METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK FOR POLICY COHERENCE ASSESSMENT

SUPERB
Upscaling Forest Restoration

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Author

Metodi Sotirov and Simon Fleckenstein

Affiliations

University of Freiburg, Chair of Forest and Environmental Policy

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Political actors, forest restoration managers and other stakeholders across Europe face the challenge of addressing policy coherence and navigating trade-offs in order to meet competing demands for forest ecosystem goods and services. This task is complicated by an uncertain and complex future, as well as by the ongoing biodiversity crisis, climate change, and socio-economic disruptions. To tackle these challenges, there is an urgent need to identify and implement a range of policy and management responses that can help anticipate and prepare for the future. Consequently, achieving policy coherence and integrating diverse societal demands into a balanced approach to forest management—one that benefits both current and future generations—remains a crucial objective for restoring forest ecosystems across Europe.

Policy integration and policy coherence can be defined as a "process of [...] coordinating various policies [...] aiming to achieve multiple complementarities and synergies" (Briassoulis, 2004, 13). Coherent policy goals can be simultaneously achieved without any significant trade-offs. Incoherent policy goals contain major contradictions where goals cannot be attained simultaneously, thus leading to policy fragmentation, or policy integration failure. Consistent policy instruments and management practices work together to support a policy goal, whereas inconsistent policy instruments and practices work against each other and are counterproductive, for example, providing simultaneous incentives and disincentives toward the attainment of stated policy goals.

Coherent cross-sectoral integration can be observed when issues, goals and instruments are integrated and coordinated among the forestry sector and other forest-relevant land-use sectors such as agriculture, rural development, biodiversity conservation, climate protection, and renewable energy. Intra-sectoral integration applies within the forest sector itself. Forest policy integration and coherence refers to integrating and coordinating forest management practices, including forest restoration within the forest sector itself, as well as across forest management and other land-use practices at different local scales (e.g., individual trees, forest stands, forested landscapes, spatial planning regions).

Vertical forest policy integration and integrated forest management practices refer to issues of coherent integration and co-ordination across spatial scales, including the international, EU, national, subnational and local levels. It is at the level of regional or local practices where political decision-makers, policy officers, landowners, forest managers, forest industries, environmental groups and other stakeholder groups have to implement integrative policy paradigms and put policy decisions into action. This is not only challenging due to sustainable forest management as a "wicked problem" that is characterized by high stakes and variety of societal claims for competing forest land-uses. It is also challenging due to the paradoxes, inconsistencies, and contradictions inherent in forest-related policymaking.

Table 1: Analytical dimensions of the assessment of policy integration and coherence. (Sotirov & Arts, 2018)

Dimensions and scales of policy integration and coherence		
Spatial (vertical)	Topical (horizontal)	
	Intra-sectoral	Cross-sectoral
Policy (international, EU, (sub)national))	Integration of sustainability dimensions (economy, ecology, social) within forest policy	Integration of forest policy in other, more salient, land use policies (agriculture, biodiversity, climate, water, energy) and vice versa
Management (local)	Provision of a wide range of forest ecosystem goods and ecosystem services (supporting, provisioning, regulating, cultural) by forest management practices	Integration of forest management practices in other land use management practices (e.g. agroforestry, management of Natura 2000 forest sites, urban forestry, LULUCF) and vice versa

A straightforward approach to assessing forest policy coherence—both vertically across political levels and horizontally across forest-related policy areas—is to break down and analyze key elements of sectoral and multi-level policies. First, key policy elements may include overarching **policy goals**—broad, abstract objectives that guide a specific policy or framework—as well as policy objectives, which define more concrete and tangible targets. The second key element are the **policy instruments** which are the means and techniques governments support to reach policy goals. These elements can be categorized into four major types of policy instruments: regulatory instruments, which include environmental quality standards, emission limits, and restrictions; economic instruments, designed to encourage or discourage certain behaviors through financial incentives or disincentives such as subsidies and tariffs; informational instruments, which encompass advisory services, training, and public awareness campaigns; and organizational instruments, which involve structural or administrative measures to implement policies effectively. Last but not least, **policy calibrations** refer to concrete adjustments of instrument settings. They outline what is needed to implement objectives and include adjustments to the stringency of regulations and to subsidy budgets.

Breaking down multi-level and sectoral policies into individual policy elements can help to assess whether forest-related policies are aligned toward a common goal or if they pursue conflicting objectives, with policy instruments potentially working against each other. In this context, the impact of potentially harmful subsidies in forest-related policy areas, such as renewable energy policy, should not be overlooked.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To determine whether forest (restoration) policies align with multi-level and forest-related sectoral policy goals, it is essential to consider the various dimensions and scales of policy integration and coherence. For effective implementation, these policies should ideally align with both broader forest-related objectives and multi-level policy demands, while also balancing trade-offs within the forest policy subsystem, where economic, social, and ecological interests often intersect. While the embeddedness of forest (restoration) policy in this multi-level and multi-sectoral policy environment renders an optimal alignment of policies according to forest policy goals unrealistic, a thorough understanding of vertical and horizontal policy trade-offs and synergies can support a successful policy implementation, and thereby, the achievement of actual policy outcomes on the ground.

REFERENCES

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