

Time to get a joint grip on Nordic science communication

The Nordic–Baltic countries have a common story to tell about their sustainable forestry, a story that needs to be told particularly to policy makers from other parts of Europe.

But how can this story be told, and to whom? This was one of the points discussed when leading forest research communicators from the Nordic and Baltic countries met for a two-day workshop outside Uppsala, Sweden in October 2016.

The workshop did not end up with a definitive suggestion, but all participants agreed that combined forces can do more than individual efforts. A joint news feed assembling popular research articles from each

university and institute is one way. The news feed could be disseminated via social media and on joint websites such as NBForest.info. A prerequisite for a comprehensive stream of research information is that enough popular science is published in English. Here, we all have a lesson to learn since most popular communication today is directed to a national audience.

Another aim of the workshop was to share experiences, tips and tricks for the most efficient ways of communicating with different target groups. Communicators from Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Estonia described their growing use of new channels such as social media, videos, blogs and story telling, besides regular press releases and popular summaries on websites. Some of the tips and tricks are listed here.

The EU Parliament, one key target for facts about sustainable forestry in the Nordic and Baltic countries.

Photo: Cedric Puisney, CC licence.



Researchers can be prompted to communicate more

Writing courses have proved to be successful. *Cathrine Glosli* at NMBU described how these courses had resulted in some researchers becoming very efficient communicators. She had also found that the reluctance to blog is lower than that to produce an article for a news magazine. Many researchers are afraid of having their name and face in a newspaper article, but media training can help.

Q&A – a good way to interact

Several of the presentations highlighted the role of communicating with the public and professionals through question and answer services. *Kjell Suadicani* and *Iben Margrete Thomsen* have seen how such Q&A services draw attention and attract many visitors to the website. About 10-20 questions are sent to the service each month.

Similar services are used in many institutes. *Gunilla Häggström*, Skogssverige.se, coordinates the “question box” to which member of the public can send questions to be answered by experts. In Sweden, journalists can use Expert Answer, a service delivered cooperatively by all universities and a number of research institutes.



"All our results are now available on the web in an easy-to-read format". Erik Viklund from the Swedish institute Skogforsk describes the focus on digital communication. Photo Mats Hannerz.

“Who will read if they can watch?”
 All presenters had experienced a growing focus on videos. *Kairit Prits*, head of communication at the Estonian University of Life Sciences, has a set of 3-minute and sometimes 100-second videos presenting research to the public and potential students. “*Who will read if they can watch?*” she asked, particularly with young students in mind. But she also admits the challenge of simplifying science. The researchers at EMU are forced to summarise their research “*in words so simple that their grandmother can understand*”.

Say it in English as well
 Most popular articles and news on the institutes’ websites are written in a domestic language, where most of the target groups are. Very few press releases are targeted at the international audience. This is a challenge for a joint project aiming to reach outside the Nordic region. The question of translating more news into English (and other relevant languages) is a strategic question for each of the organisations. SNS can play a role to promote more international outreach.

Journalists ask for more stories
Bengt Ek, chief editor of the magazine *Skogen*, emphasised the need to focus on the receiver rather than the sender in university news. He encouraged the scientists and communicators to send out news, and also describe new findings. Organisational news and events are usually less interesting, but people and new research results are more interesting. Magazines always need more material; they also want short stories.

Popularised research, more to do
 Although many universities disseminate many of their findings in a popular form, only a small share is “translated” for non-experts and released as news or popularized articles.
 One organisation that has closed this gap completely is Skogforsk. *Erik Viklund* presented the current strategy to publish all of the scientific and technical reports in short format articles in a Knowledge Bank on the web. The bank is growing with almost an article per day.

"Be creative and use the opportunity". Cathrine Glosli from Norwegian University of Life Sciences told how Valentines Day was used to sell in a story when fungi and algae meet in lichens. Photo Mats Hannerz.



Shortcuts

Finland: Diverse forests save money

Thirty million trees and 8,737 tree species were included in a global analysis of biodiversity. Published in *Science*, it showed that the abundance of tree species increases the quantity of biomass output, as well as preserving biodiversity. The researchers believe that productivity losses due to species extinction in a forest will cost 500 billion dollars per year globally. The financial benefits of forest biodiversity seem to be more than double the costs of biodiversity conservation. Researchers from Luke took part in the network of scientists behind the report.

Source Luke, Mixed forests maintain biodiversity.

Sweden: Predators in man-made landscapes

Large carnivores such as wolves, lynx and/or brown bears have permanent populations in most European countries. But what are their effects on the ecosystem? A review article in *Proceedings of the Royal Society B* concludes that the effects will be rather different from those found in natural landscapes, such as Yellowstone National Park. The European landscape is strongly modified by man, who is part of these ecosystems. Research on large carnivores must therefore consider the human impact from e.g. forestry and hunting. SLU-researchers took part in the study.

Source SLU, Paws without claws? Effects of carnivore comeback in European anthropogenic landscapes

Norway: Finding exotic trees by satellite

Norwegian authorities regard the spread of introduced tree species as a problem. Some of the invasive species are on the official “black list”. It is time consuming to find the trees with field surveys, but now researchers at NMBU have used remote sensing to identify exotic spruce species. The project has identified alien species such as Sitka spruce in Vestland, Nordland and Troms, and also the native Norway spruce when it is growing outside its natural range in northern Norway.

Source NMBU, Finner fremmede treslag med satellitt