The Value of FSC to Europe's Public Forests

**"Social representation of the forest
at a time of global changes"**

Prague, 11 October 2019

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With the support of
the Walloon Minister for forests

Postulate
- Resistance/opposition to cutting trees by the general public
- Increasing risk/trend of/towards **"untouched" forest**

Global climate strike, 20.9.2019, The Guardian

**Intentional fire
in a forestry company,
France,
December 2018**

USA, August 2019

**"Fertile disobedience is living in the forest with the forest"
France, June 2019**

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The concept of social representation

Definitions

- « A social representation is an **organized set of information**, opinions, attitudes and beliefs about a particular object » (Abric 2003)
- « A form of **knowledge**, **socially elaborated and shared**, with a practical aim and **contributing to the construction of a reality common to a social group** » (Jodelet 1989)

Important to know…

- Social representations are mainly **transmitted by communication**
- Social representations **guide our behaviors**

Farcy, C., Nail, S., Baudry, O., Granet, A.-M., Lahssini, S., Matagne, J., Rametsteiner, E., 2018. Toward social representation of forest in urbanized societies. In: Farcy, C., et al., (Eds.), Forestry in the Midst of Global Change. Taylor and Francis Group / CRC Press.

Evolution of social representations of the forest

> **Hear and understand what is happening outside the sector**

Evolution of social representations of the forest

Common to all eras (unconscious mythology)

- Space loaded with **divine powers**, place of **mystery** and revelation
- In the forest, we get **lost**, we find the/our way, we find ourselves
- To access it, you need to **be strong** :
  - Hunter, priest, king or … brigand
- **Inhospitable** and threatening space that is only gone across
- **Initiatory** space

The forest evoking myths and legends,
Cahiers of the Environment, INRA

De Smedt, T., Fastrez, P., Matagne, J., Farcy, C., 2016. Les recommandations du programme en matière de communication. In: Dereix, C., Farcy, C., Lormant, F., (Eds.), Forêt et Communication. Héritage, représentations et défis, L'Harmattan, Paris, 381-391.

Evolution of social representations of the forest

Dominant long-time rooted image

- Traditional rural society, **closed on its one**, socially and culturally homogenous
- Forest being a **distant scenery**, aside, self-centered, operating independently of the society
- The forester being the *symbolic* **owner** of the forest, managing its destiny

Map of the Saint-Germain-en-Laye forest (early 18th century (National Archives, Paris)
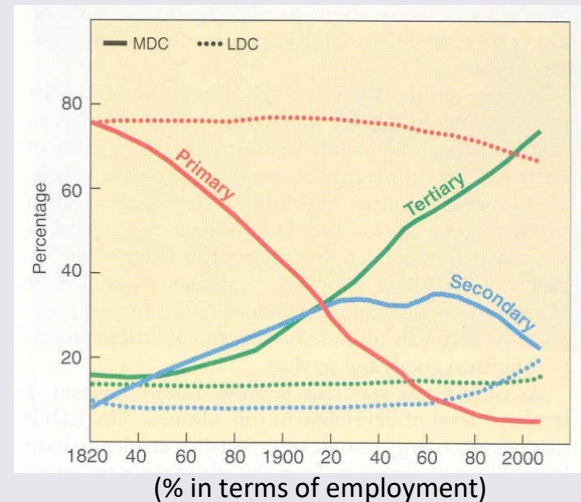
Evolution of social representations of the forest

Today

Urbanization

1900 | 2 out of every 10 people lived in an urban area
1990 | 4 out of every 10 people lived in an urban area
2010 | 5 out of every 10 people lived in an urban area
2030 | 6 out of every 10 people will live in an urban area
2050 | 7 out of every 10 people will live in an urban area

Defined by UN HABITAT as a city with a population of more than 10 million
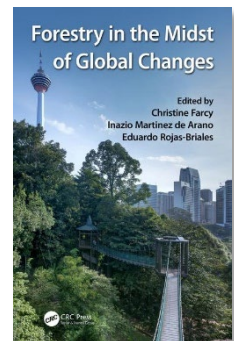
Tertiarization of the economy

(% in terms of employment)

Globalization

- *Virtual*
- *Immaterial*
- *Distant*

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Evolution of social representations of the forest

Today for the general public

- Forest represents the rarity of a precious good potentially threatened by human activities, taboo territory, preserved from the aggressions of modern life

- Many are struggling to know **who owns** the forest

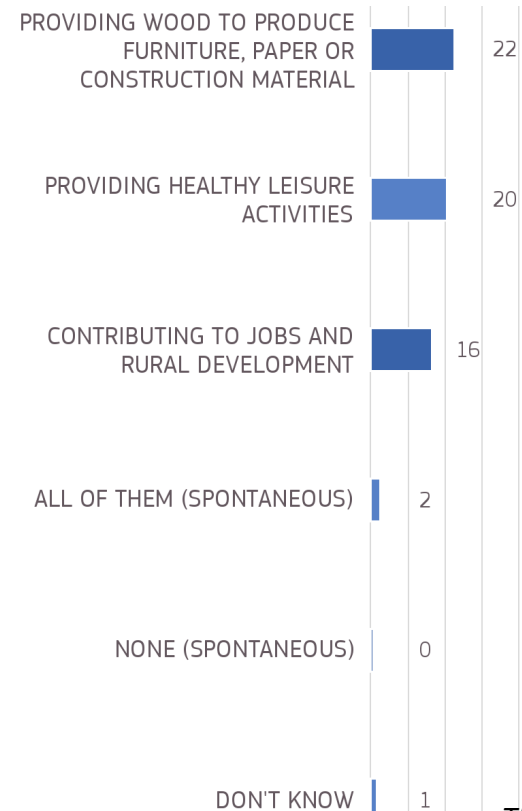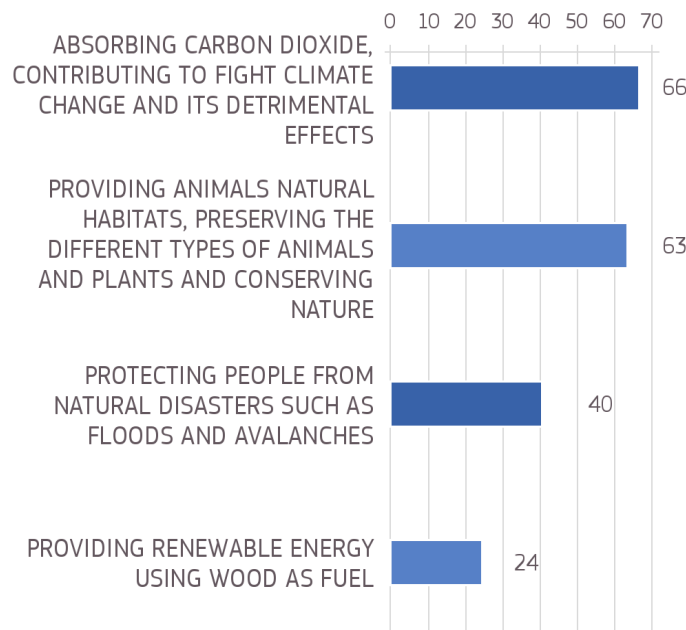- The main function of the forest is ecological

Eurobarometer CAP

http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/survey/index_en.htm

QC13 What do you think are the most important benefits provided by forests? (MAX. 3 ANSWERS)
(% – EU)

28 Members states of the EU, 27 822 people interviewed (face to face), October 2015

ABSORBING CARBON DIOXIDE, CONTRIBUTING TO FIGHT CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS DETRIMENTAL EFFECTS — 66

PROVIDING ANIMALS NATURAL HABITATS, PRESERVING THE DIFFERENT TYPES OF ANIMALS AND PLANTS AND CONSERVING NATURE — 63

PROTECTING PEOPLE FROM NATURAL DISASTERS SUCH AS FLOODS AND AVALANCHES — 40

PROVIDING RENEWABLE ENERGY USING WOOD AS FUEL — 24

PROVIDING WOOD TO PRODUCE FURNITURE, PAPER OR CONSTRUCTION MATERIAL — 22

PROVIDING HEALTHY LEISURE ACTIVITIES — 20

CONTRIBUTING TO JOBS AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT — 16

ALL OF THEM (SPONTANEOUS) — 2

NONE (SPONTANEOUS) — 0

DON'T KNOW — 1

CE, 2016. Europeans, the agriculture and the common agricultural policy

TNS Opinion, 2016

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Eurobarometer CAP

Top 1/country

Protecting people from floods & avalanches

Providing renewable energy

Providing wood

Absorbing CO_2

Providing habitats, preserving biodiversity, conserving nature

Jobs and RD

Providing healthy leisure activities

TNS Opinion, 2016

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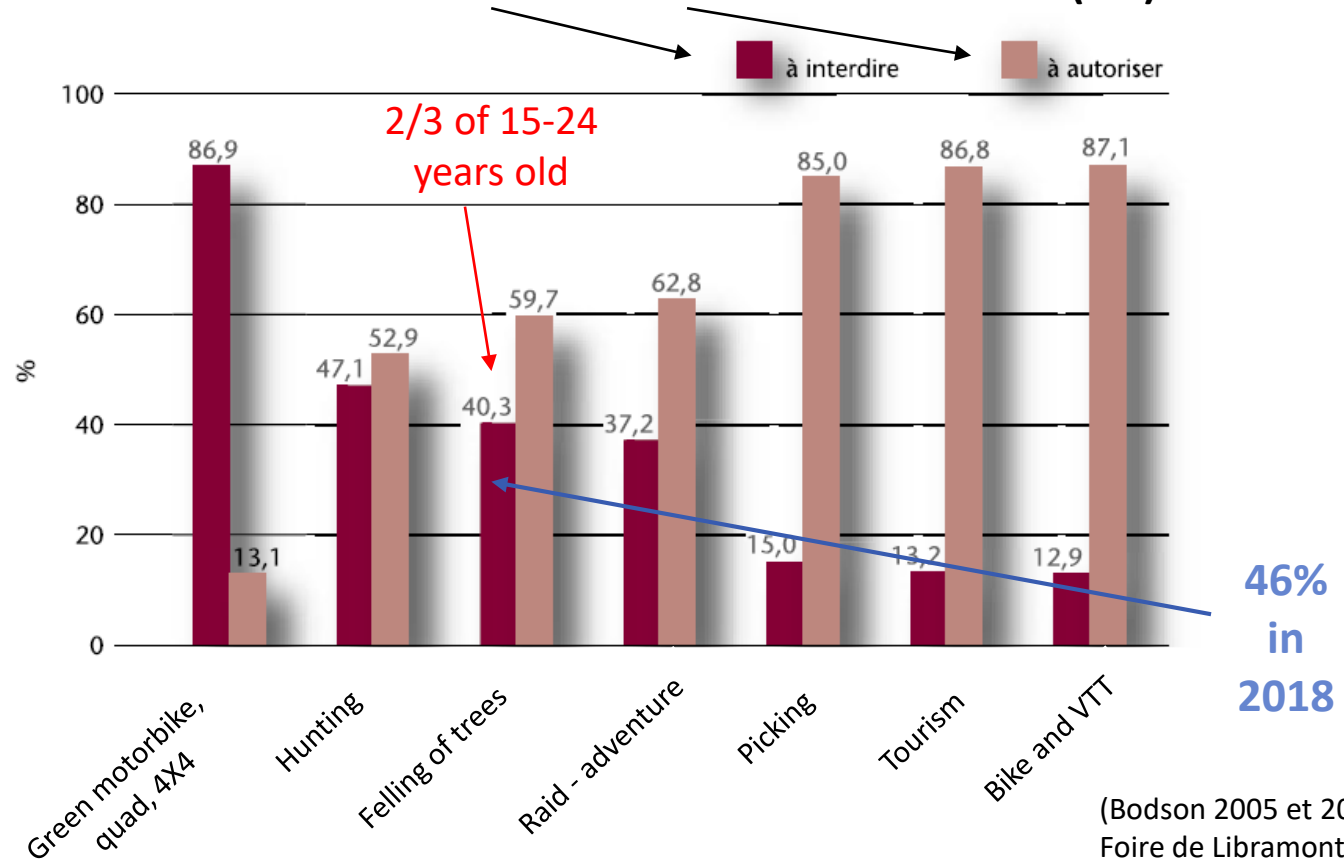# Evolution of social representations of the forest

Today for the general public

- Forest represents the rarity of a precious good potentially threatened by human activities, taboo territory, preserved from the aggressions of modern life

- Many are struggling to know **who owns** the forest

- The main function of the forest is ecological

- The forest became a sensitive subject: many sentimental meanings and emotional relationship

- A large part is against cutting down/killing trees, an act saw as "**killing the forest**"

"Understand perceptions, uses and meanings of the forest in 2005 " (Wallonia and Brussels 1038 people)

Activities to ban or allow in the forest - 2005 (list)

à interdire   à autoriser

2/3 of 15-24 years old

86,9   13,1   47,1   52,9   40,3   59,7   37,2   62,8   15,0   85,0   13,2   86,8   12,9   87,1

100
80
60
40
20
0

%

Green motorbike, quad, 4X4   Hunting   Felling of trees   Raid - adventure   Picking   Tourism   Bike and VTT

46% in 2018

(Bodson 2005 et 2018)
Foire de Libramont

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- Pessimist vision on the state of forests and their future

- Preservation and exploitation of the forest are considered not compatible

- **Growing divide** between the forest sector and the society

« Are trees the new whales ? Noble creatures massacred by men? »

Courrier International n° 1324 from 17th to 23th March, 2016
« The Germans have always displayed a visceral attachment to their forests. Today, more than ever, it is in the middle of beeches, oaks and spruces that they will revitalize themselves. Yet, their consumption of firewood and wood construction is skyrocketing. **Dilemma** » (*Die Zeit*, Henning Sussebach, Florian Janicke).
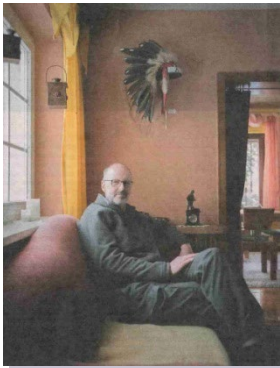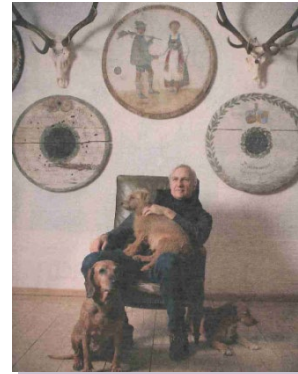
« The secret life of trees »
400.000 copies sold. Best sales
for a essay, 2015

« Nonsense ! If we plant trees, it is to cut them»

Cemeteries in forests. 3400 funerary urns (3000 euros each). It finances integral reserves

Today 650.000 translates
copies in 35 countries

« The more urbanization accelerates, the more nature is sacralized »

*Firewood : 10 m3 wood/year
instead of 1,06 national*

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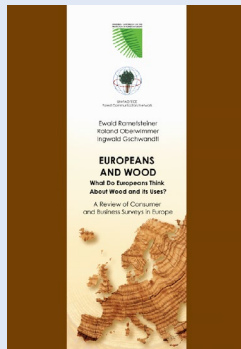# « *Attitudes towards the forest according to the forest or not forest profile* »

(Belgium 2017
120 students)

(Matagne 2017)

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However…

« Wood is nature, warm and friendly »
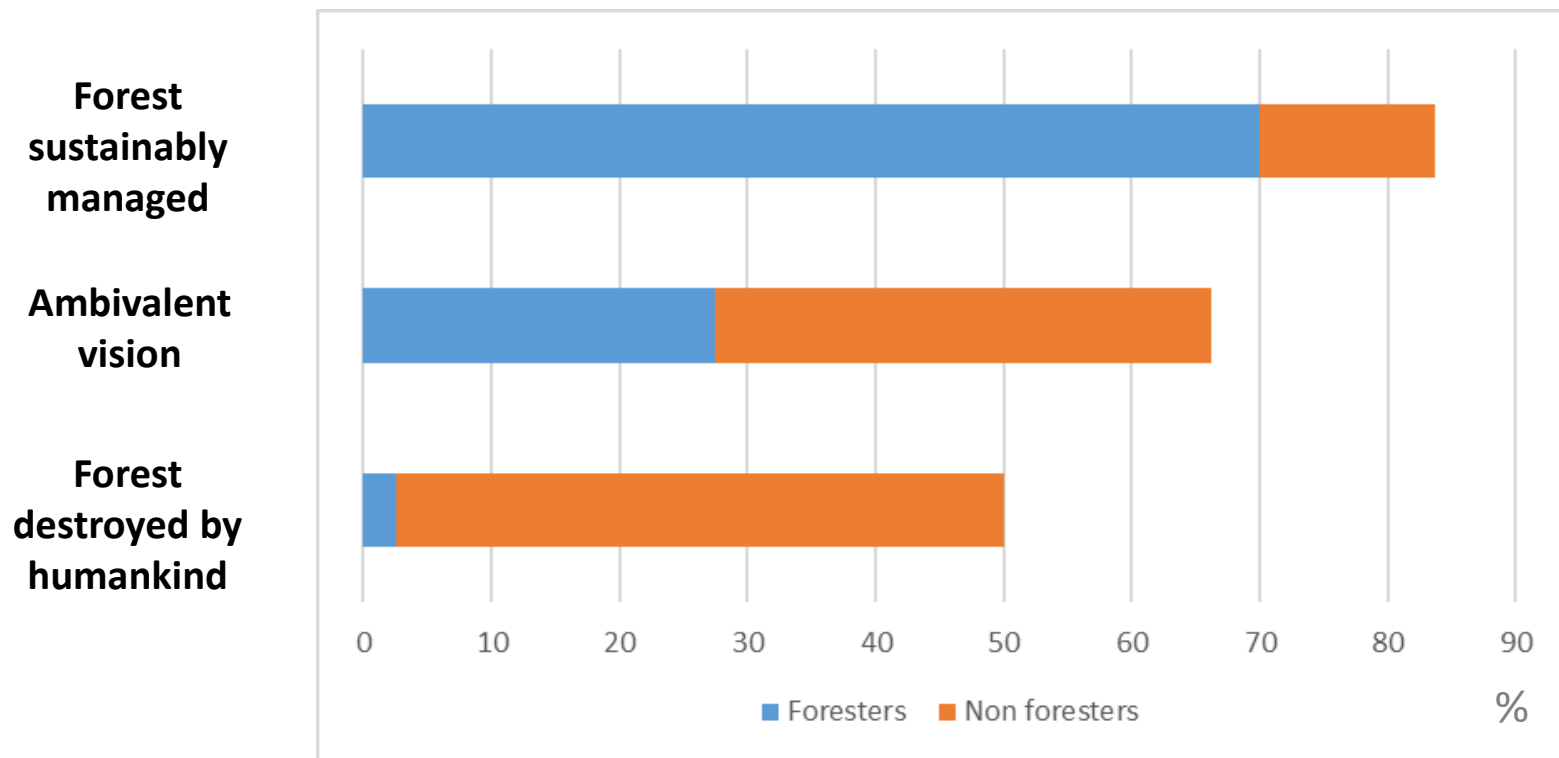
… but no/poor link with forest management!

Forest Europe 2007

« Its like a good steak! … Wood material and steak have become things in themselves in our perception, put at a distance or even cut from their origin by the shaping they have undergone » (Bodson 2017)

… and wood is part of the solution for the futur (i.e. Bioeconomy)

Commodity flows and processing 2011 (in millions of tonnes)

(Morrison et Golden 2015)

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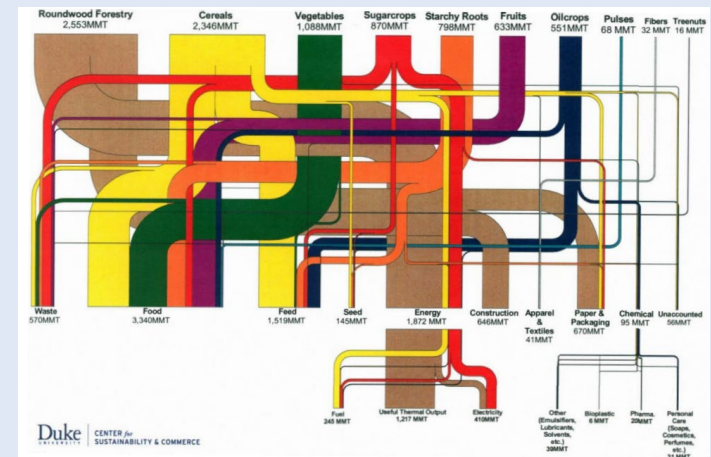
Polysemy and deep-rooted symbolic value

- Rise in strength of the symbolic value of the forest

- Mirror: speed versus serenity

- Increase in the emotional relationship between man and forest

- Spring of deep and ancestral attachment to the forest (reptilian, archaic)

- Deforestation and urbanization: fear of loss of access to a collective memory (Harrison 1992)

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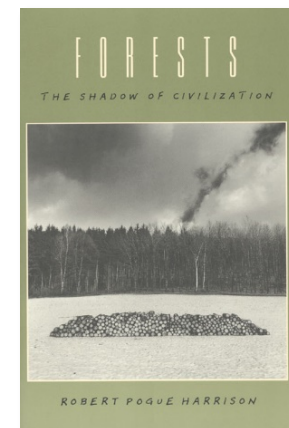
Particular societal context
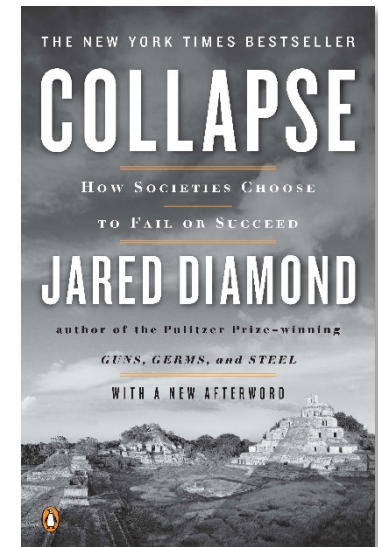
Strong emotional context

- Society in transition
- Frequent references to the collapse of the society/civilization ("collapsologie")
- Awakening of collective citizen conscience
- Emergency feeling
- Reawakening of the survival instinct

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Coexistence of various ethical models

		On the physicality (the body)			
		Discontinuity	**Continuity**		
On the interiority (the spirit) — **Continuity**		**Animism**	**Totemism**		
On the interiority (the spirit) — **Discontinuity**		**Analogism**	**Naturalism**		
			Anthropo-centric	*Biocentric*	*Ecocentric*
			Valuing humanity	Valuing any life	Valuing natural ecosystem

(Nicole Huybens 2018 udapted from Descola 2005)

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Complexity of forest issues and hypocognition

Lack of sufficient cognitive frameworks to capture every dimensions of the complex reality of environmental issues (Lakoff, 2010)

RTL INFO — ACTU   SPORT   PEOPLE & BUZZ   VOUS   VIDÉOS

🏠 » ACTU » VOUS » TÉMOIGNAGES

The small forest born of a crowdfunding is threatened: "I had been told about rabbits but no deer!"

Pierre Fagnart , publié le 27 septembre 2018 à 06h04

La plantation de la forêt, en avril 2018

"1000 trees planted in the heart of an industrial estate", "A **primitive** forest in Pérulwelz", "A buffer zone to absorb the noise" ... At the end of April, the announced planting of several hundred trees in a plot belonging to the IDETA had made the headlines in several media. Everyone was in favor of the ecological scope of an innovative project. Five months later, the growing forest became the deer's pantry and if no one intervene, she will be gone before the end of the year.
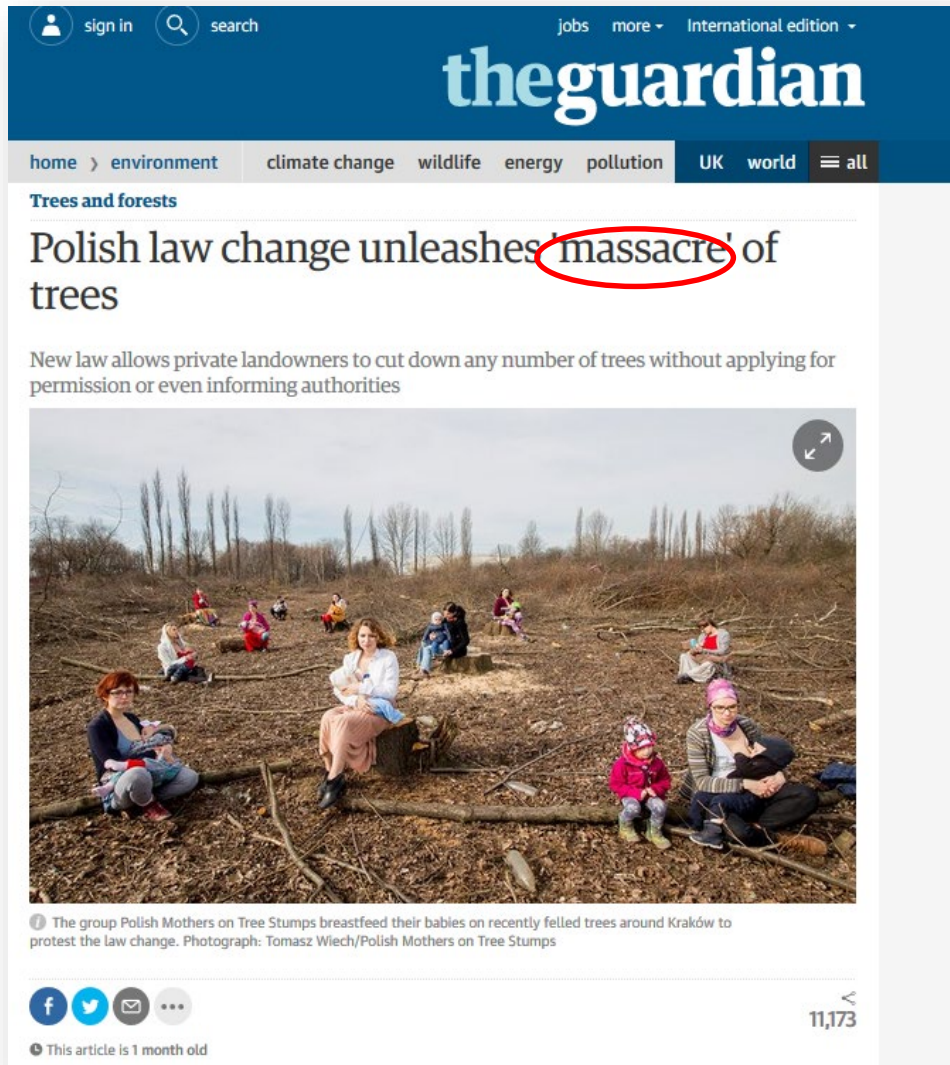
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'Media bath' and dominant persuasive communication model (ballistic)

- **Forest knowledge** of the general public is formed via the media
- Mass media build on and **reinforce** dominant social representations
- Dominant persuasive communication model
    - Simple messages, often decontextualized, visual, emotional
    - Highlighting the extraordinary
    - The general public conceived as a massive and passive target reacting in a similar way and to be **impacted** repeatedly
    - **Inappropriate** for understanding complex issues

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Contrast between images used and the news

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Preliminary

- Understand **in depth**
- Take note of the existence and the **strength of conviction** of the social representations

Communication

- Reverse the focus and the priorities: build on the ability **to be understood** instead of convincing with a message
- Rely on collective intelligence and assume communication based on **complexity**
- Make explicit, in accessible language, the **institutional quality of enunciators**, their specific roles and competencies
- Strengthen media skills through media education (at school)

Forest policies

- Resolve **inconsistency** by strategically address forest policy fragmentation

Positioning/posture of the forester

- Long time: symbolic owner of the forest and now acting on a **defensive mode**
- From forest manager … to manager of the relationships between the society and the forest
- Instead of brandishing the Sustainable Forest Management flag, serve the society by resolving concrete questions/problems
- Take the opportunity to review its **deontology/code of ethics**

Decision making

- Add to the traditional economic and scientific criteria, **ethical and symbolic** ones (too often unspoken, encrypted)

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Giant megaphones to listen to the forest
(Estonian students in design, 2015)

Thank you for your attention !

Photo: Tõnu Tunnel