

More forest biodiversity for less money?

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Credit: Timo

Increasing the visibility over decisions relevant to preserving forests can improve the ability to get the right mix of economic instruments used for forest conservation policy. But change is slow.

Making decisions related to [forest conservation](#) is no mean feat. Particularly, when a cost/benefit analysis is combined with integrating social and institutional impact at local and national scale. This challenge is even more complicated when taking into account the EU's latest funding strategy outlined in its framework programme, Horizon 2020. The latter is aiming at reducing the [loss of biodiversity](#), increasing the protected land area and restoring sensitive ecosystems while increasing the proportion of renewable energy consumption to 20%. Nevertheless,

this is precisely the challenge that the EU-funded [POLICYMIX](#) project is tackling.

Specifically, the project aims at comparing the cost-effectiveness of different economic instruments in conservation. Project scientists are evaluating different ways of implementing conservation policy and comparing their effectiveness. "This is not an attempt to find general solutions which will work for all types of conservation in all countries," says project coordinator David Barton, who is an environmental and resource economist at the [Norwegian Institute for Nature Research](#) (NINA), in Oslo.

"The reality is much more complex which means that the outcome of using some instruments may work in one country, but not in another, due to differences in the socioeconomic, cultural and institutional contexts," he tells youris.com. "When economic instruments are useful they are part of a policymix adapted to local conditions. To use a [housekeeping](#) metaphor, we have found that economic instruments need a regulatory home with a family of information instruments," he adds.

To test their approach, project scientist have focused on a number of case studies in Norway, Germany, Portugal, Netherlands, United Kingdom, Finland, Brazil and Costa Rica. In the Finnish case study, for example, project scientists have mapped out the mix of biodiversity and forest management instruments throughout the country. About two thirds of the country is covered with production forest and a major part of this land is owned by small private owners. The forest conservation instruments are legal regulation, economic incentives, information, forest services or a mix of these which to some degree are overlapping. The project is welcome by users who gain greater visibility when making decisions. "The [project] gives us a much better overview of biodiversity and forest regulation," comments Finnish project coordinator Jukka Similä from [SYKE](#), the Finnish Environment Institute in Helsinki.

It is important for the forest owners that they feel that they are treated in a fair manner. Transparency is an important factor," Similä adds. In fact, he argues, from the first results of our survey we can already see that the policy change towards voluntary conservation has an impact on the attitudes. Furthermore, "we have observed that the level of compensation is only one factor among many affecting the decisions of forest owners whether to participate in public conservation schemes," he adds.

Some experts believe the project is relevant and timely study to improve biodiversity management. "I like the vision of POLICYMIX, but I also believe that the timescale is an important factor in order to measure real impact on biodiversity," says Niels Strange, professor in management planning of [forest](#) and nature at the University of Copenhagen, Denmark. He concludes: "The long term impact cannot be measured in a few years it rather takes decades to see the changes in biodiversity".

Flexible solutions may be required though. "In the Finnish case study it is promising to realise that fixed-term [conservation](#) contracts may lead to a more positive attitude from the land owners to accept nature reserves and other more strict instruments," programme director Johan Svensson, programme director in landscape analysis at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Umeå. "It can be questioned, however, if such a route is preferred in a situation where climate, new nature resource markets, land owners attitudes and strategic frameworks change, and instead call for more flexible and non-permanent solutions."

Provided by Youris.com

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