

Unlocking the Potential of Birch in Europe



Birch is the third most abundant tree in the European North and the Baltic region, yet it remains largely underutilised. Fast-growing, widely distributed and offering dense, strong diffuse-porous wood, birch is well suited for pulp, veneer, plywood, furniture, flooring, joinery and structural timber. The main barriers to greater value creation include logistics systems not tailored for efficient sorting, transport, and mill distribution, missing standardised grading, and limited quality databases.

Through the SNS network VALUE:BIRCH we brought together researchers, industry partners and students across Northern Europe to address these barriers and expand markets for birch beyond firewood. Our mission is to aggregate and share knowledge, identify critical gaps, and foster collaborative solutions that increase value-specific utilisation of birch throughout the forest value chain. During 2025, we met online and had a two-day workshop in Borås, Sweden, hosted by RISE. This gathering connected single-country and small bilateral initiatives into a broader, coordinated network and helped link projects and initiatives across countries with differing stages of value-chain development.

The Borås meeting concentrated on strength properties, grading, and quality assessments, including visits to the mechanical testing laboratory at RISE and presentations on strength testing and grading. Discussions highlighted the need for standardisation and practical steps required to translate test results into usable grading systems. The second day was devoted to quality assessments and included presentations followed by a field trip to a variety of birch stands managed for recreation, biodiversity, and quality timber. Five PhD, master's, and bachelor's students presented their research, demonstrating promising new approaches and reinforcing cross-institutional mentorship and learning.

The network's activities have already strengthened connections among researchers and industry partners across countries, improving shared competence in sorting and mobilising birch as a regional resource. New contacts, project ideas, and improved communication were clear outcomes, and participants expressed strong motivation to seek joint funding and scale up collaborative initiatives. SNS has granted us with funding for a second year of the VALUE:BIRCH network, with priorities including tailored logistics solutions, better mobilization, and targeted product and market development to move birch into higher-value applications.

If you work with birch research, processing, product development, or forest management and would like to join the network or attend upcoming events, please contact us [[Katrin Zimmer, NIBIO](#)]. Together, we can increase mobilisation and value-specific use of birch across Europe and take this abundant, high-quality resource well beyond its traditional uses.

