

## Temperate forest

# Man and Temperate Forest

### Wood and paper industry

Woodwork in Italy is an extremely old tradition which has been developing highly creative and top-quality products since the 16th century. Mainly developed as a craft, the real furniture-making industry was born between the Fifties and the Sixties. It was just over these two decades that the great strongholds of Italian furniture-making developed in Brianza, Triveneto, in the Pesaro area and in Tuscany.

In 1995, there were approximately 35,000 Italian furniture-making companies, employing 250,000 people and topping a turnover of approximately 30 billion euros, approximately 14,000 of which are made up by exports. Italy is the leading exporter of furniture and interior decoration in Europe. In just a few years, "made in Italy" furnishings have become sought after all over the world. A lot of timber is required to meet market requirements.

The paper-making industry also requires a lot of feedstock. Just think that the European Union is the second largest producer in the world (after the USA and Japan) and Italy is top of the list. In our country, paper and cardboard making reached 8.9 million tons in 2001.

#### **Wooden musical instruments**

Violins, cellos and contrabasses are built by luthiers. Their soundboxes are made of spruce and maple wood, while other parts of these instruments are made with such exotic trees as rosewood and ebony. Violins are made of more than 60 pieces each. But also many other orchestra instruments (for example wind instruments) are made of wood. To make a piano, fir, beech and lime wood is needed, for a total of 2 cube metres of wood.

#### **Different types of firewood**

Not all woods burn in the same way. Hornbeam wood is the one that supplies most heat as it burns; beech comes second. Oak is chosen instead to produce coals because it lasts longer. Wood from resinous trees heats faster, but not for as long.

### Food from the forest

Forests have always been essential to man: as food, for industries and even for health. Oaks for instance is appreciated for its wood, which is very good quality and is sold at a high price to cabinetmakers and carpenters. Oak wood is used to make valuable furniture, veneers and often wine casks.

Plants used for food include walnut trees, which are also widely appreciated for the quality of their wood, which is used in high-quality carpentry, and chestnut trees.

Chestnuts trees, native to the Mediterranean regions, are generally grown for their fruits, the chestnuts, which are eaten cooked or ground into flour to make bread. Men have been feeding on chestnuts since time immemorial. Chestnut forests are also appreciated by hunters, since wild boars which eat chestnuts like to stay there. Chestnut wood is used in carpentry, as firewood and to make vineyards stakes that can stay planted for a long time without rotting. Chestnut wood can also keep away maggots and woodworms and is used therefore to protect linen.

Willows are mainly known for their healing properties: their bark for instance contains salicylic acid, commonly known as aspirin.

### The forest, a disappearing resource

Healthy forests mean a healthy planet, because forests protect the catchment basins needed to supply freshwater and the soil from water and wind erosion, help to re-oxygenate air, provide shelter to plants and animals, food and fodder to mountain people, are a source of timber and other products. Despite this, forests are endangered. As early as the Middle Ages wood was a resource of primary importance since it was the only source of energy along with water. Later on, after the Industrial Revolution, forests remarkably dwindled, since this resource began to be used in many different ways:

wood as a source of energy for forges (equipment where metal parts are hot-forged) and glassworks, to make railway sleepers at a time the railway network was extended for thousands of kilometres, to make new houses to cater for the increased population. The only ancient forests left are in eastern countries and in Russia. They are called “primary” and have never been exploited since they have always belonged to rich people who used them for hunting as well as often being hardly accessible. Today, the authorities are trying to control the forests that have been left in a way that enhances and protects their value. Many parks have been set up for this purpose, in which getting to know and appreciating forests helps the spreading of a more “environment-friendly” culture. In addition, the FAO has established a plan for the assessment of global forest resources. To put it in place, they had to resort to remote sensing and geographical mapping to monitor the conditions of the Planet’s ecosystems.

## Eco-tourism

Tourism-related activities are the largest economical sector in the world, since they contribute either directly and indirectly to approximately 7% of the world’s production and offer thousands of jobs worldwide. For many countries, tourism is one of the greatest sources of work and income.

It is important, therefore, to raise people’s awareness of the disturbance tourists inevitably cause to the environment with which they interact, and to promote conscientious tourism, or eco-tourism. It can actually protect the natural wealth by finding how to minimise negative effects. The World Tourism Organisation, the United Nations and other international agencies have identified the main conditions that an ecotourism project has to fulfil:

- making sure it furthers the preservation and sustainable development of territories and neighbouring communities;
- ensuring the involvement of local communities in all stages of an ecotourism project;
- minimising the negative impact that accommodation, transport and any organised tourist activity may have on the natural and cultural environment;
- making sure a reasonable part of the income generated by tourism-related activities goes back to local communities and to the preservation of natural assets;
- raising awareness that tourism may be practised in different ways, that are more respectful of the environment and socially responsible.

## The importance of a forest

Woods can be divided into two categories: natural and artificial. The first category includes native, ancient woods or woods that were artificial at first and have then naturalised. The second category includes only artificial woods or woods that have been planted only to be felled. The essential functions of a wood can be grouped into three categories: productive function, ecological-protective function, aesthetic-recreational function. The first one is essentially aimed at forestry as well as to commercial exploitation for wood products, such as fruits (chestnuts, pine nuts, etc.), bark, resins, rubber, mushrooms and soft fruits (strawberries, blueberries, officinal herbs, etc.) and game. The ecological-protective function is related to physical (keeping low temperatures and high humidity) and biological aspects (air oxygenation, production of organic substances). By collecting rain, reducing its falling speed, making the soil permeable and reducing surface flows, woods control the outflow of water streams. In addition, they almost completely counter the effect of winds and brightness. Another important function of woods has to do with the pedogenesis (birth and growth of soils), since it replenishes the soil and roots of organic substances.