

### WOOD ANATOMY IN A DECLINING WORLD ECONOMY

Throughout the world, institutes of pure and applied research are suffering from the international economic recession. The effects of spending cuts will affect forest products laboratories as well as the wood anatomy departments of universities, if considerable staff reductions have not already been carried out during the past decade. That wood anatomy must share in the general decline is inevitable, but the adverse financial climate can and should also bring out a renewed and beneficial awareness of the need for cooperation and for a high standard of quality. Only then can we hope to be able to defend current research projects and to procure funds for new research of high priority.

No longer can we afford the luxury of pure and applied scientists ignoring each other's results. Often one feels that there is a tremendous waste of data: facts gathered with the aim of reconstructing a natural classification of a woody angiosperm family can be equally relevant for the technologist who is called upon to analyse the structure-property relations in some commercially important species of that family. Yet, only rarely is the link between pure and applied research results really effected. Despite numerous claims that wood anatomy can reliably predict the end use properties of different timbers, the impression cannot be avoided that continuous lip service is being offered to the cause of structure-property research, without any major progress beyond the rather trivial fibre wall thickness—density—strength relationships. Herein lies a tremendous challenge for active cooperation in the coming years between technologists at forest products laboratories and comparative wood anatomists involved in multicharacter analysis for identification and classification. This is only one example of how progress could be maintained with a dwindling community of active research workers. Conversely wood technologists can actively contribute

to a better understanding of the 'academic' problems of wood evolution as I have attempted to demonstrate in a recent paper (in 'New Perspectives in Wood Anatomy'; Junk/Nijhoff, The Hague: pp. 23–58). In that same volume Burley (pp. 151–169) tells us that wood anatomists leave a wealth of unique research materials from progeny trials for the estimation of the genetic and ecological component of structural variation unused. All we need is a greater awareness of each other's problems and potentials — in other words we need a more broad-minded type of wood anatomist.

Integration of the technological, forestry-related, and botanical aspects of wood anatomy has always been a major goal of the International Association of Wood Anatomists and of this Bulletin, and this goal should now be pursued more actively than ever. In this light the three international wood anatomy meetings in close cooperation with IUFRO Division 5, announced elsewhere in this Bulletin gain in significance. Here plans can be informally developed between representatives of all sub-disciplines. This alone should be important enough to guarantee good attendance at all three meetings.

There is one aspect of the declining economy, which we cannot counteract effectively by pursuing the above ideals; that is the alarming rate of unemployment amongst young wood scientists, who have contributed so much to our research projects during their MSc, PhD or other training courses. Creating opportunities for the generation of coming wood anatomists in the present economic climate requires a degree of solidarity and unselfishness from the wood anatomical establishment which will be hard to find. Yet this problem should be constantly on our consciences. We simply cannot continue to train promising wood anatomists without offering them some perspective for their personal future.

Pieter Baas