



Photo: Ane Casille Blichfeldt, norden.org

Building Nordic forest research networks for 40 years

In 2012, SNS will have been the hub for forest research cooperation in the Nordic countries for 40 years. The jubilee will be celebrated with a conference in Denmark in July 2012, dedicated to areas in which SNS plays an important role.

Nordic cooperation in forest research had been going on for decades via various working groups by the time SNS was established as a result of a merger of two main cooperative bodies (see “Landmarks”, p. 403). SNS developed during the 1970s to become the main organisation for Nordic research cooperation, with a long list of permanent research networks under its wing.

Bringing people together

The main purpose of SNS has been to promote research cooperation at the pan-Nordic level. The initiation and support of research networks has been one of the main tools to achieve this. Examples of topics covered by the networks are forest pathology, tree breeding and genetics, gender research in forestry, and wood science. Altogether 15 permanent network groups were active in the first decade of the 21st century.

Networks get support for specific travelling and meeting costs. Far from all of the permanent networks apply for funding each year. In recent years, a larger number of temporary networks have applied for funding for specific activities which may last for one or several years.

Research projects

Besides the networks, SNS has also supported research projects for which there is a clear benefit from Nordic cooperation. A grant funded research project should include organisations from at least three partner countries from the Nordic area or adjacent countries. Such projects rely, to a large extent, on co-financing from existing national funds, while the SNS contribution brings synergy. The SNS share has usually been in the range of 25–35% of the total project budget.

Centres of Advanced Research

An even stronger focus on networks is found in the CARs (Centres of Advanced Research), which saw

the light of day in 2005. The CARs get support for cooperation over a five-year period, and bring together researchers from many organisations within a specific field. Successful CARs can re-apply for a further period of funding at the end of the five-years. Examples include OSCAR, focusing on operational systems, and CARE-FOR-US, which researches urban forests.

Financing

SNS receives funding for its activities from the Nordic Council of Ministers, or more specifically from the Senior Officials Committee for Agriculture and Forestry (*Åmbetsmannakommittén för fiske och havsbruk, jordbruk, livsmedel och skogsbruk – ÅK-FJLS*).

The budget is limited compared to those of national funding agencies, and it has in fact been reduced over time. In the mid 1980s, annual support amounted to 7–8 million DKK, while it has been less than 6 million DKK per year for the last few years, despite inflation.

The SNS-support relies to a high degree on co-financing from the participating institutes. Support from SNS should thus be regarded as a “lubricant” to promote cooperation and create synergies. It is also, to a high degree, meant as seed money to encourage further cooperation at the European level.

In the 1980s, most of the funding was given to research projects. One example from 1986 illustrates this: Out of a total budget of 6.9 million NOK, 16 research projects involving 30 institutes received 5.7 million NOK. In the early 2000s, a slightly higher proportion was dedicated to research projects than to networks, while funding in more recent years has been targeted mostly towards networks and CARs.

Outside the Nordic area

The Baltic states and north-western Russia gradually became involved in the research cooperation from the mid 1990s. The first stipends to Baltic



Bringing people together has been the main focus for SNS. Above: A network for forest ecology discusses plant stress at a meeting in Finland, 1989 (Photo: SNS). Below: The network CARE-FOR-US meets outside Stavanger in 2011 (Photo: Katrine Hahn Kristensen).

researchers were granted in 1995, and in 1998 a board meeting was held in Vilnius to discuss how cooperation could be strengthened. Today, Baltic researchers are involved in many of the networks and projects supported by SNS. North-western Russia is also an important partner.

The EU-perspective also became gradually more important from the mid-1990s, not least since an increasing share of research funding was channelled through Brussels. Today, the potential to become involved in EU-financed projects is one important criterion for projects to be approved by SNS.

Rotating secretariat

The chair and secretary have circulated among the Nordic countries on a four-year cycle. Iceland is exempted because its forest sector is so small. The secretary is the only person on the SNS pay-roll. He or she is usually employed part-time and is selected from the scientific or administrative staff of the host organisation. The secretary shoulders a heavy load: arranging meetings, keeping control of the finances and communicating results. The current secretariat is in Denmark, but responsibilities will move to Sweden in 2014.

The board

Since 1997, SNS has had a board comprising two representatives from each of the Nordic countries, and observers from the autonomous regions the Faroe Islands and Åland. In contrast, the board of the early 1990s had four representatives each from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden, and one from Iceland. The four individuals from each country represented forest research, forest administration, practical forestry and funding agencies.

The future

SNS is currently in a positive development, with a strong board, increased funding from the Nordic Council of Ministers and expanded research- and networking activities in the Baltic Sea Region in close cooperation with EFINORD.

A brand new external evaluation of SNS will form the basis for the upcoming work with formulating a new strategy for SNS for 2014-2017. The SNS board has started the discussion now and will focus on strengthening the network-approach, cooperate more actively and cross-sectoral on themes like the biobased society and sustainable green growth. They will increasingly focus on policy-advice and setting the agenda for forest-research in the Nordic and Baltic Sea region.

Read more:

Annual reports dating back to 1985 can be downloaded on

www.nordicforestresearch.org

Countries hosting the chair and secretariat of SNS

Period	Host country	Chair
2010-2013	Denmark	Pernille Karlog, Naturstyrelsen
2006-2009	Finland	Kari Mielikäinen, Metla
2002-2005	Norway	Josh Kolltveit/Olav Hepsö, Norges forskningsråd
1998-2001	Sweden	Lisa Sennerby-Forsse/Jan-Erik Hällgren, SJFR
1994-1997	Denmark	Vilhelm Bruun de Neergaard
1989-1993	Finland	Jan Heino, Centralskogs-nämnden Skogskultur
1986-1988	Norway	Oluf Aalde, Ministry of Agriculture

Some landmarks for SNS

1970	Two pan-Nordic committees – <i>Nordiska Skogsforsknings-institutets Samarbetsnämnd</i> (established in 1954) and <i>Internordisk Kommitté för Skogsforskning</i> (established in 1968) – decide at a joint meeting to merge and form a new cooperative body.
1972	The merger takes place and <i>Samarbetsnämnden för Nordisk Skogsforskning</i> (SNS) is formally established at a meeting in Copenhagen in November.
1978	SNS is brought under the Nordic Council of Ministers.
1982	The independent Nordic Forest Work Study Council (<i>Nordiska Skogsarbetsstudiernas Råd</i> , NSR) is brought into SNS as one of several networks.
1986	Publication of <i>Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research</i> starts after an agreement between the Royal Swedish Academy of Agriculture and Forestry (KSLA) and SNS.
1995	Cooperation with the Baltic states is initiated, and gradually strengthens over time.
1997	<i>Samarbetsnämnden för Nordisk Skogsforskning</i> changes its name to <i>SamNordisk Skogsforskning</i> (Nordic Forest Research Co-operation Committee), and the board structure changes.
1999	<i>News & Views</i> is introduced as the regular newsletter for SNS. It is published in each issue of Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research.
2000	<i>NOLTFOX</i> , the common database for field experiments, is inaugurated.
2005	The first phase of <i>Centres of Advanced Research</i> (CAR) kicks off.
2006	A new journal <i>Wood Material Science and Engineering</i> is launched with editorial support from SNS.
2010	EFINORD is established and begins cooperation with SNS. SNS establishes a flagship on sustainable forestry under the EU Strategy for the Baltic Sea Region together with EFINORD, partly financed by the Nordic Council. Scandinavian Journal of Forest Research celebrates 25 years with a jubilee seminar at the IUFRO World Congress in Seoul.



"In the end, Indufor can fully agree with a wish from one SNS stakeholder: 'Hope 40 new years for SNS, no time to retire!'. Anders Portin from Indufor presented the evaluation.

Photo: Mats Hannerz

Positive evaluation of SNS

"SNS should keep on doing what it's good at – bringing people together and enabling cooperation". That sentence summarises the conclusions of an independent evaluation of SNS's work and role.

The last comprehensive evaluation of SNS dates back to 1993. A changing research environment with increased internationalisation and new potentials for regional cooperation was the motivation for an up-to-date evaluation. The board of SNS assigned this task to Indufor, an international consultancy based in Finland. The evaluation included interviews with stakeholders, questionnaires and analyses of documents.

Some of the conclusions:

- SNS has an important function in the Nordic forest research arena. In total, 91% of the interviewees were satisfied or very satisfied with SNS.

- All Nordic countries and autonomous regions consider that they participate on equal terms.
- SNS is praised for its non-bureaucratic and functional structure.
- Focus should be moved from forest ecology and silviculture to areas such as bioenergy, climate change and multiple uses of forests.
- The rotating secretariat is not without problems, but has advantages in involving all countries.
- The stronger links with Baltic research are a positive move, although some organisations would also like stronger cooperation with Scotland, Ireland and Canada.
- Better reporting and follow-up is needed. Do the activities lead to increased cooperation and new projects?
- SNS is doing well with respect to communication and dissemination, with Scandinavian Journal of Forest

SNS 40-years jubilee conference

New challenges for sustainable forestry

Programme:

3rd July 2012

9.00–16.00: Scientific jubilee conference at University of Copenhagen with presentations and posters

16.00–18.00: Seminar for young researchers: The publication process

4th July 9.00–17.00: Excursion to the Arboretum and Grib Skov in northern Sjælland

Participation in the conference and excursion is free of charge and coffee and lunch will be provided both days.

There is room for a maximum of 150 persons for the conference.

Registrations should be sent to hahn@life.ku.dk

More information is found on www.nordicforestresearch.org.

Research as the flagship. News and Views should be disseminated more widely.

- The roles of EFINORD and SNS must be clarified.

Pernille Karlog, chairman of SNS, comments: "SNS is very satisfied with the solid external evaluation. Our next step is to use the recommendations from the evaluation when developing a new strategy for SNS, which will be in action from 2014."

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More info about SNS:

www.nordicforestresearch.org

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- interesting for the readers.

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