

International Multidisciplinary Workshop 27.-28.5.2021
Contested Society-Nature-Relations: Forest related Emotions,
Practices and Conflicts in Times of Societal Change



UNIVERSITY OF
EASTERN FINLAND

Bioeconomy-based Smart Specialisation in the European Periphery: Reflections on Sustainability and Economic Development

Postdoc research: Sixth cycle in the periphery CYPER (2020-2024)
Maija Halonen, [maija.halonen\(at\)uef.fi](mailto:maija.halonen@uef.fi)
Department of Geographical and Historical Studies



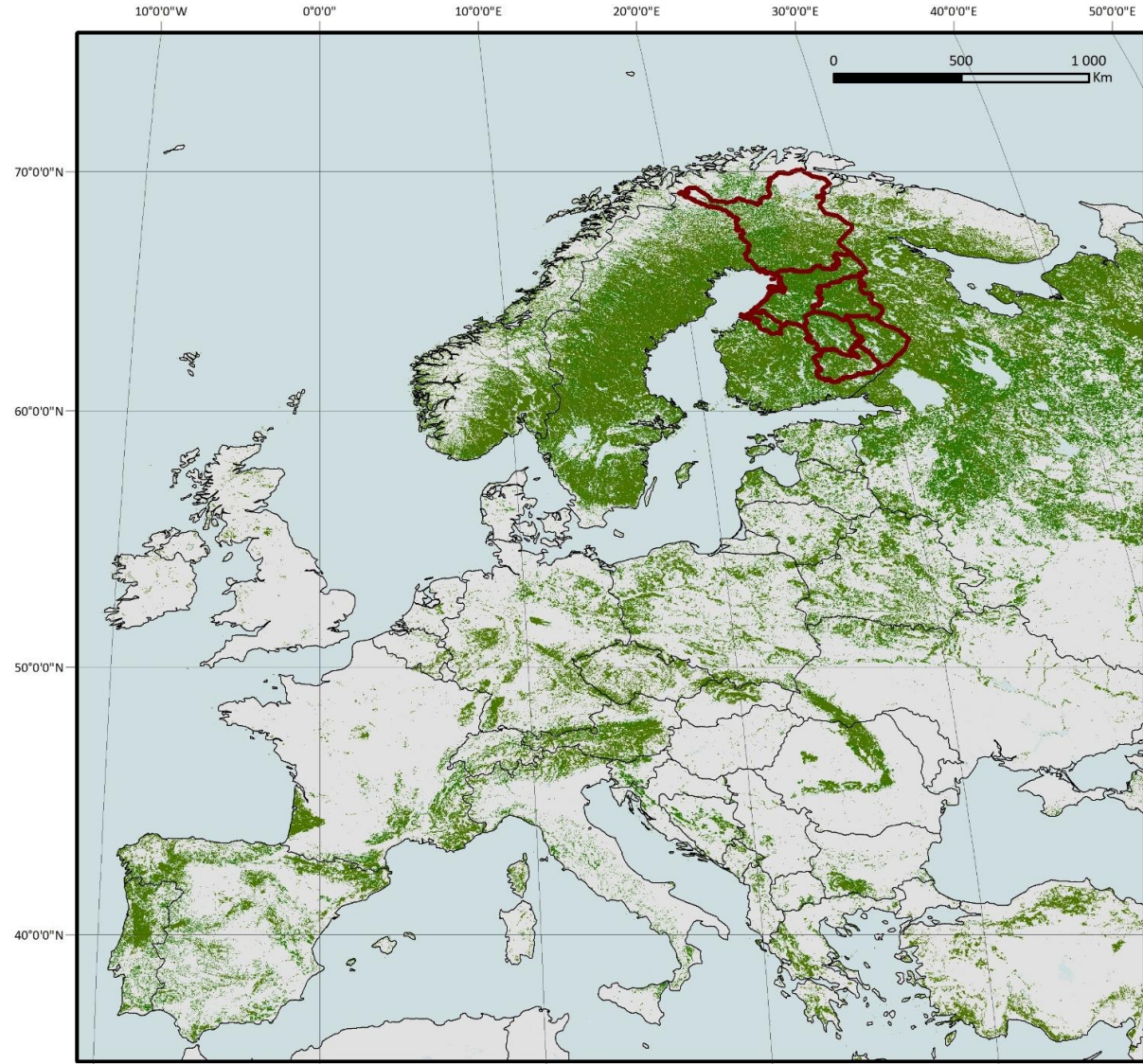
KONE FOUNDATION



Forested European Periphery

East and North Finland among coniferous (needle/mix leaf) dominated countries

(Data sources: ECJRC 2003; ArcGIS Hub 2015; National Land Survey of Finland 2016)





Bioeconomy in sustainable transition

- Currently no policy-document, agenda or strategy seems to exist where reference to sustainable transition to post-fossil and post-plastic economies via bioeconomy would not appear (E.g. Rakovic et al. 2020; Skarbøvik et al. 2020)
- In global and multinational scale, transition is steered by the initiatives and programmes such as Green Economy and Green Deal which
 - strive for a (circular) economy that is low carbon, resource efficient and clean in production
 - aims to boost collaboration and solidarity -> in principle, no place should not be left behind via the inclusive objectives (see UNEP 2011; EC 2019)
- Meanwhile, the (growth) objectives of (bio)economy are challenged by the objectives relating the diversity of nature and increasing of carbon sinks (cf. EC 2018; Regulation EU 2018/841; Mutanen et al. 2019; Kunttu et al. 2020)



To national and regional policies

- Transition to post-fossil and post-plastic economy seems promising for resource-rich countries and resource-rich regions within them
- Desired economic scenarios tend to be highly centred around the innovative bioeconomy
 - “Successful, emerging areas such as carbon neutrality, ecological investments, cleantech, the bioeconomy and circular economy and scarcity of raw materials, can create new growth stories in Finland’s manufacturing industry, the building blocks for our wellbeing and prosperity” (Programme of Prime Minister ... 2019, 10)
- However, the growth may be restrained by the ecological perspective
 - In general: “An ecologically sustainable Finland will show the way in mitigating climate change and protecting biodiversity. “
 - Forests, E.g.: “The measures of the climate programme for the land use sector [...] include [...] Safeguarding the[...] growth capacity and health of forests, advancing afforestation, reducing deforestation” (Programme of Prime Minister ... 2019, 10, 39)



Bioeconomy in Smart Specialisation

- It is not surprising that renewable natural resources are emphasised in the policies such as Smart Specialisation as many of the objectives favour renewable sources over fossils and plastics
- In European peripheries such as East and North Finland, most of the regions have referred either explicitly or implicitly to the bioeconomy as a priority in their industrial transition, forests typically having central role in it
(East and North Finland 2019)
- The mixture of the policies and objectives of bio-based economy, spatial inclusion and ecological perspectives has raised a question on how the regional actors of development interpret the policies and how they conceive the role of natural resources in regional economic development



Sift and power - ideologies and values

- “The core process for transitions is a shift in belief systems, ideologies and public opinion” (Geels 2010, 499)
- “Power dynamics can influence whose values are expressed or recognised, and which values emerge in contexts” (Kenter et al. 2019, 1455)
- The specific interest is in:
 - Different types of sifts that indicate transition in natural-relations and/or resource-based economic development in regional level
 - Power relations between the different values, especially in the recognition of values presented from the regional perspectives



Interviews with regional experts

- The main data consist of expert interviews with regional actors:
 - 7 regional interviews (2020) and 11 sub-regional interviews (2021)
 - Directors or managers who have gained the first-hand knowledge about the Smart Specialisation and/or the general frames of the regional development by their working experience
 - Interest in the experiences and perceptions of these regional actors
- Part of the questions were formulated on the basis of Smart Specialisation strategy 2019-2023 “East and North Finland in Industrial Transition”
- Other regional policy programmes and strategies were utilised as supportive material in individual interviews



Valuable regions by valuable resources

(Regional) socio-economic perspective

- No sign of a remarkable ideological sift as the forest resources will be used for the economic purposes also in the future
- A typical starting point was to express the natural resources, namely forests, as the strengths of the regional development into which the future of economic potential were also related to
- Current political atmosphere was seen as favourable for regions which can benefit the utilisation of renewable resources, and which might add recognition of these regions in general development
- Specific programmes such as European Green Deal were presented as well-received policies enabling both the economic development and the resource-efficient transformation



Valuable resources in somewhere

(National and global) ecological perspective

- Unlike Green Deal, Lulucf-process was presented as an example of policies that emphasise the non-local / national / global ecological benefits over regional socio-economic development
- In this kind of setting the forest resources were seen as valuable for ecological development globally whereas the perspectives of regional socio-economic development were seen as disregarded
- The criticism raised by the interviewees did not concern the protection of forests in principle but above all the external, namely supra-regional or supranational policies and regulation which steers and controls the utilisation of the natural resources within peripheral regions with little control-power themselves



Reasoning criticism – novelty?

Ignorance of regional or national know-how and heritage

- The principles of sustainable use of forests were not presented as a totally new approach in these regions, for instance
 - Sustaining nature for the future generations due to the ecological reasons and economic possibilities were seen as guiding principles of forest-use in Finland
 - The lessons were believed to be learned from the past when many of the forests were practically felled once in the 1960s and 1970s
 - The struggles between different economic purposes or between the economic utilisation, recreation and conservation were presented as an old phenomena but only with new cases
 - In that sense, no signs of the need to make radical change in societal natural relations appeared



Reasoning criticism – power?

Recognition and decision-making power

- The right to define and control the sustainable use of these specific type of forests were seen having a relation with the understanding of these forests and the benefits from those forests
 - Exaggeratedly asking: Those who understand city-parks as forests, sees these peripheral forests only as nature-parks or conservation areas, and do not understand the conditions of living or the living that understand the nature here – Do they know better than us who live here? (E.g. 2H10)
 - The more economic benefits and control stays inside the region, the more acceptable the use of the nature was seen
 - Currently the recognition of the internal economic and ecological benefits as well as the control-power were seen compromised because of the external decision-making power that follows the location of ownerships, and economic and political hierarchies



Weak signals of change

Will sustainability rhetoric transfer into reality?

- The relation between the economic growth and sustainability seemed to be under redefinition
- The unfavourable economic growth was related to:
 - the over exploitation of nature
 - for the purposes of disposable consumption
 - in a way that the resource is under-valued
 - mostly benefits external economic actors
- The economic growth based of the natural resources was wished to take place:
 - by the production of upgraded products
 - by recycling of the natural resources
 - in a way that regional or local values and benefits are recognized over external values



Conclusions

- Contested Society-Nature-Relations: The forest related regional society-nature-relations are contested especially from the outside of the regions within the forests
- Emotions and conflicts in Times of Societal Change: Conflicts regarding the use of forest resources arise when regional/local benefits or values are experienced as disregarded, and the control-power is external rather than internal
- Practices in Times of Societal Change: Society-nature-relations maybe contested and the awareness of the need to make changes in these relations has risen but the stage of the shift is more ideological-type rather than practice-type



References

- ArcGIS Hub (2015) CountriesWGS8, World Countries. [6.6.2019] <https://hub.arcgis.com/datasets/a21fdb46d23e4ef896f31475217cbb08_1>
- East and North Finland (2019) East and North Finland in Industrial Transition. Smart Specialisation Strategy 2019–2023.
- EC, European Commission (2018) A Sustainable Bioeconomy for Europe: Strengthening the Connection Between Economy, Society and the Environment. Updated Bioeconomy Strategy. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- EC, European Commission (2019) The European Green Deal. Press release 11.12.2019. [21.10.2020] <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/e%20n/ip_19_6691>
- ECJRC, European Commission Joint Research Centre (2003) GLC2000, The Global land cover map for the year 2000. [6.6.2019] <<http://www-gem.jrc.it/glc2000>. Retrieved 6 Jun 2019>
- Geels, F. W. (2010) Ontologies, socio-technical transitions (to sustainability), and the multi-level perspective. *Research Policy* 39 (4): 495-510.
- Kenter, J.O., Raymond, C.M., van Riper, C.J. et al. (2019) Loving the mess: navigating diversity and conflict in social values for sustainability. *Sustainability Science* 14: 1439–1461.
- Kunttu, J., Hurmekoski, E., Heräjärvi, H., Hujala, T. Leskinen, P. (2020) Preferable utilisation patterns of wood product industries' by-products in Finland. *Forest Policy and Economics* 110 (2020): 101946.



References

- Mutanen, A., Vauhkonen, J., Packalen, T. & Asikainen, A. (2019) LULUCF-asetus ja metsien vertailutaso. Suomen Ilmastopaneeli, Raportti 4/2019.
- National Land Survey of Finland (2016) Administrative borders Finland. [6.6.2019] <<https://avaa.tdata.fi/web/paituli/metadata>. Retrieved 6 Jun 2019>
- Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Government (2019) Inclusive and Competent Finland – a Socially, Economically and Ecologically Sustainable Society. Publications of the Finnish Government 2019:33.
- Rakovic, J., Futter, M. N., Kyllmar, K., Rankinen, K., Stutter, M. I., Vermaat, J. & Collentine, D. (2020) Nordic Bioeconomy Pathways: Future narratives for assessment of water-related ecosystem services in agricultural and forest management. *Ambio* 49: 1710–1721.
- Regulation EU 2018/841 On the inclusion of greenhouse gas emissions and removals from land use, land use change and forestry in the 2030 climate and energy framework.
- Skarbøvik, E., Jordan, P., Lepistö, A., Kronvang, B., Stutter, M. I. & Vermaat, J. E. (2020) Catchment effects of a future Nordic bioeconomy: From land use to water resources. *Ambio* 49: 1697–1709.
- UNEP (2011) Towards a Green Economy: Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication - A Synthesis for Policy Makers. [21.10.2020] <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/126GER_synthesis_en.pdf >