



Lifestyle of health and sustainability of forest owners as an indicator of multiple use of forests



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ABSTRACT

In the face of a strong societal emphasis on sustainable development, the research on environmentally conscious consumers is becoming increasingly important. In a country such as Finland, non-industrial private forest (NIPF) owners can be used as a proxy for a high-involvement group engaged in forest ecosystem service provision and consumption. NIPF owners constitute a large proportion of the Finnish population and, based on previous research, the values they ascribe to forest meaning and use have become more diverse, strongly emphasizing recreational and conservation values alongside timber production. We thus hypothesize that understanding the NIPFs consumer perceptions better offers new insights into future consumer value creation in Finnish society overall, especially concerning the segment of consumers associated with the lifestyle of health and sustainability (LOHAS). First, the theoretical aim of the study was to validate a measurement model for forest owners engaged in pro-environmental consumption behavior and its effect on the meaning of forest for them. Second, the empirical aim was to identify different consumer categories among NIPF owners by classifying them into groups based on their sustainability orientation, and determine how the valuation of various uses of forests differs between these groups. The data set of 394 forest owners was collected in Finland in 2013 by telephone interview and was analysed using multivariate methods. The findings indicate that the owners with the highest sustainability orientation have a greater emphasis on multiple benefits of forests than owners who have a lower orientation to sustainable consumption behavior, and that they could be therefore considered as an interesting peer group for developing new service offerings in the changing forestry markets as well.

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1. Introduction

The global awakening to environmental protection and the call for corporate responsibility, as well as rapid technological development, have changed forest industrial structure and significantly affected the use of forests in Finland (Hetemäki et al., 2006). Until recently, the traditional forestry sector has been heavily dominated by the raw material dominant mindset characterized by optimization of material flows and a keen strategy towards production efficiency (Mattila et al., 2013; Toppinen et al., 2013; Näyhä and Pesonen, 2014), but alternative forms of value creation in forest use are now increasingly emphasized. For instance, multiple uses of forests are highlighted as the conservational, recreational and spiritual values of forest have increasingly become part of the current sustainable forest management paradigm (Richnau et al., 2013). The forest sector has faced a number of challenges in the last decade in Finland as well as many western European

countries and the United States, including low profitability caused by oversupply and volatility in traditional paper and wood product markets, changing institutions and rising concerns over environmental protection (see, e.g., Ghosal and Nair-Reichert, 2009; Hetemäki et al., 2013; Mattila et al., 2013). In parallel, increasing consumer awareness for more sustainable products emphasizes the role of European forest-based sector in creating sustainable solutions from renewable materials (Pätäri et al., 2016), and although there are already many interesting forest-based products and services in the markets, a lot of unutilized potential remains (Näyhä et al., 2014).

As non-industrial private forest (NIPF) owners comprise the most significant owner group in many forested European countries, for example controlling 60% of the productive forestland in Finland (Finnish Statistical, 2013), these forests not only form the basis for the forest industry's raw material supply, but also offer significant societal benefits like recreation services in terms of public right of access. NIPF owners are a diverse group with different backgrounds, who value their forest for multiple reasons (Kuuluvainen et al., 1996; Karppinen, 1998). Along with advancing urbanization, a decreasing proportion of farmer forest owners, and the owners' decreasing dependence on income from wood sales (Hänninen et al., 2011), a growing number of NIPFs

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have been found to be alienated from the goals of traditional forest management (Häyrinen et al., 2015).

Despite more emphasis at the societal level having been placed on the ecological awareness of consumers and the potential of green marketing (Peattie, 2001; Belz and Peattie, 2012), sustainable consumption and the lifestyle aspects of forest owners have not been a focus in any of the previous studies. Thus, our study contributes to the previous research by approaching the value creation process of NIPF owners from this perspective. The theoretical aim of the study is to validate a measurement model for forest owners with orientation towards pro-environmental consumption behavior and how it affects the meaning of forest for them. Consequently, the validation of the model provides a solid basis for the further empirical testing. Thus, empirically, the aim is to recognize the segment of forest owners who are engaged in pro-environmental consumption and investigate how they perceive the various aspects of forest use. More precisely, we ask whether the general orientation towards health and sustainability aspects among NIPF owners (as representatives of the high-involvement group regarding the use of forest) could affect their perceptions of forests in the broader sense and also acknowledging NIPF owners' consumer role. Thus, we want to identify groups of NIPF owners with non-traditional views on forest usage and to provide a better understanding of their needs as potential new customers and ways to enhance value generation for them via enhanced sustainability aspects. By identifying this segment of more sustainability oriented owners we also wish to understand better the forest resource utilization in the context of one resource rich developed country in transition towards a bio-based economy (Kleinschmit et al., 2014).

We begin by first introducing the theoretical rationale behind the empirical work. We then describe the data collection process and the measurement scale development associated with the survey. Finally, we present and discuss the results and point out the limitations of the study and some implications for future research.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Profile of sustainability oriented consumers

Increasing concern over sustainable development has directed the discussion towards the sustainable lifestyles of individuals. Based on work such as Laroche et al. (2001), a growing number of consumers have realized that their consumption behavior has an impact on the environment and thus are likely to choose products that are more ecologically friendly or socially responsible. Consequently, marketing managers are also increasingly interested in the green segment of consumers (see Peltz and Peattie, 2012). In previous literature, environmental consciousness has been commonly measured using attitudinal or behavioral components or both (Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; McDonald et al., 2012). While attitudinal factors consider intentions, motivations and beliefs or values, behavioral components include the kinds of activity, the amount of activity, and consistency of reported activities (McDonald et al., 2012). Measurement is also frequently based on the self-reporting of the behavior rather than actual behavior (McDonald et al., 2012; D'Souza et al., 2007), which potentially leads to problems with social desirability bias (see Barbarossa and Pelsmacker, 2014).

An extensive literature review by Diamantopoulos et al. (2003) indicates that a large set of variables has been employed in profiling the green consumer segment, including geographic, cultural, personality and socio-demographic measures. The last mentioned is particularly widely used, but even though socio-demographical data on consumers is easily obtained (McDonald et al., 2012), these characteristics have quite often, offered conflicting views on socio-demographical characteristics in relation to environmental behavior, and hence socio-economic background has not been found to segment consumers' sustainability

orientation accurately (as in Peattie, 2001; Diamantopoulos et al., 2003; Roos and Nyrund, 2008). Straughan and Roberts (1999) claim that more focus should be put on psychographic variables to understand and identify the underlying determinants of sustainable consumerism.

A relatively recent concept is culturally creative consumers (Ray and Anderson, 2000), also referred to as LOHAS consumers (acronym for lifestyle of health and sustainability) (LOHAS Online, 2013; Ernst & Young, 2008; Belz and Peattie, 2012),¹ which is a segment consisting of creative citizens oriented towards a sustainable lifestyle. According to Korhonen (2012), for instance, a third of the population in Finland belongs to the so-called LOHAS consumer segment, for whom, high ecological, ethical and social responsibility play an important role, as well as healthy consumption choices. According to Mohr (2011), LOHAS is a new social majority that will revolutionize the consumption markets in the future. There is also evidence that consumers following an ecological lifestyle also seek more information and like to experience new challenges (Chen, 2014). In the study by Wan et al. (2015) for a Chinese furniture market, women were more often associated with LOHAS orientation than men. However, Belz and Peattie (2012) state that LOHAS consumers can come from any demographical background. Nevertheless, the concept of LOHAS is also criticized for being just a new phenomenon that allows consumption without a guilty conscience (Bilharz and Schmitt, 2011).

2.2. Diversification of non-industrial private forest owner values and the future of the forest sector

Growing interest in sustainable consumption has raised the question of whether the global rise in green values is also reflected in the changing attitudes and values of non-industrial private forest owners. A number of previous studies in Europe and the United States have emphasized that NIPF owners are no longer focused on monetary gain in terms of producing raw material for the forest industry, but increasingly also value other ecosystem services from forests or the existence of forests as such (Karpinen, 1998; Majumdar et al., 2008; Urquhart et al., 2012). For instance, a recent study by Häyrinen et al. (2015) found that in Finland there are certain forest owner groups, especially among female, highly educated and urban forest owners, who value aesthetic and forest conservation objectives more than industrial raw material production. It is likely that some of these forest owners do not find the raw-material driven goals in current forestry service markets appropriate to their needs (Häyrinen et al., 2015; Mattila and Roos, 2014), and having an industry mindset in the wood trade is not necessarily the best way to communicate with them. There is also evidence from previous Finnish studies that a number of forest owners expect to have far more freedom of choice regarding their forest management practices (Rämö et al., 2012; Asikainen et al., 2014).

Forest ownership involves a lot of emotional perspectives and the carrying of legacy as most of the forests in Finland are inherited. In a recent study by Lähdesmäki and Matilainen (2013), the emotional aspects were found to play an important role in forest management decision-making. According to Häyrinen et al. (2015), regardless of some NIPF owners being passive in the industrial timber market, these same individuals can be very dedicated to forest ownership. Similarly, Niskanen et al. (2007) stated that for some owners, forest as a symbolic asset may be more meaningful than economic profitability. Consequently, a number of objectives and values of NIPF owners call for renewal of

¹ LOHAS is term established by the Natural Marketing Institute (LOHAS Online, 2013).

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