

# **IMPROVING HIGHER FOREST EDUCATION BY INTERNATIONALISATION AND INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE: THE EXAMPLE OF A LOCAL IFSA GROUP**

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# **IMPROVING HIGHER FOREST EDUCATION BY INTERNATIONALISATION AND INTERCULTURAL EXCHANGE: THE EXAMPLE OF A LOCAL IFSA GROUP**

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## **Abstract**

Due to the growing expectations on forestry graduates an improved higher forest education is needed. IFSA and their renowned partners offer opportunities to deepen the members knowledge and broaden students' horizon in participating in annually organised IFSA-meetings or (inter)national conferences. As IFSA operates as a platform, the members get the possibility to network with experienced forest or forest-related professionals. Students of the local IFSA group Tharandt organise and participate in meetings on national and international level, and present their new experiences at events with fellow students.

**Keywords:** IFSA, forest education, student organisation, forestry student

## **History of the IFSA**

IFSA (International Forestry Students' Association) was founded in 1973 during an annual meeting of forestry students in Great Britain. The motivation of the meeting was to create an international platform for an exchange of information and making contacts all over the world. In 1994 the headquarter of the organisation moved to the University of Freiburg in Germany.

Since the establishment in the 1970's the organisation has grown, by now spreading over 50 countries on all continents. Today there are more than 130 local committees, which makes IFSA one of the largest international student organisations. The vision of the IFSA is to raise the awareness of the importance of forests for humankind and appreciate the different values that forests offer with the guiding principle "a world that appreciates forests"<sup>1</sup>. It's mission is to enhance the members education by organising international events, support networking and the exchange between different cultures.

In the strategy 2018-2022 the IFSA board identified the following goals:

- Goal 1: Strengthen the IFSA community.
- Goal 2: Take learning beyond the classroom.
- Goal 3: Enable students to engage globally.
- Goal 4: Ensure institutional stability.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.ifsa.net](http://www.ifsa.net)

## **Organisation of the IFSA**

The association is managed by the IFSA Board, consisting of seven members. The Board is liable for the plans and processes of the organisation. As a non-governmental-organisation, IFSA is run completely by students for students. On a geographical level the organisation is divided into seven regions: northern America, Latin America, Asia-Pacific, northern Europe, southern Europe, northern Africa and southern Africa. Important annually meetings are held, to enhance the community and support the international relations between the members from different countries. The largest one is the International Forestry Student Symposium (IFSS). During this annual meeting the IFSA board and other officials get elected and important internal topics are discussed, as well as many excursions and workshops are held. Other meetings on international level are the seven annually organised regional meetings, taking place in a different country of the respective seven regions each year. The aim of the meetings is to network and make new friends, get to know IFSA and the opportunities the association offers as well as broaden students horizons in workshops and through the exchange with other members. The Germany meeting is planned on national level for the exchange for all German local committee (LC). Highlights of each meeting are an international evening, organised for the cultural exchange, and an auction to raise money for IFSA's development fund. The development fund supports members from low income countries in their LC projects or mobility to take part in IFSA meetings.

For more information the author recommends the official website: [www.ifsa.net](http://www.ifsa.net)

## **Partners**

The Students' Association has many renowned partners, which support the engagement of the members to get active and involved in research projects. Examples of the many partners are EFI, IUFRO, CIFOR, FAO, Global Peatlands Initiative, UNEP, United Nation Forum on Forests and UNFF and many more. In the SILVA Network conference at Tharandt the joint IUFRO-IFSA task force was represented by Juliet Achieng Owuor (see Owuor and Rodriguez, this volume).

## **How does IFSA improve higher forest education?**

There have been changes in the last years in the curricula of the universities, the traditional courses are complemented by modern courses. But still, knowledge of the students is superficial about certain topics. IFSA functions as a platform for the exchange of information, contacts and ideas (Kostilainen, 2005). Due to its global network with different partners and renowned organisations from all over the world, IFSA offers the chance to deepen the knowledge in participating in international meetings, where political issues are discussed. The members of IFSA are motivated to improve their self-education, and take the opportunities to network with forest

professionals from all over the world. In presentations or meetings in their local committees the students share their experiences with fellow students.

As known from previous SILVA Network conferences, IFSA also carries out surveys e.g. Lackner et al. (2016), to determine issues in forest education. As IFSA is run by students, the organisation acts like the voice of forestry students. To have a stake in processes concerning the development and improvisation of forestry education it is important to have many active members who participate in conferences and meetings of the partners.

### Local Committee Tharandt

The seven German Local Committees are located in Eberswalde, Göttingen, Freiburg, Rottenburg, Freising, Erfurt and Tharandt. The LC Tharandt, counts 12 active members, students from BSc Forestry and MSc Forestry. To get active in the IFSA and to learn about forests in other parts of the world we participate in meetings like the NERM (Northern European Regional Meeting) or the IFSS. We have a close relationship with the IFSA LCs from Prague and Brno, Czech Republic, which resulted in our ‘forestry-friendship meeting’. It is an annual meeting, held alternately in Czech Republic and Tharandt, Germany. In April 2019 five members of our LC spent a weekend in the Bohemian carst area located in the National nature reserve Karlštejn. We enjoyed a botanical excursion (Figure 1), hiking trips in the local forest and evenings with campfire and guitars.



Figure 1: Forestry Friendship meeting 2019 in Czech Republic ©Marek Mejstřík.

We have also used the opportunity provided by IFSA to send some of our local members with observer status to the United Nation Framework Convention on Climate Change in Bonn, Germany. This gave us a chance to understand and get involved in political processes. To share our experiences with other students on the campus and interested persons we organise so called ‘Fernwehabeende’, once a semester. These are events where we organise presentations about IFSA meetings,

internships abroad, exchange semesters or other interesting experiences students want to share and have a round of discussions and questions afterwards. Furthermore we help to organise events during the first week for the freshmen in October or our campus-party.

Our LC members agree that being part of IFSA is a great and worthwhile experience!

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