

## **Tempus project strengthens inter-cultural dialogue among European and Russian foresters**

In line with societal development, forestry has been undergoing major changes. These changes call for a change of culture amongst forestry professionals, who increasingly have to ‘move out’ from their forests and engage in the public debate about prioritised forest products and services. Forestry in the Russian Federation has also been affected by this. Moreover, transformations in the legal, policy and administrative frameworks for forestry have complicated the daily work of Russian forestry professionals in forest management and industry even further. This has resulted in an urgent need for capacity building and continuing education.

The European Tempus programme is an important instrument for meeting educational and training needs in Russia and other parts of Eastern Europe. It funds cooperation projects in the areas of curriculum development and innovation, teacher training, university management, and structural reforms in higher education. Tempus places special emphasis on the mobility of academic and administrative staff from higher education institutions, both from European Union and partner countries.





*Project seminars held at Mari State Technical University aim to educate the region's foresters about current developments and approaches in forestry.*

Institutional EU Tempus project “Training, Networking and Capacity Building for Sustainable forestry in Povolgie” (IB\_JEP-26038-2005) was started at the outset of 2007. The project consortium comprises the University of Helsinki (Palmenia Centre for Continuing Education, Finland), Mari State Technical University (MarSTU, Russia), Dresden University of Technology (Germany), University of Padua (Italy), BOKU (Austria), Aristotle University of Thessaloniki (Greece), and woodSCAPE consult (Denmark). The project’s main objective is to strengthen institutional capacities of the forest sector of the Russian Federation, and the so-called Povolgie region in particular. The project focuses on developing the necessary conditions, methodologies, infrastructure and staff capacity at Mari State Technical University, with the help and expertise of EU partners.



***Professor Davide Pettenella from the University of Padua made the participants familiar with the concept of social corporate responsibility.***

The project retrains chief foresters from the forestry enterprises of the Privolzski Federal district and authorities of Federal Forestry Agencies. They will be made familiar with the state-of-art of sustainable forest management, also from an international perspective. The foresters will gain insight in the structural changes needed in forestry, so that the sector can remain successful. A considerable part of the project is devoted to the development of new courses, distance learning classes and development of a network of forestry enterprises in the region to ensure training continuity also after project completion.

The region’s forestry specialists will learn about international experiences with sustainable forest management. This will help them deal with the present transitions in the Russian forest sector, which could promote decentralization of management from Federal to regional level. New knowledge obtained through the project could help increase investments in the forest sector, develop effectiveness of forest management and enhance the dialogue between foresters and society at large.



### *Participants in the first project seminar*

At the time of writing, the first two of a series of training seminars were held at MarSTU. Project participants had the opportunity to meet and discuss with selected representatives of Povolgie forestry enterprises. Seminar participants came from different regions of Povolgie, namely Kirovskaya, Yaroslavskaaya, Ulyanovskaya and Pensenskaya oblasts, as well as from the republics of Mari El, Tatarstan, Mordovia and Chuvashia. They included college and university teachers, directors, and foresters and specialists from forestry enterprises and forestry ministries.

Seminar participants expressed their interest in some specific thematic areas for enhancing their knowledge and skills. These include timber production and silviculture, with topics such as determining of efficient allowable cut, use and processing of wood of different qualities, new technologies for afforestation and reforestation, and use of less valuable broadleaf tree species, and the field of forest protection, where topics of interests include the management of fires, pests and diseases. Other main fields of interest are forest economics and forest policy, with aspects such as market pricing of wood in the EU, decentralisation, and leasing of forest lands. Finally, the management of special forests, including protection forests, urban forests, university forests also has people's particular interest. Many of these topics were covered during the first two seminars. Foreign experts introduced, for example, topics such as lifelong learning in forestry, instruments of corporate social responsibility in the sector, use of simple sampling methods for forest inventories, service-oriented management, and communication and participation in urbanised forestry.



*Field trip to the forest enterprise of Mari El*

Participants recognised many of the presented issues from their own daily work and found several of the approaches and instruments presented very useful. Many of the challenges facing forestry today are very similar in Russia and the EU. Various ways to improve interaction with society, for example and to raise the profile of forestry in the region were taken to heart. Apart from providing important knowledge transfer, the first seminars succeeded in establishing a network of forestry professionals and teachers in the region. The first 'batch' of retrained foresters will have an opportunity to experience sustainable forest management abroad through study trips to EU countries participating in the project. Activities like this will enhance the inter-cultural dialogue for the benefit of sustainable forestry in Europe.