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“Development on the margin”

## Historical Paradigm Shifts in Tropical Forest Plantations

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### Abstract

Forest related humanistic and social scientific research is generally under-represented in the field of forestry, in spite of its deep interrelation with other disciplines. However, forest practices and policies related to the general socio-economic development are very interesting from the social sciences perspective.

While forestry and silvicultural sciences focus predominantly on the technical aspects of tree planting, it was acknowledged already decades ago, that plantation forestry has very significant socio-economic and also political impacts, perhaps especially so in the developing world.

It is therefore important to ask about the particular systems of knowledge that organise global plantation forestry, how these were changing and what are the dominant knowledge-systems influencing plantation practices today.

The paper aims at showing the change in approaches to plantation forestry, with particular emphasis on tropical regions. Introducing the concept of a “paradigm”, a set of historically changing assumptions, concepts, values, and practices that constitutes a way of viewing plantations, and directs plantation related policies, it traces the development of such structures of knowledge in the history of plantation forestry. A wide historical sketch of trends and milestones in plantation forestry accompanied with analysis of World Forestry Congress documents (as the most graspable forum of what can be termed an “epistemic community” of plantation forestry), FAO archival documents and a content analysis of a sample of issues of the influential journal “Unasylva” are discussed to show the evolution of meanings and associations of forest plantations. Based on the vast textual analysis, a classification of the “paradigms” (with “paradigm shifts”) is proposed and discussed in relation to the understandings and impacts of plantations.

**Keywords:** FAO, paradigm, plantation forestry, tropics, Unasylva, World Forestry Congress