experiences as forest manager, government servant, teacher at professional schools, and as an international consultant for international and bilateral agencies.

Science in Transition: From Forest via Landscape to Human Environment Systems

Born just at the beginning of World War II and living for four and a half decades in Germany, Franz Schmithüsen witnessed the impacts of a terrible war during his childhood as well as the difficult times of the succeeding Cold War period. He belongs to the generation that has strived for economic progress, social stability, democratic ruling, and peacefully living together on the European continent. However, the German «economic miracle», as well as similar developments in other countries, characteristic for the second half of the 20th century, brought new challenges and serious problems to be solved. To say it in the words of one of his colleagues, Dennis Le Master: «The West prospered, but unevenly, in part because of varying economic growth rates, the result of factors such as lack of infrastructure, inadequate banking and credit institutions, and poor or inconsistent economic policies. Production and consumption of goods and services grew in quantity and quality as did the rate of exploitation of natural resources. Widespread environmental degradation and pollution became matters of public controversy. International markets intertwined and evolved into a global economy» (see Le Master's contribution in this edition).

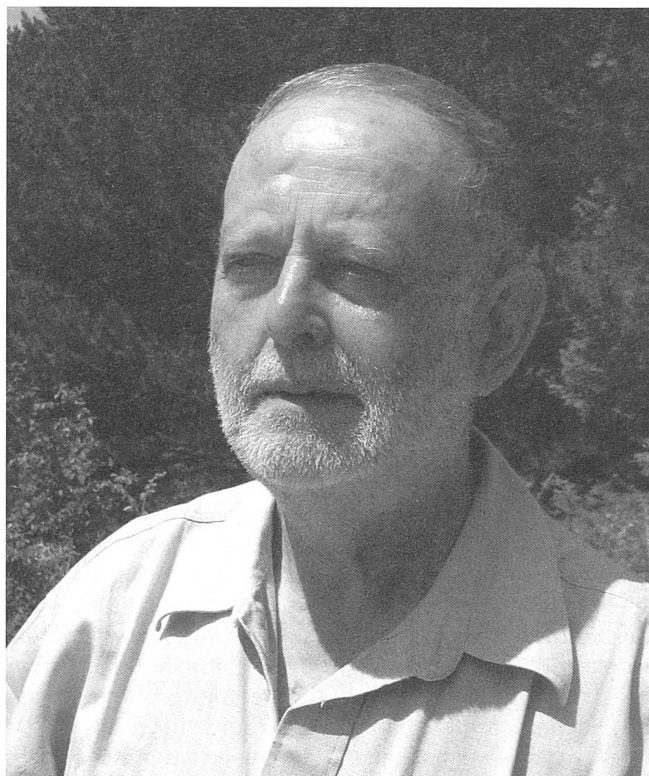
Clearly, during this time the complexity of socio-economic-political processes linked to forest management and environmental protection in a broad sense, as well as the progress of

the forest and wood processing sector grew immensely, and have become multilayered. Forest conservation and forestry development are today not only of national and local concern, but are a world wide issue. Schmithüsen envisaged these changes most clearly, and his view had a considerable international impact. This again has been most impressively stated by his U.S. colleague: «He encouraged the rest of us to see and appreciate the complexity, and he also encouraged our participation in these processes» (Le Master, *idem*). In this discourse of change new strategies had to be developed that allowed for an interdisciplinary view on the forest system. Against this background it was most naturally that he, together with his research group at ETH, embarked on research addressing the multiple and spatially differentiated uses of a renewable natural resources. The question of at what point human society creates, protects, or destroys forests has become the focus of the studies that have been undertaken during many years. He developed a sophisticated view of forest and landscape dynamics as the result of complex interactions between changing societal needs and values, new economic opportunities, and functioning political institutions and regulations.

In his recent address to the faculty for forest sciences and natural environment of the Aristotle University in Thessaloniki, he insisted on an economic perspective and stated that wood production and other economic goods and services would remain at the core of viable and effective forest management. He stressed the urgency of a research approach that combined business economics and analysed the financial viability and marketing opportunities of land managers and industrial entrepreneurs, with natural resource economics investigating and demonstrating positive and negative external effects in quantitative and monetary terms (*cf. SCHMITHÜSEN et al. 2003*). This approach is essential in order to understand the economic dimensions of all relevant economic and social outputs from forests and forestry, to define a balance between private and public responsibilities in managing the forest resource, and to reach a rational repartition in private and public investments.

Such a combination allows an assessment of the financial dimensions for maintaining the forest area, for ensuring multiple forest uses, for increasing the productivity of forest stands, and for increasing the value of wood production (*cf. e.g. SCHMIDHAUSER & SCHMITHÜSEN 1999*). At the same time, a combination between business and natural resource economics is also important for relying on market signals and instruments, for regulating private and public land tenure, for designing comprehensive and workable legislation, and for providing the floor for the implementation of effective and efficient governmental forest policies. In order to integrate sustainable forestry practices into the broader spatial scale of landscape protection and management, one has to understand the many possible economic interactions between forestry production of private goods and services on the one hand, and the needs of ensuring public interests (respectively public goods) from forests on the other hand.

Altogether, his professional and academic activities have focused on the dynamically changing relationships between forest, landscape, and society. His interests combine empirical analysis focusing on concrete experiences related to a given space and to a given time with the aim to better understand the prevailing institutional conditions, the ongoing political and social processes, and the relevant actors involved. In investigating and managing such relationships he considered it necessary to look at the interface between alternative land uses at different spatial scales as well as to be aware of a continuous change, in particular with regard to economics, technology and science, as induced by the driving forces in society (SCHMITHÜSEN 2004). His broad multi- and interdisciplinary approach to Forest Sciences, but also the changing character of approaching forest systems, becomes obvious from his papers and books. They show his evolving understanding of forests and landscape as part of the broader context, and analyze the manifold interactions within human environment systems.



Where it All Came From

Franz Schmithüsen studied Forestry Sciences at the University of Freiburg, Germany, at the University of British Columbia, Canada, and at the ETH in Zurich. He graduated in 1964 as Dipl. Forstwirt (Forest Management) in Freiburg. He worked as an assistant at the Chair of Forest Business Economics at ETH Zurich (1966–1967) and received his doctoral degree in technical sciences under the guidance of Professor Hermann Tromp from the ETH Zurich in 1969. In 1970 he obtained a Diploma in Professional Pedagogy at the Institute of Higher Education, Stuttgart, Germany, and in 1975 completed his habilitation in forest economics and policy at the forestry faculty of the University in Freiburg. In 1984 he was elected full professor for forest policy and forest economics at the ETH Zurich. He carried this responsibility until his retirement in March of 2005. But this is only one side of Schmithüsen's professional career. Already during his Ph.D. studies, he combined theory and practice by receiving professional forestry training. Subsequently, he worked as a forester in the State Forest Administration of Baden-Württemberg. He was employed as a civil servant at the state forest office in Königsbronn and at the forest worker training center in Itzelberg (1969–1971); in the ministry of agriculture and environment in Stuttgart (1972–1974); as head of the state forest office in Geislingen (1978–1980); and as director of forests in the regional directorate in Stuttgart (1981–1984).

His academic and practical work experiences were supplemented by his activities in international development cooperation, which he has carried out over many years. His Ph.D. in forest concessions in tropical regions gave him a solid background in order to understand the urgent need to transfer knowledge and practical experience to the many countries

that had gained their independence. He started to work temporarily as a consultant for the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and for the World Bank at the beginning of the 1970s, and became a leading international expert in advising new forms of forest tenure such as modern timber concessions

and long term forest utilization contracts (SCHMITHÜSEN 1977, 1978). From 1975 to 1978 he was released from the forest service and engaged as a forestry specialist and a Senior Forest Institution Advisor at FAO headquarters in Rome. He continued to work regularly on short term assignments as a forestry advisor for a number of international and bilateral development organizations after returning to Germany and later as professor in Zurich.

To see the immense problems in the developing world and to be able to contribute to the growing efforts to establish legal, political, and professional frameworks has certainly shaped his thinking and attitudes. He learned to see the problems that we have to address in relation to the magnitude of the tasks that have to be accomplished in the tropics

and sub-tropics in protecting forests and nature, fostering sustainable forestry, establishing viable wood processing industries; and in establishing the fundamentals for education, training, and research. It is worthwhile to mention that his professional approach cannot be understood without his family background. His father, Josef Schmithüsen, was a geographer and scholar in the tradition of Alexander von Humboldt. Josef developed a modern, methodology-driven systemic but holistic view on the geographical systems, which allowed the understanding of the relationship between the general and the specific (SCHMITHÜSEN 1976). His mother, Franziska Schmithüsen, stimulated his interest in history, culture, and human behavior at an early age. She insisted that her eight children learned to speak foreign languages and became able to communicate in a world in which people need to talk to each other.

The Stage ETH

As head of the Professorship Forest Policy and Forest Economics at ETH Zurich, Franz Schmithüsen built on the concepts of Victor Dieterich, Hermann Tromp, and Bernhard Bittig, who had looked at forests from distinct socio-economic and political perspectives and considered them as complex functional systems providing multiple goods and services to society. He enlarged this concept in at least three directions: the first, and probably most visible change, consisted in strengthening – both in teaching and research – the international aspects and relations of forest conservation and forest management (cf. e.g. SCHMITHÜSEN & SIEGEL 1997; CIRELLI & SCHMITHÜSEN 2000; SCHMITHÜSEN 2000; GALLARDO & SCHMITHÜSEN 2005). A second characteristic was his consequent and strong cooperation with scientists from the social sciences (cf. e.g. SCHMITHÜSEN & DUHR 1993; SCHMITHÜSEN 1996; SCHMITHÜSEN *et al.* 1997; SEELAND & SCHMITHÜSEN 1997; SCHMITHÜSEN & ZIMMERMANN 2000). This co-

operation was not limited within his own professorship but included other departments of ETH as well as the collaboration with universities in Switzerland and abroad. A third extension took place in the field research and teaching application. At the end of the eighties he began to shift his focus from forest policy and forest economics to forest, nature, and landscape policy, law, economics, and sociology (cf. e.g. SCHMIDHAUSER *et al.* 1993; SCHMITHÜSEN *et al.* 2000; SCHMITHÜSEN & WILD-ECK 2000). The efforts were based on his conviction that these changes were necessary in order to make useful contributions for society in general and for the forest community in particular.

International aspects, a multi-, inter-, and trans-disciplinary approach, and a view beyond the edge of the forest, were qualities that students extremely appreciated. A large number of semester theses in forest and nature conservation law, approximately 200 diploma theses, and several Ph.D. theses, have been guided by Schmithüsen and his collaborators, and are an expression of the students' esteem for his border-crossing approach. With regard to the scientific activities of the professorship, he maintained the hard core domains forest policy, forest law and forest business economics, and successfully launched new initiatives with regard to socio-empirical, cultural, and resource economics research. After discussing with his collaborators he signed on as project leader for a considerable number of research projects funded by external national and international sources. The clients ranged from the City of Zurich and the Federal Directorate of Forests to the European Union and FAO, and from an evaluation of financing forest management in Switzerland to the advancement of tropical forest research. The geographically, topically, and disciplinary broad field of research activities have been recognized by his membership in numerous research institutions, scientific commissions, evaluation and reviewing committees, and expert groups. As an acknowledgement of his contributions to the European and international scientific forest community he was elected a corresponding member of the Italian Forest Sciences Academy, honorary member of IUFRO, and invited to give one of the yearly Pinchot lectures in the United States. Recently, he has received honorary doctorates from the faculty of forestry and natural environment from Aristotle University in Thessaloniki and from the faculty of forestry and environment of the Czech University of Agriculture in Prague.

Besides his research and teaching he assumed various responsibilities within the institutions of ETH. He was head of the Forest and Wood Research Institute (1987–1989), head of the Department of Forest and Wood Research (1990–1994), and deputy head of the Department of Forest Sciences (1999–2001). On an interdepartmental level he became one of the driving forces for creating the new Department of Environmental Sciences and co-founder of the Institute for Human-Environment Systems (HES). As one of the first three members of a Presidential Steering Committee (2000–2003) he contributed to the proposals for forming a Center for Environment and Natural Resources, and was involved at an early stage in what has now become ETH's new School Domain «Earth, Environment, and Natural Resources» (S-ENETH). During this process he contributed in particular in designing a new quality of cooperation between the applied natural sciences and the socio-economic sciences in the large sense. At the level of the ETH Zurich he chaired as Delegate of the President for 15 years (1990–2004) selection committees for the election of new professors.

What Has Not Yet Been Said

Schmithüsen's strong, multifaceted personality made him a scholar that looked far beyond his own disciplinary boundari-

es. He was literate in humanities, interested in arts, and curious to know other countries and regions of the world in order to understand the different modes and cultures that determine the life of people. However, if these are qualities that may be expected from a university professor one should also add that he unequivocally incorporated a forester, down to earth, rooted to the soil, and practicing the professional habits and traditions. One of the reasons for his successful work at the ETH was his constructive, open-minded, and respectful manner to meet people and to find solutions for any kind of problem. These qualities made collaboration with him productive, efficient, and pleasant, whether as a co-leader of the Institute HES, or as a member of the numerous committees and working groups in which he participated. For the collaborators of his professorship, «management by Schmithüsen» meant to set the frame, to indicate the direction, and to let them then have the freedom to develop their own ideas, define the particular research issues, choose an appropriate and effective methodology, and accomplish the work. It also meant to him to encourage and support each of the collaborators and to face them with trust, fairness, respect, and humanity. Thanks to his knowledge of the international networks and his openness for other disciplines he was able to provide them with new ideas and inputs, which formed the basis for many of their research and educational projects. There is no doubt that he will continue some of his manifold scientific, consulting, and cultural activities after his retirement as teacher and researcher at the ETH. We wish him and his wife Françoise good health, which is indispensable to finalize all the still current or envisaged projects and plans.

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