

Nordic Forest Policy: Re-visiting Cross Border Cooperation

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Abstract

Recent years witnessed heightened interest of the Nordic countries and their forest policies amid global debates on accelerating reductions in greenhouse gases emissions while preserving biodiversity. Further momentum to understand the role of Nordic forests in this context also stems from the New EU Forest Strategy for 2030 and the COP28, which have once more ratcheted up commitments to halt and reverse climate change and biodiversity loss. This raises pertinent questions about today's power dynamics and the future of the Euro-Arctic cooperation governing forests. Notably, puzzles remain between preserving the forest, further industrializing the forest, and overall meeting diverse societal goals and stakeholder needs. This study explores the concept of "Cross Border Cooperation" within the EU and Nordic framework and investigates its capacity to enhance effectiveness of Nordic Forest Policy in response to present and future challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. The article does so through an interdisciplinary framing in the social sciences and the case study analysis

method, focusing on four cases: (a) the Euro-Arctic's Cross Border Cooperation Initiative; (b) the forest-based Nordic circular bioeconomy; (c) Multifunctionality, strategic research and cooperation; and (d) cultural heritage law. The paper concludes with an outlook on the future implications of Cross Border Cooperation in Nordic Forest Policy.

Keywords: Nordic Forest policy; Circular bioeconomy; Euro-Arctic Cross Border Cooperation; Sustainability; Environmental law and governance

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1. Introduction

The use of forests globally continues to face several challenges related to balancing socio-economic goals, climate change, and biodiversity loss (Rekola et al. 2010; Jan et al. 2023). A lot of the current momentum to understand the role of forests, including Nordic forests, stems from the EU Green Deal (including the New EU Forest Strategy for 2030) and from the 28th session of the Conference of the Parties (COP28) to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which have once more acknowledged previous failures and urged to ratchet up international multi-stakeholder commitments to halt and reverse, respectively, climate change and biodiversity loss. This makes Cross Border Cooperation (CBC) evermore crucial, especially for countries sharing land boundaries as well as policy relations of forestry.

Fundamental to today's global society are the arrangements developed among State powers on how best to cooperate in response to present and future challenges of forestry. Without a clarified perspective on cooperation, there is a likelihood of hampering efforts towards reconciling multiple societal and ecological goals and mitigating unavoidable trade-offs. Using the case of Nordic Forest policy, this paper re-visits the CBC concept, investigating its capacity to shape effectiveness in Nordic Forest policy. Nordic forests can be described as

regional, consisting of distribution in types (for instance, boreal and coniferous, private vs. state-owned, managed vs. unmanaged, primary vs. secondary) at varied geographical scales involving Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, and their national forest policies. Meanwhile, we use the term 'Nordic Forest policy' with reference to the legislative settings in Nordic countries that are shaped by "national forest policies, EU forest policies, international regulations and norms, and the incorporation of multiple strategies, procedures and constraints concerning the use, management, and restoration of forests across Nordic countries" (Nebasifu et al., 2024, p.2).

We therefore first provide an overview of CBC and of the challenges associated with managing and governing Nordic forests (Section 2) and then proceed to investigate its capacity to shape Nordic Forest policy in response to present and future challenges of forestry from three crucial perspective angles:

- a) A synopsis of CBC in EU and the Nordics.
- b) An overview of the sustainability challenges facing Nordic Forests.
- c) Possible scenarios of fostering effectiveness in Nordic Forest policy from the CBC stance.

2. Conceptual background

This section unpacks a summary on the CBC initiative within the EU and Nordic

contexts, and pinpoints some of the Sustainability challenges facing Nordic Forests.

2.1. Cross Border Cooperation in EU and the Nordics

CBC is a key element of EU policy designed in line with the EU's territorial cooperation model towards neighbours, supporting sustainable development, reducing differences in living standards, and helping to address common challenges across EU borders (European Commission 2022). CBC has other objectives of promoting economic and social development in border areas; addressing challenges of the environment, public health, safety, and security; and putting in place improved conditions for persons, goods, and capital mobility (European Commission 2022). The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) regulation for the period 2007-2013 and the European Neighbourhood Instrument (ENI) regulation adopted in March 2014, both recognize CBC as crucial to cooperation between EU countries and neighbourhood countries. With an emphasis on EU countries sharing a land border or sea crossing, funding can be issued for a program between several EU and neighbourhood countries. CBC programs are therefore a unique cooperation mechanism effective based on the participating countries' sturdy commitment, ownership, and balances of a

partnership between the participating countries on either side of a border. Here, Member States and neighbouring countries have an equal say in the program decisions and projects receive funding if implemented by partners on both sides of a border. Management may be entrusted to a local or national authority in a member state, jointly nominated by all countries participating in the program.

The EU's CBC initiative impacts Nordic countries in the areas of sustainable development, as well as scientific and political cooperation. Here, the Nordic Cooperation within the intergovernmental Nordic Council of Ministers acts as an interparliamentary body, supported by the Programme for Nordic Co-operation on the Environment and Climate, and the Sustainable Development Strategy of the Nordic Countries and the surrounding areas. The Nordic Council of Ministers' vision for Nordic cooperation is to make the Nordic Region the most sustainable and integrated region in the world by 2030. One of its target objectives is that of working together to address challenges associated with ecological sustainability, climate change, and biodiversity. For this to be achieved, in 2020 the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation approved the Nordic Expert Group for Sustainable Development to assist the Nordic Committee for Co-operation and the Ministers for Nordic Co-operation in the implementation and follow-up of Vision 2030.

However, because some countries in the European North share land border or sea areas (e.g., Finland, Sweden, and Norway), their participation in CBC matters also involves establishments such as the Arctic Council created in 1996, the intergovernmental Barents Euro-Arctic Council (BEAC), and the interregional Barents Regional Council (BRC) launched in 1993– within which the Arctic Member States share relations on various issues. This goes by with the aid of the EU's competence in policy areas such as climate change, safeguarding the Arctic environment, sustainable development in and around the Arctic, and international cooperation on Arctic issues (Koivurova et al. 2020; European Commission and High Representative 2016). Thus, as the Arctic increasingly connects and is embedded in the global political agenda (Kirchner 2022) through CBC, so too, are chances for the Nordic region, its forests, and policies.

2.2. Sustainability challenges facing Nordic forests

Nordic forests hold significance for multiple social, economic, and ecological goals. In addition to being carbon sinks, they are key habitats for biodiversity, a source of livelihood, recreation, and cultural values to many citizens as well as the indigenous Sámi living in the European North. Also, forests are crucial to the transition to a circular bioeconomy, with wood being one of the primary forest-based resources in the Nordics to meet

market demand for energy and for a variety of other bio-based products and services.

In the last decade, with decentralization, democratization, and globalization gaining ground in international policy and debate on the sustainable use of forests, Nordic Forest policy experienced new developments. These included integrating wider interests and voices in forest management and decision-making, as well as an increasingly multifunctional view of forest use (Fridén et al., 2024; Nebasifu et al., 2024). Questions and tensions, however, persist. First, despite the attempts to reconcile multiple economic, social and environmental goals, fundamental trade-offs continue to exist in the way Nordic forests are used and managed (Mazziotta et al., 2023). Second, policymaking related to Nordic forests also needs to further consider issues such as indigenous land rights, traditional land uses, and their potential for a multifunctional shift in Nordic Forest policy (Nebasifu et al., 2024; Elomina and Živojinović, 2024).

3. Case study analysis

Case studies are an essential part of policy analysis and research. According to Pal (2005), complex systems comprise real-world problems that mask specific institutions, wherein, different policymakers observe the meanings of such problems in different ways. The case study analysis method follows two

perspectives in contributing to policy analysis:

(1) First, it enables contextualizing the problem definition. For instance, using the case study, the researcher can develop a portrait of the problem in a given region, for that region, and for decision-makers in that region.

(2) Second, case studies can reveal questions relevant to an existing policy and ultimately inform practical advice on such questions.

However, considering the interdisciplinary context of this paper, its objectives, and the need for clarity in arguments on the CBC initiative, we

combined Pal's case study method with the approach by Fischer (2007) of the 'deliberative policy analysis', based on Practical Reason, that integrates both empirical and normative arguments about an existing phenomenon in policy analysis. Fischer describes this Practical Reason as an informal logic of evaluation in policy discourse that systematically "connect facts and values, empirical and normative inquiry in the framework for policy deliberation" (p. 223). This approach emerged during the last two decades in the social sciences when scholars witnessed the "argumentative turn" in response to technocratic decision-making practices.

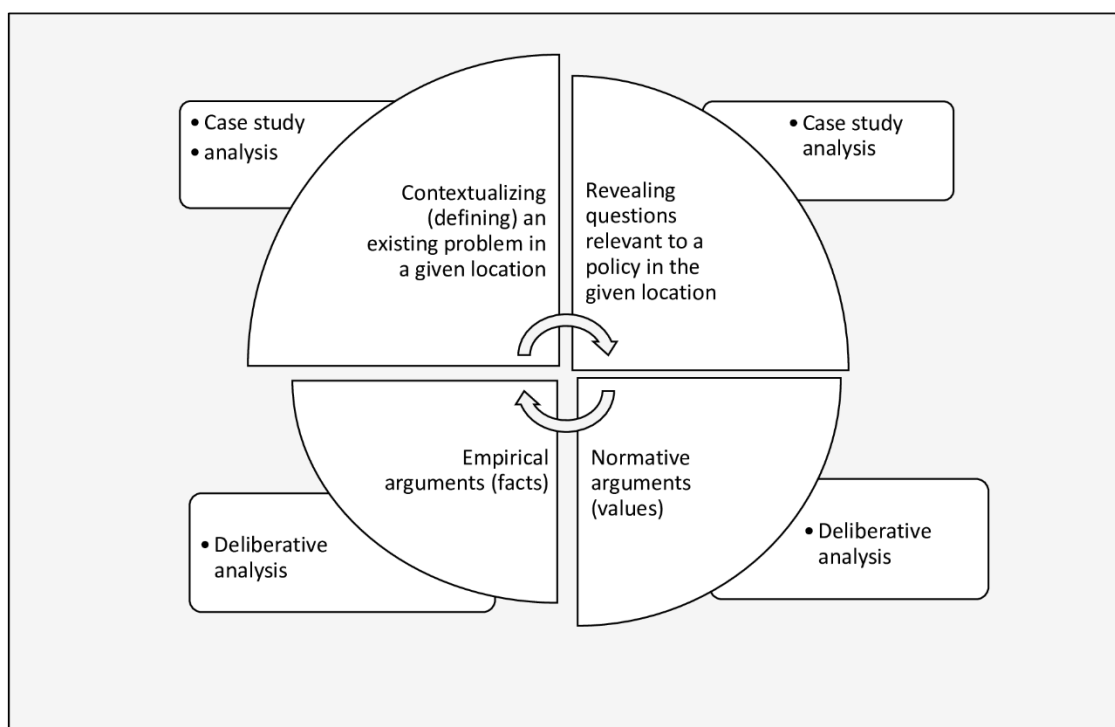


Figure 1. Policy analysis, Practical Reason & the logic of evaluation. Source: Adapted from Fischer (2007) and Pal (2005).

In so doing, the deliberative analysis seeks aspects representative of wider interests, arguments, and discourses, in part,

emphasizing citizen participation, aiding decision-makers and citizens to achieve needs and interests important for progress

in the broader society. *Practical Reason* is advantageous for balancing normative with empirical discourse. While it includes an empirical assessment of the study phenomena, it also takes account of the actor's motives for action, problem-setting, all through, to recommendations and alternatives, based on deeply rhetorical and interpretive practices. Interest in the *rhetoric tradition* – a form of *practical reason*, comprised of arguments driven by possible premises assessed according to the historical context, affective influences, motivational factors, and situational circumstances (Fischer 2007).

Inspired by the above, we adopt the case study method in studying Nordic Forest policy, a deliberative policy example relevant to mitigating climate change and forest loss which affects many stakeholders in the forestry sector, but more importantly, many local and indigenous groups that have long used forestland for livelihoods. Also, given demands to accelerate carbon reductions, reverse forest loss, and promote multifunctional forest management, we need to adopt a *deliberative policy analysis* that connects the CBC initiative with normative inquiry to tackling our study objectives.

4. Findings from the case studies

In this section we examine the capacity of CBC to foster effectiveness in forest policies between Nordic Countries by analysing options and lessons learnt from

four cases. Further, because CBC principles target both the terrestrial and marine environment, we also use Kirchner et al.'s (2022) definition of "cross-border environmental governance", which enables us to consider the cross-border (CB) governance of marine spaces (in the context of transporting forest products) significant for effecting Nordic Forest policy.

4.1. The Euro-Arctic's CBC Initiative

Cooperative environmental governance has a long history in Nordic countries. The region has long played a leading role in opening borders and facilitating cooperation. Cross-border work and travel between Finland, Norway, and Sweden have preceded the entry of these countries into the European integration process, reflecting (and contributing to) the lack of relevance of international borders in the everyday life of people in the region. This cooperative spirit is also reflected in international treaties that can be described as cooperative regional international environmental law, including the Espoo and Aarhus Conventions, to name just two examples.

The Aarhus Convention (Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters, 1998) allows for cross-border litigation and participation in governance processes related to the protection of the natural environment. Created under the

auspices of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), this international treaty not only set a landmark in the development of international environmental law but has also inspired and informed legislative processes on the national level as well as on the level of the European Union. For the Nordic countries, this treaty is already applicable law, so it will directly impact cross-border cooperation in the future, too. The same can be said of UNECE's Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context that was concluded in Espoo in 1991 as all Nordic countries as well as the European Union are parties to it.

The Aarhus Convention allows for participation in processes but also for cross-border litigation, for example, if a person living in one country is affected by a measure taken by another country, for example, a mining operation on the territory of country A that is based on a license under A's law but which also have negative effects on the natural environment across the border in country B. A person who is affected negatively by such cross-border pollution can access the courts in the polluting countries more easily than had been the case before the entry into force of the Aarhus Convention. The Espoo Convention is meant to even prevent such harm by requiring environmental impact assessments to consider cross-border situations.

These norms not only serve as an inspiration for the Nordic countries but are directly binding and as such influence domestic law-making in the region. In addition, also the European Union is bound by these international treaties. Given the importance of EU legislation for environmental law in the region, the cooperative ideas that had their origins in the Nordic region have already gained wider attention. For forest policies in the Nordic countries, these rules have the potential to be replicated in through national and EU laws.

4.2. The forest-based Nordic circular bioeconomy

In 2020, the European Commission adopted the Green Deal, a set of policy initiatives (targeting climate, energy, food, forest, biodiversity, transport) aimed at reducing the net greenhouse gas emissions by at least 55% by 2030 compared to 1990 levels (European Commission 2021). The transition to a circular economy is at the heart of the Green Deal. The Nordic Forests sector situates in both the biological and technical cycles of a circular economy. As forests elsewhere in Europe and the broader Arctic, it is also being prepared to suit and embrace a circular, bio-based economic model. However, challenges in the overall circularity of forest-based value chains seem to persist due to sectoral traditional means of operation (UN & FAO 2021). In this transition to a circular economy, an even more pressing need in

the Nordic Forests sector is that of accelerating reductions in carbon emissions – which often requires balancing between forest conservation, intensive forestry, and meeting diverse stakeholder needs and market demand for wood (Brandão and Santos, 2024; Giacometti et al., 2024). An example need concerns the demand for forest management procedures that can deliver multiple ecosystem services (Nebasifu et al. 2024). Thus, to ensure the sustainability of the forest-based value chains in the Nordic Forests sector, CBC will be crucial to enhancing continuous consideration, coordination, and cooperation of circularity at all stages of the value chains in the Nordic region.

A viable starting point for this is exploring the relevance of The Nordic Working Group for Circular Economy (NCE) for cross-border cooperation between the Nordic States – NCE was set up in 2019 as a merger of two previous groups – the Nordic Waste Group (NAG) and the Working Group for Sustainable Consumption and Production (HKP) (Nordic Council and the Nordic Council of Ministers 2019).

Linking the NCE's objectives to principles of sustainable forest management (SFM) (and/or with your examples from any of the Nordic countries), in what ways could this enhance the effectiveness of Nordic Forest policy? The principles of sustainable forest management can be integrated into

forestry practices, for instance, by promoting the utilization of wood products in the construction sector. Through NCE, the Nordic countries could influence the Circular Economy policies of the EU. As reported by Castell-Rüdenhausen et al. (2021), the national CE policy frameworks of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden align with one another. However, it should be noted that the national policies in the Nordic countries may be reflective of the policies of the European Union (EU), as they are often derived from them. The use of wood products in construction offers several benefits, including carbon sequestration, which contributes to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Taxation of energy derived from wood and the harmonization of tax policies across the Nordic countries could further drive the utilization of wood in this sector.

The Nordic countries possess a wealth of renewable resources from their forests, beyond just wood products. By collaborating and leveraging their strengths, they have the potential to tap into the potential of forest-based products, such as berries and mushrooms, and develop new, high-value products for international markets. Joint marketing efforts could be undertaken to effectively reach these markets, thus allowing the Nordic countries to realize the full economic benefits of their abundant renewable resources. One of the main objectives of the circular economy, also for

the NCE, is to diminish the amount of waste. Innovations in the use of fertilizers for forest plantations have been developed, including the retrieval of phosphorous from energy facilities, which can decrease waste and conserve critical resources. An example of circular economy in practice can be seen in Rovaniemi, Finland, where a facility has been established for the incineration of sewage sludge for energy generation purposes. The residual by-products of this process can then be utilized as fertilizer for forestry operations, demonstrating a closed-loop solution that conserves resources and reduces waste (Peltola et al. 2023).

The circular economy, like the sustainable forest management principle, aims to strike a balance between ecological, economic, and social interests. Therefore, cooperation between countries is crucial in achieving this goal. The Nordic countries, particularly Finland, Sweden, and Norway, face similar challenges in transitioning towards a circular economy, and thus, should continue to deepen their cooperation to realize their shared objectives.

4.3. Multifunctionality, Strategic Research, and Cooperation

As Nordic countries and their forestry sectors continue the transition to greener practices, there will also be a growing need to disclose what exists for mutual relations between Nordic countries – to meet the forestry needs of diverse stakeholders,

State and non-State actors, residents, as well as indigenous groups in the Nordic region. In situations of this kind, Strategic Research on CBC principles will be crucial to bridging gaps in participatory/inclusive governance. Borrowing from Nebasifu et al.'s (2022) work, Strategic research may include research practices that produce useful options for preserving biodiversity – taking into consideration – the everyday life of people in the Nordic region. For instance, a retrospective analysis of forest policies that emphasize participation and inclusive forms of governance and how such policies transform over time to meet the present and future needs of diverse actors in the Nordic region.

The analysis is urgently needed, as the forest policies in Nordic Countries have become an increasingly complex and politically loaded sphere, following the critical importance of maintaining carbon sinks to mitigate climate change. To focus on new dimensions of multifunctionality, strategic research, and cooperation on Nordic Forest policies, this chapter first looks into a case study on Northern Finland, the country in Europe with the highest percentage of the forest. Northernmost Finland has the highest rate of forest in the country.

As forestry is a key industry in Finland, Finland has plenty of expertise, research, and long history of forest management. Still, lately, Finnish forest experts underlined the challenge of managing forest policies, as the tightening

of EU legislation and policies makes forest planning highly complex (Tynkkynen 2023). Following the current struggle and a long and sometimes contradictory history of forest policies in northern Finland, the regional authority, the Regional Council of Lapland, organized a 'citizens council' to offer suggestions to manage better forest policies, especially with the ongoing green transition. Lapland covers one-third of Finland's land and has plenty of state own land.

Increased interest in protecting carbon sinks and biodiversity has strengthened the decades-old forest conflicts in Northern Finland. In their final declaration, Citizen Council underlines how the current situation is complex in Lapland, following multiple interests for land use. For instance, the overlaps between forestry and reindeer husbandry that has been a source of dispute for several decades in Finnish Lapland (Rikkonen et al. 2023). For this reason, more transparency and knowledge are needed to make just and fair decision-making, besides other more concrete recommendations (Ilmastotoimet Puntarissa 2022; Lapin Liitto 2022).

Challenges are not limited to the vastly transforming politico-legal dynamics or lack of transparency, as there remain major challenges with methodologies. For example, an article in Nature (Scientific Reports) describes how the current methods to analyze forest landmass leads to biased and wrong

results, which "causes significant carbon balance errors for northern (latitude > 60°) sites" (Vekuri et al. 2023, 1). In Finland similar methodology has been used for decades (Tiihonen 2023). To this end, gaining transparent and fair knowledge won't be easy.

Other than the threats of climate change on forest biodiversity, forest conflicts remain prevalent among actors. For instance, in January 2023, one of the main discussion topics in Finland was a protest against logging in Northern Finland, where members from several environmental NGOs continued stopping the forest logging in the area of Aalis fell. Public authorities, including police arresting activist, has not been able to fully control demonstrations (Leino 2023). Simultaneously in the media, public discussion of Finland's forest policies has remained polarised.

This latest development in Northern Finland describes the increasing demand for further action to develop multifunctionality in forest policies. There is also a growing need for strategic research and cooperation in further developing forest policies, including the politico-legal framework of forest policies in the EU. So, drawing from the historical developments in Nordic Forest policies and considering the described growing demands for multifunctional forest management, it is highly likely that multifunctionality will take centre stage in the new normal of Nordic forests.

4.4. *Cultural heritage, law, and cooperation on Nordic forests*

Over the last decade, cultural heritage, associated expressions, and traditional knowledge of indigenous and forest-reliant groups around the world, especially those in the Nordic and European North, such as the Sámi, and their relations with nature have increasingly been questioned within the scope of forest management (Kyllönen et al., 2024; Sandström, 2024). This raises the need for further discourse on what possibilities exist for multi-societal level cooperation (e.g., from the Global to European, to the National, and onto the local) linked to cultural heritage, its associated legislations, and what they imply for forest policies in the Nordic region.

For instance, an existing platform for cooperation on the subject matter is within the framework of the *2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage* – adopted during the Sixth session of the Intergovernmental Committee for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage 22-29 November 2011, in Bali, Indonesia. Some of the Committee's collaborative functions include delivering guidance on best practices and issuing recommendations on measures useful to safeguarding intangible cultural heritage; examining States' reports on the implementation of the Convention; examining proposals for programs and

projects that reflect the objectives of the Convention; as well as granting international assistance (UNESCO 2011).

Within the forest milieu, are various forms of intangible cultural heritage (ICH), vital not only for the maintenance of deeply rooted cultures and knowledge but also for promoting biodiversity. In line with the above convention, ICH can be that of "practices, representations, expressions, knowledge, and know-how, transmitted from generation to generation within communities, created and transformed continuously by them, depending on the environment and their interaction with nature and history." (UNESCO 2011, 6). Other useful examples providing a basis for cooperation, includes the Akwé: Kon Voluntary guidelines of the UN CBD (for the conduct of cultural, environmental, and social impact assessments regarding developments proposed to take place on, or which are likely to impact on, sacred sites and on lands and waters traditionally occupied or used by indigenous and local communities). Also, Article 31 of The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) specifies the right of Indigenous peoples to maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage.

At the European level, and more specifically to the European Commission's (2014) communication to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the regions –it stresses the

need for an integrated approach to cultural heritage for Europe. Whilst acknowledging ICH as a commonwealth and legacy of Europeans, an irreplaceable repository of knowledge, and a valuable shared resource for economic growth, employment, and social cohesion, the Commission emphasizes the responsibility to look after such heritage as primarily a matter for national, regional and local authorities, concerning the principle of subsidiarity.

Considering the above opportunities for cooperation, there is also a need for national and local level cooperation, especially where the above mechanisms offer potential benefits to fostering effectiveness in Nordic Forest policy. That is, the capacity for policy to address societal goals and achieve successful outcomes through competent formulation and implementation processes (Mukherjee and Bali 2019). A possible area to explore in this regard would be that of local legislative elements linked to cultural practices and deeply rooted relations people have with forests – disclosing from them, what opportunities exist for valuable cooperation among forest users.

5. Conclusions and outlook

This paper came as a timely attempt, contemplating some of the concerns raised on the need to preserve forest and mitigate the unfavourable impacts of climate change, following COP28, which concluded with a decision on the outcome

of the first ‘global stocktake’ of the world’s efforts to address climate change under the Paris Agreement whilst recognizing the urgency to enhance global cooperation in transitioning away from fossil fuels (Arora, 2024; Wise, 2023). Locating the above timing, within the context of heightened interests of forest policies in the Nordics and global debates to accelerate reductions in CO₂ emissions, the authors addressed the matter from the stance of “Cross Border Cooperation” (CBC) within the EU and Nordic framework. Investigating its capacity to shaping the efficacy of Nordic Forest policy in response to present and future challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss. Understanding the complex nature of balancing the above needs, this paper developed with a focus on CBC within the EU and Nordic frameworks, to investigate whether and how CBC can be useful in shaping the effectiveness of forest policies in the Nordic region in response to present and future challenges of forest loss and climate change.

In line with the above, the paper targeted three specific objectives including: that of taking a step back, to summarise some developments of CBC within the EU and Nordic; providing an overview of the sustainability challenges facing Nordic Forests; and unpacking possible cases from the CBC stance, and their usefulness to promote effectiveness in Nordic Forest policy. In response, we discussed the CBC as crucial to EU policy

in terms of the EU's territorial cooperation model linked to aspects on supporting sustainable development, reducing imbalances in living standards, and its usefulness to addressing common challenges across EU borders. CBC remains a key element to cooperation between EU countries and neighbourhood countries. It also does impact Nordic countries on aspects to sustainable development, scientific, and political cooperation. For the Nordics, are already existing mechanisms, useful to advancing shared efforts on achieving various topics of cooperation including that on forest and climate change. For example, the Nordic Cooperation within the intergovernmental Nordic Council of Ministers. One of its shared visions, to make the Nordics more sustainable and integrated by 2030 surely presents us with options for which the agenda on forest policies in the Nordics can be addressed.

In considering such options, questions on ameliorating sustainability challenges facing Nordic Forest would also need to be further addressed, such as integrating wider interests and voices in forest management and decision-making, and how best to go about the increasingly multifunctional view of forest use. What potentials to capture from both the EU's CBC and Nordic's CBC initiatives in reconciling the above questions, and needs, linked to other issues such as indigenous land rights, traditional land

uses, and their capacity for better cooperation in Nordic Forest policy.

Nonetheless, in examining whether and how CBC principles can best shape the effectiveness of forest policies in the Nordic region, the authors use case examples setting the stage to rethink existing approaches towards joint efforts of addressing matters of biodiversity loss and climate change across borders. In them, exist, legislative arrangements and structures, practices, and linkages, useful to informing public participation and decision-making towards cross-border cooperation. For instance, in learning from the Euro-Arctic's CBC initiative, the *Aarhus Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making, and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters* (1998) stress cross-border participation in governance on matters linked to the protection of the natural environment. *The Espoo Convention (concluded in 1999)* further augments this need in pursuit of environmental impact assessments therein, towards ensuring economic activities such as mining among others, do not negatively impact people and biodiversity in cross-border areas. In exploring the role of circular economy in forests; are important platforms, crucial to enhancing sustainable forest management, e.g., The Nordic Working Group for Circular Economy (NCE) created in 2019, for cross-border cooperation between the Nordic States, the Nordic Waste Group (NAG), and the Working Group for

Sustainable Consumption and Production (HKP), all having a cooperative function on sustainability issues.

Also, worth noting, towards an effectiveness in forest policies, is the link between multifunctionality and multi-actor space of operating in the forest sector. Here, CBC can be enhanced with local and indigenous groups vis-a-vis their contribution to forest growth, by re-visiting customs and traditions, and their legal basis for use in particular social settings. Along these lines, instruments such as the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) provide a useful tool to clarify the applicable basis for cooperation with local and indigenous groups on the one hand, and the suitability of ICH in reversing forest loss on the other hand. Both the 2003 *Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage*, and the European Commission's (2014) communication stressing an integrated approach to cultural heritage in Europe, are among some of the legal tools to further explore the above need for cross-border cooperation and its importance to shaping the present and future of Nordic Forest policy.

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