

## Why Forest Policies Should Acknowledge Local Perspectives to Incentivize Climate Adaptation

Forest adaptation policies are often lost in translation concerning their implementation on the local level, varying across national contexts<sup>1</sup>. The global, objectified concept of climate change, transported through those policies, tends to mismatch with individual experiences of change on the local level<sup>2</sup>. While forest experts across Europe are aware of climate-related challenges<sup>3</sup>, the complexity of human-forest relations is rarely addressed. In this context, understanding how change is experienced is crucial to incentivize climate adaptation<sup>4</sup>.

### Key findings: Varying stories of change in three Case Studies

Narrative interviews on how change is experienced at the local level were conducted in three European case studies: Freiburg (Germany), Les Landes (France), and Solsonès (Spain). The reported stories of change reflect a strong identity with the forests and their management practices. Adaptation occurs within the capacities and objectives of the respective regions, combining preventive and reactive actions.

#### *What are the predominant changes perceived by local practitioners?*

Climate change is only one challenge, among others, reinforcing prevalent dynamics. Forest management is increasingly confronted with societal pressure, structural constraints, and socio-economic challenges. However, experienced changes vary strongly across case studies.

#### *How are these changes experienced?*

For forest practitioners, change is mostly evident and experienced through individual observations, as well as exchange amongst colleagues. Scientific data and modelling often only support and specify general observations.

#### *How is change being practiced?*

In order to foster resilience, actors develop case-sensitive practices of persistence and adaptation. The measures taken are often embedded within existing forest management practices, and reflect local priorities rather than alignment with general (EU) objectives.

#### *The role of adaptation policies*

Policies are not directly decisive for local practitioners; their targets are, however, transferred through the respective institutions. EU-funds are crucial to foster adaptation projects and mutual learning. Ambiguity remains concerning the inclusion of forests in climate policies. While presenting new opportunities and motivations for forest management, the generalized inclusion often mismatches its complex realities, that might lead to reluctance and losing trust.

### Policy Implications: foster case sensitivity of forest policies

- **EU policies** need further horizontal and vertical integration, combining *top-down* with *bottom-up* approaches and acknowledging local forms of knowledge and experiencing
- **Forest management** requires flexible policies, allowing context-sensitive implementation
- **EU-funding** is crucial to facilitate the adaptation of forests across Europe
- **Integration of forests** into broader regional development might open new opportunities and lead to increasing acceptance

<sup>1</sup>[www.eco2adapt.eu/platform-for-policy-input/](http://www.eco2adapt.eu/platform-for-policy-input/), <sup>2</sup>Jasanoff (2010): <https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276409361497>; Hulme (2010): <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.gloenvcha.2010.07.005>, <sup>3</sup>Khanam et al. (2025): <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ienvman.2025.125903>; Djahangard et al. (under revision), <sup>4</sup>Goldman et al. (2018): <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.526>; Nightingale et al. (2022): <https://doi.org/10.1002/wcc.740>