



COST

As a Vehicle for Research Networking

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What is COST?

- “COST” stands for COoperation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research.
- The COST programme does not fund research, it facilitates networking amongst researchers (and also policy makers and practitioners).
- COST is organised in a large number of domains, of which “Forestry and Forest Products” is one – a very active one!



What is COST?

- COST is managed by the European Science Foundation on behalf of the European Commission.
- Funds come out of the EU research framework budget.

How does COST work?

- Actions start when a group of experts develop an idea into a project covering a specific area.
- The project is presented to the relevant technical sub-committee.
- Once approved (it may go back to the committee after revision) it is necessary for countries who wish to participate to sign a memorandum of understanding.

How does COST work?

- Each country appoints 1 or 2 management committee (MC) members who in turn appoint working group members
- The action is usually divided into 3 or more working groups (WG) representing different themes within the subject and each country is allowed 2 members per WG.
- The action is run by the MC

How does a COST action work?

- COST funds networking via WG meetings – this is where the activities happen.
- Sometimes single WG meetings take place or else the whole action meets in a big meeting, hosted by a particular country.
- For forestry, this also enables field visits to look at specific aspects on the ground in different countries.

How long does a COST action last?

- Typically, an action lasts 4 years.
- Year one is spent with members getting to know one another and preparing “country reports” – a base line of knowledge in the field from each country involved.
- Years 2 and 3 are spent working on the various themes.
- The final year concentrates on outputs.

What are the outputs from an action?

- Typically, there are several publications – country reports, papers from presentations made at meetings and a book presenting the results of the work aimed at practitioners and policy makers.
- There is also a website with various resources on it.
- There is often a research conference.
- The network itself is a very important result.

Example: COST E33

Forest Recreation and Nature Tourism

- This action covers a very important field for forestry.
- The action is multidisciplinary – foresters, landscape architects, rural development specialists, economists, statisticians, tourism experts.
- 24 countries involved.

COST E33

- The action started in Jan 2004 and lasts until Jan 2008.
- Three working groups:
 - 1. Values and benefits of forest recreation and nature tourism
 - 2. Supply and demand for forest recreation and nature tourism
 - 3. Planning, design and management of forest recreation and nature tourism.

COST E33

- Features:
 - Very multi-disciplinary – reflecting the current reality of forestry
 - Has a large female membership (compared with many forestry activities)
 - Vice-chair and all 3 WG chairs are women
 - Strong participation of younger researchers at PhD level
 - Includes researchers, policy people and practitioners.

COST E33

- Meetings held in Edinburgh (Nov 2004), Cyprus (April 2005) and next in Bavaria (Nov 2005 – next week).
- Meetings are themed – plantation forestry and access to private forests (Scotland), Southern European issues (Cyprus) and the Alpine chain (Bavaria).
- Invited experts also come to make presentations.



Scotland 2004



Cyprus, April 2005

Does work only happen at meetings?

- NO!
- Work mainly happens in between meetings, brought together and discussed at meetings.
- Therefore, staff time needs to be committed by partner institutions.
- COST only pays travel and subsistence!

What do institutions and researchers get out of COST?

- The network – knowing fellow researchers, discussing mutual issues, finding potential research partners.
- A springboard into research projects, eg FP6 and FP7.
- Links between research, policy and practice
- Building research capacity and skills of younger researchers (who can benefit from Short Term Scientific Missions).

What do institutions and researchers get out of COST?

- BUT!
- What you get out of participation in an action is in direct proportion to what you put in!
- There is no room for people who come to meetings but who do not offer anything!
- Thus there is a very “buzzy” atmosphere at meetings.

What do policy makers get out of COST?

- Policy makers can be part of the action and so they can interact directly with a large part of the scientific community working in a particular subject.
- Policy makers can input their priorities into the programme and help steer the outputs so that the scientific materials are of value to them.
- They can influence the general direction of research in the field directly with researchers.

What do practitioners get out of COST?

- Access to the research community who should be helping to solve practitioners' problems.
- Influence over the outputs so that eg books are aimed at practitioners.
- They can assist the development of the research agenda and ensure that research is relevant to their needs.

However...

- This year there are budget problems so:
- Fewer meetings can take place...
- Or smaller meetings...
- But people are still committed and we are working hard to make the money stretch as far as possible so as to maximise participation and to keep the momentum.
- We hope this is a short term problem...

To conclude

- COST is a great programme for networking,
- For sharing experience
- For collaborating with others
- For encouraging younger researchers
- For creativity
- For broadening experience.

So thanks to the COST organisation and to
ESF for running things efficiently...
Keep up the good work!

And thanks for your attention!

