

THE EVOLUTION OF FOREST CERTIFICATION: A SHORT REVIEW

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Abstract: *The paper presents the main aspects regarding the evolution of forest certification, both at international and national level. Starting with 1993, forest certification has become an important modality to promote sustainable forest management and an important market instrument, being based on performance standards. In Romania, only FSC scheme is implemented, more than 700,000 ha of state and non-state forests being certified, whilst 85 companies got their operations CoC certified.*

Key words: *forest certification, FSC scheme, PEFC scheme, forest products, market.*

1. Introduction

In general, certification represents the recognition of the performances in the activity of an organization or a company, and of the quality of the products and services provided. The International Standardization Organization (ISO), which has been active ever since 1947 gathers together standardization institutions from over 140 countries, and elaborated over 15,000 standards, including those related to the environment (ISO series 14000).

The certification schemes can be based on system standards or performance standards. A system standard specifies the fact that a company operates according to a management system based on quality performances, environmental and social ones [6]. ISO 14000 series comprises system standards which consider the environmental aspects and the impact of certain activities on the environment, considering the need to implement environmental policies and principles [13].

The performance standards are characteristic to a certain field of activity, dealing with aspects which are not regulated by ISO. For example, in forestry, the performance is assessed based on an evaluation of the forest management in a certain management unit considering the fulfillment of several indicators referring to forest production, biodiversity conservation, water protection, utilization of chemical substances, etc.

Forest management certification (frequently called “*forest certification*”) is complementary to ISO certification, confirming the quality of forest management, providing market incentives, and supporting the sale of forest products resulting from forests managed sustainably, based on a set of principles and criteria. Apart from forest management certification, another certification scheme based on performance standards refers to chain of custody (CoC) certification. It confirms the existence of the possibility to trace the certified wood from the forest

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unit to the end user in all the phases of its processing and transport, through labeling and physical separation from the uncertified wood; thus the buyer is able to identify the origin of wood product. By knowing the wood origin (having a chain of custody or traceability system in place), the public and end consumers could contribute to the promotion of sustainable management of the forest wherefrom the wood is originating [8].

Forest certification is considered a market instrument and a voluntary process which promote good forest management [4]. It can be also seen as a mechanism which regulates the trade with wood products in order to protect wood resources and to improve forest management. It represents a useful tool to support sustainable forest management [7].

Forest certification is considered a non-regulatory instrument, which provides market rewards for good forest management, stimulates the sustainable management of forests and supports the involvement of all stakeholders in the planning and implementation of forest management [1].

2. Origins

In 1992, 115 heads of states and (for the first time) representatives of the non-governmental organizations (NGOs) took part in the United Nations Conference focusing on environment and development, held in Rio de Janeiro [8]. In this conference, the need for environment protection was widely admitted and the concept of international rights in the field of environment was strongly promoted. The Rio Declaration contains 27 principles (the well-known Agenda 21), which provides the basis of action, the objectives and the implementation methods regarding the socio-economic dimension,

conservation and management of natural resources.

The idea of forest certification appeared as a consequence of the International Tropical Timber Organisation (ITTO) failure to combat massive forest cutting. As the trade of tropical wood was threatened, a tracking mechanism for the origin of the wood was developed [2].

In 1993, the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) was established as an independent, non-profit and non-governmental organisation aiming at accrediting the forest certification bodies. In the same year, the first certificates for forest management were issued in Mexico, as well as certificates for chain of custody (in USA). In the following year, FSC established its statute, and the founding members approved the certification principles and criteria. Five years later, the first competing certification scheme appeared, strongly supported by the European forest owners: the Pan European Forest Certification (PEFC) scheme.

The initial purpose of the forest certification was to offer incentives for those producers who practice a good forest management [2]. It was seen as one of the most important progressive mechanisms in forestry, contributing to the sustainable management of forests and increasing the level of confidence between producers and buyers [2].

3. Evolution of Forest Certification

Whilst the certification process started relatively slowly, after 1997 the area of certified forests increased rapidly, especially in Europe. The threshold of 10 million ha of FSC certified forest was reached in 1998 [10]. In 2000, the FSC certified forest area reached 22,197,041 hectares, and the number of chain of custody certificates was 1,287 (in 47 countries – [10]). The interest for

certification increased constantly, and in 2005, the FSC certified forests amounted to 67,159,664 hectares, whilst the number of chain of custody certificates was 4,246 in 73 countries.

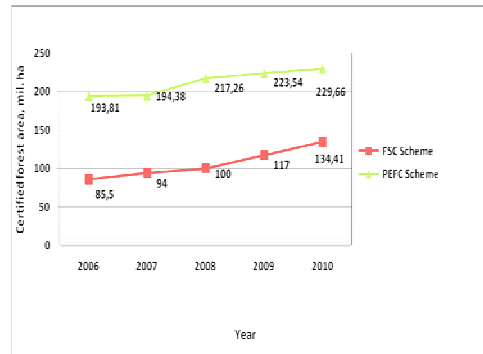


Fig. 1. *The evolution of certified forest area in the world between 2006 and 2010 (source of data: [10, 11])*

In 2008, FSC certified area reached 100 million hectares (fig. 1), and in December the same year new FSC working groups were established in Norway, Honduras and Nepal [10].

The evolution of the other certification scheme (PEFC) was also an ascending one, being a scheme which endorses the national certification schemes of forest certification. PEFC was established by the national organizations from 11 countries, strongly supported by the forest owners. The certification schemes from Scandinavian countries, Germany and Austria were among the first PEFC endorsed ones [11].

In 2004, Australia and Chile became the first countries outside Europe with national certification schemes endorsed by PEFC. One year later, PEFC became the scheme with the largest area of certified forests (over 180 million hectares), as the national Canadian certification standard was endorsed. The PEFC certified area reached 187,680,627 hectares in 2005, Canada,

Finland and United States hosting over 60% of the total certified area [11]. It should be also mentioned that the PEFC scheme changed its name to Programme for Endorsement Forest Certification Schemes, as its coverage exceeded the initial European boundaries.

In 2008, PEFC certified area exceeded 200 million hectares (fig. 1), and 2009 brought along the endorsement of the national certification schemes in countries like Malaysia and [11]. The number of CoC certificates increased constantly: 2,362 certificates in 2005; 4,420 certificates in 2008 and 7,688 certificates in 2010 [11].

4. Situation of Forest Certification in early 2012

On 15th February 2012, the reported FSC certified area was 149.82 million hectares [10], Europe and North America owning over 80% of the certified forests (fig. 2).

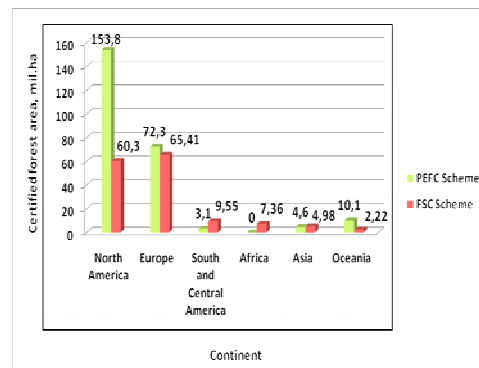


Fig.2. *Continental distribution of certified forest area (February 2012 – source of data: [10, 11])*

In Europe, large areas of certified forests are found in: Sweden – 11,487,992 hectares; Russia – 29,332,208 hectares (including the Asian part); Poland – 6,966,892 hectares; Belarus – 2,621,425 hectares; Croatia – 2,018,987 hectares;

Great Britain – 1,581,027 hectares; Ukraine – 1,211,156 hectares; Estonia – 1,086,959 hectares; Lithuania – 1,053,188 hectares [10]. 1,078 forest management certificates were issued in 80 countries. The largest number of certificates was awarded for private forests (619), followed by public forests (275), whilst the rest of the certificates were issued for forests owned by some communities, governments, indigenous populations, etc. [10].

At the beginning of 2012, the total number of FSC CoC certificates was 21,879 distributed in 106 countries (fig. 3). The largest numbers of certificates were awarded in United States – 3,714; Great Britain – 2,206; Germany – 1,667; China – 1,827; Japan – 1,130; Holland – 1,221; Italy – 1,111; Canada – 1,016 [10].

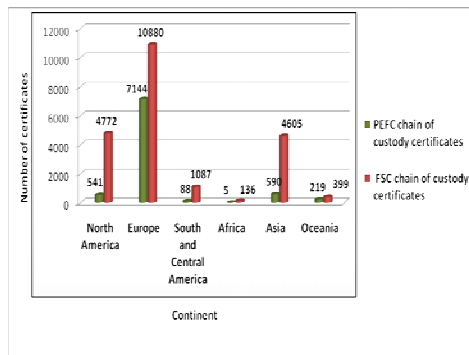


Fig.3. *Continental distribution of CoC certificates (January 2012 – source of data: [10,11])*

The PEFC certified forest area in early 2012 reached 243.9 million hectares [11], over 60% being found in North America (Canada and USA) (fig. 2). Large areas of PEFC certified forests are also found in Finland (20.78 mill. ha), Australia (10.06 mill. ha), Norway (9.11 mill. ha), Sweden (8.39 mill. ha), Belarus (7.78 mill. ha), Germany (7.39 mill. ha), France (5.10 mill. ha) [11].

At the beginning of 2012, the total number of PEFC CoC certificates was 8,587 [11]. The biggest number of certificates was awarded in Europe (7,144). In North America only 541 CoC certificates were issued, although this continent has the largest certified area of forests (fig. 3). Most CoC certificates are in France (1,959), United Kingdom (1,319), Germany (1,243), Italy (444), Spain (419), Holland (369), Austria (362), Belgium (223) and Japan (209) [11].

5. Forest Certification in Romania

After several initiatives regarding forest certification (the first international seminar on forest certification for Romanian state forest managers held in mid-1998 in Poiana Brasov, several studies regarding CoC and forest management certification in some pilot forested areas, discussions about the establishment of a national working group etc.), the year 1999 represents a landmark for forest certification in Romania, as a National Working Group for Forest Certification was established. It gathered members grouped into three chambers: social, economic, and environmental. The main initial goal of this working group was to promote the certification of forest management and chain of custody among Romanian forest managers and business sector [9].

The Governmental Decision 1476/2002 represented a favourable background for the development of forest management and chain of custody certification. According to this governmental decision, the process of "forest certification" is defined as "the action according to which, through internationally acknowledged mechanisms certificates which prove the sustainable management of forest in a certain territory are issued, based on internationally recognised standards in the field of forest

management” [12]. In the same governmental decision, the optional/voluntary character of the certification is stated, the process being initiated only on the request of forest owners or administrators, the cost being

supported by the National Forest Administration (for the state forests), by the local councils (for the forests owned by the administrative units) and by the owners (in the case of private forests).

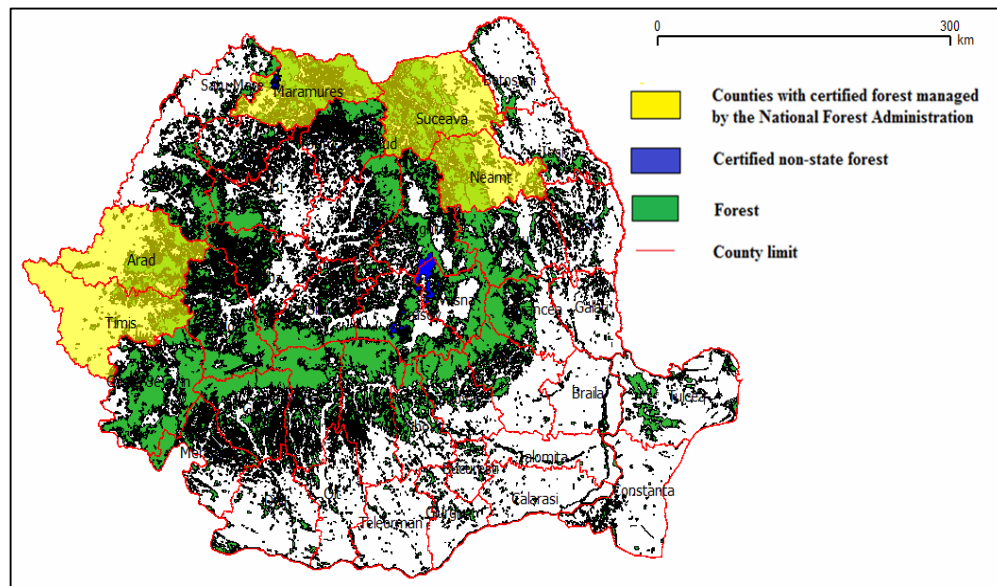


Fig. 4. Distribution of FSC certified forests (January 2012)

Thus, the legal background for forest certification being defined, the first FSC certificate for forest management was awarded in 2002 to Văratec and Târgu Neamț Forest Districts, part of the Vânători Neamț National Park.

The first FSC certified community forest was Năruja Forest District in 2005 [9]. By 2006 FSC certificates for almost one million hectares (966,589 ha) of forest had been issued, the vast majority of forest (949,390 ha) being managed by the National Forest Administration in eight counties: Arad, Argeș, Cluj, Dâmbovița, Hunedoara, Neamț, Suceava, and Timiș. Also, 29 companies were holding a CoC certificate in 2008.

At the beginning of 2012, the certified forest area in Romania was 717,055 hectares, of which 680,152.7 hectares state forests, and 36,902.3 hectares non-state forests (fig. 4) [10].

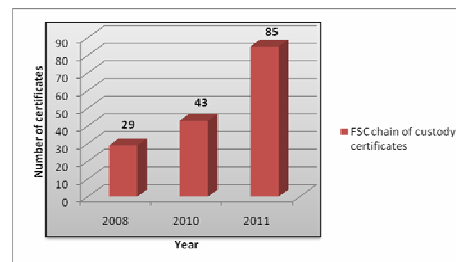


Fig.5. Increasing the number of CoC certificates (source of data:[10,11])

The market for FSC certified products in Romania has been constantly growing. An increasing number of wood processing and trade companies (fig.5) wish to certify the chain of custody, providing a trustful mechanism for wood traceability.

In early 2012, 85 companies carrying out different activities in forestry, wood processing and trade, including forest administration, primary processing, secondary processing, printing houses,

wood products trading, etc. were holding a CoC certificate [10].

These 85 locations of the forest operators are certified, their main activity being primary processing and secondary one stationery and printing (fig. 6).

The largest number of CoC certified companies are in Bucharest (11), followed by Maramureş (10), Braşov (9), Bacău (7), Harghita (5), Botoşani (5), etc.

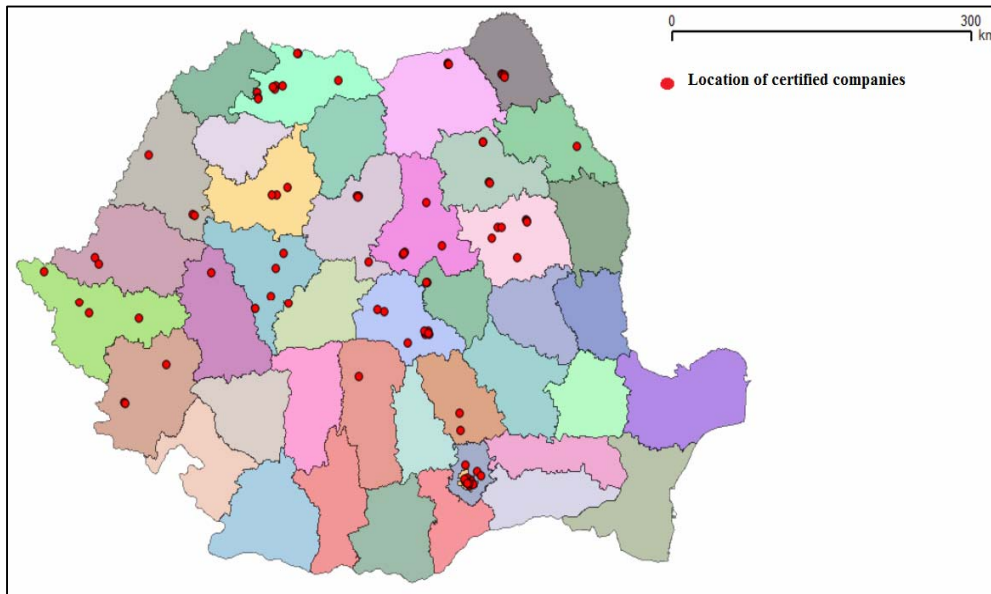


Fig.6. *Location of CoC certified companies in Romania*

6. Discussions

Both forest management certification and chain of custody certification represent a voluntary process, influenced especially by the market requirements, the need for international recognition of the quality of forest management, and the need for a consultative and transparent character of the forest management planning [1].

The market represents the main factor which influences the Romanian companies to certify their chain of custody, thus deter-

mining the forest owners/administrators to certify their forests. The direct cost of certification represents a problem for the small forest owners in Romania [5], thus the big owners having a competitive advantage in the certification process. The private European forestry contributed significantly to the establishment of the PEFC scheme, which endorses the national certification schemes, regardless of ownership [5]. In Romania, this scheme has made no progress, maybe justified by the lack of

initiative in developing national standards, which would consider the specific local/national ecological and ownership conditions [5].

The certification of forest management and chain of custody can be also seen as a way of communication with the consumer. The certification of the chain of custody offers to the consumer information about the origin of wood and the stages through which it passed [3]. It also represents the confirmation of the fact that the wood comes from well-managed forests, inviting the consumers to trust the adopted competitive management. The certification represents a credible means of transmitting to the public the message of supporting the sustainable forest management [3].

Forest management certification represents an instrument through which owners confirm (or improve) the best practices in conserving biodiversity. From a political perspective, the certification becomes a way of influencing the forest owners [3].

The certification can also be seen as a game of power and money. The non-governmental organizations play an important role in the development and adoption/promulgation of certain standards [3]. The pressure on the important Romanian exporters of wood and wood products influences the certification process as they play an important role in the wood trade, influencing the Romanian market and the fate of other economic operators in this field.

Presently, the end consumer demand for certified products in Romania is very low, whilst the commerce with certified products is mainly oriented towards Western Europe. One explanation might be that from the point of view of quality, the products are not different from the uncertified ones, and the Romanian consumers are not too interested about the proof that the forest wherefrom the wood

originated is well-managed. On the other hand, in the socio-economic context of the country, the bigger price of the certified product represents an impediment for the consumer, when buying a product, compared to the cheaper one of the same quality, which does not have the certification logo.

The cost of certification creates difficulties for small forest owners who cannot afford to invest in this process (especially when they are not in an association), both in the initial evaluation/assessment and the annual monitoring in the 5 year validity period of the certificate.

At the same time, the forest certification is part of the nowadays forestry reality. Designed initially as a means of stopping the illegal trade and rewarding good forest management, it slowly becomes more or less a requirement. The European Union established through a set of regulations (e.g. Regulation no. 955/2010) the obligation for the operators which introduce wood or wood products on the European market to implement a “due-diligence” system, applicable from 2013, very similar to the one of certification. The purpose of the “due-diligence” system is to prohibit the introduction of illegal wood on the market, to have a list of the providers and the merchandisers for a period of at least 5 years, having in mind the traceability of wood.

No matter if a wood product is certified or not, quality represents education, civilization and culture, as well as awareness of the need for a sustainable forest management.

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