

Sustainability - a fancy and commercially-oriented word or a business commitment to Nature

Celso Foelkel: – Director - Celsius Degree, foelkel@via-rs.net

Abstract:

Today, it is being very simple to state that a business is sustainable - there are no demands for proofs or legal certifications. Everything has a volunteer level. Nobody receives penalties for saying one thing that may be not true. It seems that any single forest-based and pulp/paper company in the world really believes that either its forestry and industrial operations are sustainable. And most of them state this very proudly in the company website, in the sustainability report, etc. The word sustainability has acquired a synonymous of marketing. Good and evil companies in the same bag. Everybody self-proclaiming to be sustainable. It is curious and intriguing this fact: sustainability should be seen as a result of actions, attitudes, behaviors, strategies, policies, long-term results, commitments, partnerships, certifications, ecolabels, etc. And validated by the interested parties, and not by the own actors in a specific business.

I understand that a great number of the forest sector companies that have achieved the forest certification label have the belief that they have reached the top of the sustainability requirements. However, this was just one step in a long way to be sustainable.

Sustainability should be recognized and validated by reliable third parties from the society, including important interested parties, no matter whether or not they have conflicting positions with regard the issues being evaluated. It is the case for the forest management FSC certification, as example.

I personally understand that the pulp and paper sector has gained enormous improvements in the environmental performance in the past two decades, but there is still a long road to be paved to reach the status of being "environmentally friendly". There are important homework's to be done, not by single companies individually, but for the sector as a whole. One is very critical: all issues that receive question-marks from society should be carefully evaluated and clarified, as examples: consumption of water and energy by pulp/paper mills, generation of toxic compounds and discharge of them through effluents, generation of odor, exports of nutrients from forest soils, hydrological balances of the forest plantations, etc.

Pulp and paper industry is a wonderful and magnificent industrial activity. It may reach an outstanding position in terms of sustainability in the future to come. Paper is a biomass product, renewable, recovered, recycled, reusable and loved by users.

This industry should be motivated to work as a team to be better ecoefficient, to develop "THE best environmental practices", to reduce wastes and the use of natural resources. A list of suggestions will be provided along the paper as guidelines to a real sustainable pulp and paper industry.