

The ASEAN Way and Regional Environmental Cooperation: Explaining Forest Climate Policies in Southeast Asia

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Abstract

Climate change and accelerating deforestation have intensified the need for regional cooperation to address forest-related environmental challenges in Southeast Asia. As one of the world's most forest-rich regions, Southeast Asia has witnessed the development of various regional initiatives and policy frameworks that seek to strengthen cooperation on forest conservation and climate change mitigation. Limited attention has been given to the role of the ASEAN Way as a normative foundation that shapes the development of regional forest climate policies. This study aims to explain how the principles of the ASEAN Way influence regional environmental cooperation in the formulation of forest climate policies in Southeast Asia. Employing a qualitative research design, the study uses document analysis of ASEAN declarations, regional agreements, strategic plans, policy frameworks, and relevant academic literature. The ASEAN Way guides the analysis as an informal regional institution characterized by consensus, consultation, non-interference, respect for sovereignty, and informality. The findings suggest that these principles have significantly influenced the development of regional environmental cooperation by promoting consensus-based decision-making, voluntary commitments, and flexible institutional arrangements in the formulation of forest climate policies. This article contributes to the International Relations literature by demonstrating how regional norms shape environmental cooperation and influence regional policy development, thereby providing a normative and institutional explanation for the emergence and characteristics of forest climate policies in Southeast Asia.

Keywords: ASEAN Way, Regional Environmental Cooperation, Forest Climate Policies, Climate Change Mitigation.

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A. INTRODUCTION

Climate change is one of the greatest global challenges of the twenty-first century, with significant impacts on environmental sustainability, economic development, and human welfare (Asian Development Bank, 2012; Bulkeley & Newell, 2023). In the context of climate change mitigation, the forestry sector occupies a highly strategic position because forests function as carbon sinks, reservoirs of biodiversity, and providers of various ecosystem services that support environmental resilience (IPCC, 2022).

Nevertheless, Southeast Asia continues to face relatively high levels of deforestation and forest degradation caused by land conversion, agricultural expansion, illegal logging, and forest and land fires. This condition makes the region an important contributor to global greenhouse gas emissions, while at the same time making it highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) emphasizes that forest protection and sustainable

forest management are among the key strategies for achieving global climate change mitigation targets (IPCC, 2023), while the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) indicates that effective forest governance is an important prerequisite for successful sustainable development and the implementation of international climate commitments (FAO, 2008).

The characteristics of environmental problems in Southeast Asia show that various forestry issues can no longer be addressed solely through the domestic policies of individual states. Phenomena such as forest and land fires, transboundary haze pollution, biodiversity loss, and ecosystem degradation have consequences that transcend national borders and therefore require closer regional cooperation (ASEAN, 2021). In this context, ASEAN has gradually developed various forms of environmental cooperation through declarations, action plans, strategic frameworks, and regional agreements aimed at strengthening forest conservation, sustainable forest management, and climate change mitigation. One important milestone is the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution, which became the first legally binding regional environmental agreement in Southeast Asia to address transboundary haze pollution (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021).

In addition, ASEAN has developed various regional policies in the fields of forestry and the environment as part of its effort to strengthen collective responses to climate change. However, ASEAN's pattern of environmental cooperation has characteristics that differ from those of other regional organizations such as the European Union. While the European Union has developed a more supranational decision-making mechanism supported by binding legal instruments (Qiu et al., 2024), ASEAN continues to maintain an approach that emphasizes consensus, consultation, respect for state sovereignty, the principle of non-interference, and informal mechanisms. These principles are collectively known as the ASEAN Way and have become the basic norm shaping interaction among member states since ASEAN was established in 1967 (Acharya, 1997).

Previous studies have discussed ASEAN climate change cooperation by arguing that ASEAN has developed various regional cooperation mechanisms, although cross-sectoral coordination remains a major challenge (Seah & Martinus, 2021). Other studies have examined ASEAN climate governance networks and the importance of cross-actor cooperation networks in climate governance (Salazar, 2023). There are also studies on ASEAN's legal and institutional forestry frameworks, which show variations in legal and institutional capacity among ASEAN countries and the importance of regional policy harmonization (Satria, 2025). In addition, research on ASEAN cooperation in climate change mitigation has discussed ASEAN Vision 2045 as strengthening climate cooperation commitments through various regional mechanisms (Satyawan, 2025). There is also research on ASEAN-China marine environmental cooperation, which explains opportunities for regional cooperation through blue carbon as a climate solution. Still, it does not discuss forestry policies or the influence of the ASEAN Way (Zhang, 2025).

Based on previous studies, several major tendencies can be identified. First, research on the ASEAN Way has generally discussed its role as a regional norm that shapes ASEAN's institutional identity, diplomacy, and cooperation processes. Second, research on regional cooperation in the environmental field has focused on the effectiveness of environmental cooperation, regional governance, and institutional coordination. Third, studies on forest governance have emphasized natural resource management and the implementation of forestry policies. Fourth, research on climate governance has more often evaluated the implementation of climate change mitigation and adaptation policies at the regional level (Salazar, 2023; Satria, 2025; Satyawan, 2025; Seah & Martinus, 2021; Zhang, 2025).

Although these studies have made important contributions, limited research has connected the ASEAN Way as a regional norm with the process through which regional environmental cooperation produces ASEAN forest climate policies. In other words, the ASEAN Way is still more often positioned as a diplomatic norm or regional identity. At the same time, studies on forest climate policies tend to focus on implementation effectiveness, governance, or institutional coordination. This study seeks to fill this gap by explaining how the ASEAN Way influences regional environmental cooperation processes and shapes ASEAN forest climate policies. Unlike previous research that emphasizes governance effectiveness or policy implementation, this study positions the ASEAN Way as an explanatory variable for understanding the character of ASEAN's forest climate policies in Southeast Asia.

B. METHOD

This study uses a descriptive-analytical research design with a qualitative approach. A qualitative approach is used because the study seeks to understand meanings and processes, which are commonly examined through in-depth study of particular phenomena or events in International Relations (Lamont, 2015). The data collection technique used in this study is a literature study, with secondary data obtained from books, journals, research reports, and online articles sourced from the internet (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

C. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Regionalism in International Relations

In the field of International Relations theory, the study of regionalism is influenced not only by various schools of thought within the discipline but also by actual changes that have taken place in the world (Ganesan, 2011). The development of regionalism began in the 1950s, coinciding with the establishment of the European Coal and Steel Community and the European Community. Regionalism is viewed as a multidimensional form of integration that includes economic, cultural, political, and social aspects, thereby expanding the understanding of regional activity beyond the formation of free trade agreements and security regimes (Fawcett, 2005).

The development of regionalism originating in Europe became increasingly visible through the emergence of functional cooperation among states in the region

after the Second World War. During this period, there was a need to identify a theoretical framework for the phenomenon of regional integration, along with growing concern over global security issues due to the absence of a central authority above the level of the nation-state in an anarchic international system. Coordinated initiatives focused on limiting the sovereignty and power of nation-states beyond nationalism, making theoretical debates between supranational and intergovernmental approaches dominant in the early period of regionalism. In general, the supranational approach seeks to limit the sovereignty of nation-states through the establishment of institutions and decision-making bodies that transcend and override the sovereign authority of nation-states. This differs from the intergovernmental approach, which emphasizes the centrality of sovereignty and the nation-state in the context of international and regional cooperation (Wunderlich, 2007).

Initially, regionalism drew inspiration from liberal theories of international relations, which emphasized the mutual benefits derived from multilateral cooperation. However, it was not liberalism but realism that gained hegemonic status in the study of international relations from 1945 to the 1980s. In the realist tradition, regionalism served as a promise of cooperation among like-minded states in facing challenges arising from an anarchic system. Since the 1990s, constructivism has inspired International Relations studies through its focus on ideas and ideological norms. For constructivists, elite and cultural considerations regarding identity and community influence the regional level, particularly in relation to patterns of international relations. The subsequent development of regionalism occurred around the 1990s, when regional integration processes emerged in Asia, Africa, and the Americas, showing that the phenomenon was not limited to the European Union. The renewed interest in regionalism encouraged actors that had previously been hesitant to enter broader cooperation agreements and pursue deeper integration with neighboring states through institutional structures governed by formal laws or informal rules. The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is one example of a regional organization whose decision-making is conducted cooperatively (Farrell, 2005).

The development of new regionalism in the 1990s broadened the scope of earlier regionalism studies by taking into account the influence of globalization. A major impetus for new regionalism came from dissatisfaction with the narrow focus of existing approaches, which emphasized formal structures and interstate interactions while neglecting non-state actors and informal relations or interaction processes (Acharya, 2012).

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, the literature on new regionalism emerged by challenging the dominance of the European model of regional integration, commonly known as Comparative Regionalism. The discourse later developed into Global Regionalism, defined as a phenomenon that encompasses various simultaneous and interconnected processes through which communities organize themselves into

regional arrangements that operate beyond the nation-state but remain below the global level (Acharya et al., 2026).

To understand regionalism comprehensively, it is necessary to trace the meaning or definition of the word 'region,' which continues to be debated because there is no single definition, and simple geographical descriptions cannot fully capture the meaning of a region. In International Relations, a region is often treated as a supranational subsystem of the international system (Hettne, 2005). The meaning of region has also been expanded to include commonality, interaction, and ultimately the potential for collaboration. One way to understand it is to view a region as a zone or unit based on states, territories, or groups whose populations share certain characteristics. One of the main characteristics of this zone or unit is that it is larger than any single state or non-state entity but smaller than the international system; such zones may or may not be institutionalized, and their membership may be permanent or temporary (Fawcett, 2005).

Although the meaning of the word region continues to be debated, there is considerable complexity in the literature regarding two other terms most frequently used in this context: regionalism and regionalization. The concept of regionalism refers to a broad phenomenon that includes formal programs and procedures often led by states, as well as sets of norms, values, goals, beliefs, and particular international orders or societies. It includes deliberate processes of cooperation in the political, security, or economic fields. One example of such formal processes is intergovernmental dialogue and agreements that determine the direction of the European Union or ASEAN (Wunderlich, 2007).

Louise Fawcett defines regionalism as policies and initiatives that promote cooperation and the coordination of strategies among non-state entities and state actors within a particular region. In simple terms, regionalism can be understood as a policy or project, in contrast to regionalization, which refers to a process that appears similar to globalization and occurs as a consequence of spontaneous or independent factors. Such interactions can give rise to regional formation and, in turn, to regional actors, networks, and organizations (Fawcett, 2005). Regional-level organizations must be distinguished from regional systems. To make use of an organizational form, policy decisions must be deliberate, and the concept is narrower than that of a regional system (Nye, 1971).

Regionalization can also be viewed as an empirical trend that describes a multidimensional process of intra-regional change occurring simultaneously across several levels of social, political, and economic interaction. One characteristic of regionalization is that it is more spontaneous than formal regionalism, less coherent, and driven by private actors rather than states, emerging from markets, investment flows, and other cross-border activities. Ultimately, regionalism can be understood as a top-down process imposed and managed by states and other state-sponsored actors. In contrast, regionalization is a more unplanned and less directed bottom-up process that primarily involves private actors in politics, economics, and civil society. Regionalism and regionalization are not mutually separate concepts; rather, they tend

to complement each other. This can be seen in how more formal regionalism is responsible for building infrastructure, providing funding, and offering incentives that enable regionalization to occur. Conversely, informal regionalization can become a driving force for more formal regionalism and regional governance oriented toward the state or toward specific issues. From this perspective, regionalization can be seen as a push toward the formation of more formal regional regulatory and governance structures (Wunderlich, 2007).

2. Regional Environmental Cooperation

Regional Environmental Cooperation (REC) is a form of cooperation among states in a region to address environmental problems that have a transboundary character and cannot be effectively resolved through national policies alone. Problems such as climate change, transboundary air pollution, forest fires, biodiversity loss, and natural resource degradation require policy coordination, information sharing, capacity building, and the formation of cooperative institutions at the regional level. According to Oran R. Young (2002), environmental cooperation emerges because states face common environmental problems that require rules, norms, and institutions to reduce conflicts of interest and improve the coordination of collective action. Young emphasizes that the effectiveness of environmental cooperation is strongly influenced by the ability of institutions to facilitate coordination among actors and build shared commitments to environmental management (Young, 2002).

In International Relations, regional environmental cooperation is also understood as a form of collective action. Peter M. Haas (1992) explains that the formation of international environmental policy is influenced not only by the political interests of states but also by epistemic communities that provide scientific knowledge, information exchange, and policy recommendations. Thus, regional environmental cooperation develops through interaction among governments, regional organizations, scientific communities, and various other actors (Haas, 1992).

Regional environmental cooperation demonstrates several main characteristics. First, cooperation is built to address environmental problems that have transboundary impacts and therefore require coordination among states. Unlike domestic issues, environmental problems such as haze, climate change, and forest degradation generate externalities that affect more than one country (Young, 2002). Second, environmental cooperation emphasizes policy coordination rather than legal harmonization. Third, environmental cooperation relies on information sharing, capacity building, and collective learning, and learning processes among actors are an important factor in improving the effectiveness of international environmental cooperation (Haas, 1992). Fourth, environmental cooperation is dynamic and evolves in response to changing global environmental challenges. Therefore, forms of regional cooperation usually evolve through institutional adjustment, the formation of new policies, and the strengthening of coordination mechanisms (Young, 1999).

In Southeast Asia, environmental cooperation has developed in response to the rise of various transboundary issues, such as forest and land fires, haze pollution,

biodiversity loss, and the impacts of climate change. These problems have encouraged ASEAN to build various cooperation mechanisms, beginning in 1977 when environmental issues first appeared on ASEAN's agenda and continuing to develop through resolutions, action plans, specific environmental programs, and multilateral agreements. This development marks the evolution of ASEAN and the determination of its member states to present themselves as an integrated regional unit, rather than merely a sub-region of the Asia-Pacific (Elliott, 2011). The development of ASEAN environmental cooperation cannot be separated from the organization's institutional character, which places dialogue, consultation, and confidence-building as the main foundations of regional cooperation. This approach allows member states with different levels of development and capacity to continue cooperating in addressing environmental challenges without reducing the principle of national sovereignty (Anthony, 2005).

The ASEAN State of Climate Change Report (2021) shows that ASEAN environmental cooperation continues to develop through the integration of climate change, sustainable forest management, biodiversity conservation, and low-carbon development (ASEAN, 2021). Various regional documents such as the ASEAN Strategic Plan on Environment and ASEAN Cooperation in Forestry show that ASEAN views environmental cooperation as an important instrument for strengthening collective responses to climate change (ASEAN, 2018; ASEAN Secretariat, 2016b).

3. The ASEAN Way in ASEAN Regionalism

ASEAN was established in 1967 by five founding states: Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand to institutionalize cooperation among these countries at the most fundamental level. Although it began modestly, the regional organization soon became a central organization in the wider Asia-Pacific region, with eleven official member states consisting of Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Myanmar, Laos, Vietnam, and Timor-Leste, which officially joined as a member state in 2025 (ASEAN, 2025). In its early formation, ASEAN drew inspiration from the legacy of the Non-Aligned Movement established at the Bandung Conference in 1955 and continued to play its role as a norm builder. One of its tasks was to support regional governments in state-building processes, before later shifting its focus toward economic centralization. Almost immediately, ASEAN emerged as a core institution in the re-emergence of Asia's regionalization processes after the Cold War. ASEAN can also be understood as a network hub for regional and extra-regional governments that seek to participate in broader East Asian regionalization (Ergenc, 2021). When specifically discussing the form of regionalism in Southeast Asia, ASEAN becomes the primary reference point. Scholars have been interested in the fact that there are networks of informal meetings, working groups, and advisory groups, particularly within ASEAN and also in the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum, the Asia-Europe Meeting, and ASEAN Plus Three. Unlike the formal bureaucratic structures

and legalistic decision-making procedures common in European and North American cultures, this informal decision-making style incorporates its own code of conduct, often referred to as the 'ASEAN Way.' This decision-making style is built around discretion, informality, pragmatism, consensus-building, and a non-confrontational bargaining style. Consensus here means finding the most acceptable blend of views from each member state (Acharya, 1997).

The ASEAN Way is also reflected in the actions of ASEAN member states in choosing to develop patterns of cooperation that avoid confrontation and prioritize informal approaches over legally binding mechanisms. The development of the ASEAN Way was further strengthened by the signing of the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (UNTC, 1976), which affirmed the basic principles of relations among ASEAN states, such as respect for independence, territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes, and non-interference. Since then, the ASEAN Way has not only served as a diplomatic norm but has also become a foundation for the formation of various forms of regional cooperation, including in the economic, security, socio-cultural, and environmental fields (Acharya, 2001).

The ASEAN Way continues to evolve in response to changes in the region's strategic environment. Although it faces various global challenges, including climate change and environmental degradation, ASEAN continues to maintain a pattern of cooperation based on dialogue, consensus, and respect for the national interests of each member state (Anthony, 2014). The ASEAN Way is also a mechanism of cooperation based on flexibility, informal consultation, and respect for the national interests of member states. This approach enables ASEAN to build regional cooperation without reducing state sovereignty (Severino, 2006).

The ASEAN Way is generally identified through four main principles that characterize ASEAN cooperation.

a. Consensus

Consensus is the primary mechanism in ASEAN's decision-making process. Unlike other organizations that use a voting system, ASEAN prioritizes the approval of all member states before a policy is adopted. This approach aims to maintain equality among member states and prevent the dominance of any particular state (Acharya, 2001).

b. Consultation

The principle of consultation emphasizes the importance of dialogue and deliberation in resolving various regional issues. The consultation process allows member states to convey their respective national interests before reaching a common agreement (Severino, 2006).

c. Non-Interference

The principle of non-interference is one of the main characteristics of the ASEAN Way. This principle affirms that each member state is not permitted to interfere in the domestic affairs of other member states. Although it is often criticized for hindering ASEAN's effectiveness, this principle is regarded as an important foundation for maintaining trust among states (Acharya, 2001).

d. Respect for State Sovereignty

The ASEAN Way places state sovereignty as a primary principle in relations among member states. Every form of regional cooperation must continue to respect the right of member states to determine their own domestic policies (Anthony, 2005).

4. The ASEAN Way in the Evolution of ASEAN Forest Climate Policies

To understand how the ASEAN Way shapes forest climate policies in Southeast Asia, this study analyzes policy development chronologically. This approach is based on the assumption that regional policies are not formed instantly but are the result of the gradual evolution of norms, interests, and cooperation processes. In the ASEAN context, this evolution shows how the principles of the ASEAN Way, namely consensus, consultation, non-interference, and respect for sovereignty to influence the character of environmental and forestry policy formation (Acharya, 1997; Elliott, 2011). The documents examined include the Bangkok Declaration (ASEAN, 1967), Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (UNTC, 1976), Manila Declaration (ASEAN, 1987), ASEAN Vision 2020 (ASEAN, 1997), Vientiane Action Programme (ASEAN, 2004), and the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021). The process developed further after the Paris Agreement in 2015, which encouraged ASEAN to strengthen regional policies linking sustainable forest management with climate change mitigation (IPCC, 2023).

This development is reflected in various regional documents, such as the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016a), ASEAN Strategic Plan on Environment 2021-2025 (ASEAN, 2018), ASEAN Forestry Cooperation 2016-2025 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2016b), ASEAN State of Climate Change Report (ASEAN, 2021), and ASEAN Community Vision 2045 (ASEAN Secretariat, 2025). Analysis of these documents shows development in ASEAN's cooperation framework in the environmental sector, particularly with the involvement of the forestry sector. This development is divided into three phases: the phase of regional norm formation (1967-1996), the phase of institutionalization of environmental cooperation (1997-2014), and the phase of integrating forestry and climate change (2015-2025).

Phase I: Regional Norm Formation (1967-1996)

The first phase was marked by the formation of ASEAN's basic norms through the Bangkok Declaration (1967) and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (1976). During this period, ASEAN cooperation was still oriented toward regional political and security stability; however, basic principles such as consensus, consultation, respect for state sovereignty, and the peaceful settlement of disputes began to be institutionalized as part of the region's identity (Acharya, 2001).

In environmental issues, ASEAN's attention began to develop with the Manila Declaration (1987), which reaffirmed the political commitment of member states to

environmental protection as part of regional development. During this phase, there were no specific policies on climate change or forestry. Nevertheless, the institutional foundation built during this period was very important because it shaped ASEAN's pattern of cooperation, which prioritizes dialogue, deliberation, and mutual agreement. Thus, the normative phase was a period of value formation that later became the basis for drafting environmental policies in subsequent periods (Elliott, 2011).

Phase II: Institutionalization of Environmental Cooperation (1997-2014)

The second phase was marked by the increasing complexity of transboundary environmental problems, particularly forest fires and haze that affected several Southeast Asian countries in the late 1990s. These events showed that forestry issues had developed into regional problems requiring a collective response. In response, ASEAN adopted ASEAN Vision 2020 (1997) and the Hanoi Plan of Action (1999), which began to integrate environmental protection into the region's development agenda. The peak of this phase was the adoption of the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP) in 2002, which became the first legally binding regional environmental instrument in Southeast Asia. Although AATHP has the status of a binding agreement, its content still reflects the character of the ASEAN Way. Implementation is carried out through regional coordination, technical assistance, information exchange, and strengthening national capacity without granting ASEAN supranational authority to intervene in the domestic policies of member states (ASEAN Secretariat, 2021). During the same period, the Vientiane Action Programme (2004) further strengthened environmental coordination through various regional cooperation programs. The approach used continued to emphasize consultation, voluntary commitments, and confidence-building among member states (ASEAN, 2004).

Phase III: Integration of Forestry and Climate Change (2015-2025)

The third phase marks ASEAN's development toward more formal community building, with the institutionalization of a number of ambitious environmental goals and targets becoming a defining feature of this period. Sustainable development and environmental conservation goals were progressively incorporated into more comprehensive plans and vision statements, which were then agreed upon by member states for implementation as part of their political efforts (Elliott, 2011).

Analysis of the three phases shows that the development of ASEAN forest climate policies did not occur in a revolutionary manner but through a gradual process of institutional evolution. In the first phase, ASEAN built norms of cooperation; in the second phase, these norms were institutionalized through the formation of various regional instruments; and in the third phase, the same norms became the basis for integrating forestry issues with the climate change agenda. This pattern of evolution shows that the ASEAN Way functions not only as the region's diplomatic identity but also as a mechanism that shapes the policy development process. Policy characteristics based on consensus, consultation, flexibility, and respect for sovereignty are not merely consequences of environmental issues

themselves, but rather reflections of regional norms that have developed since ASEAN's early formation. The development of ASEAN environmental policy phases can be seen in the synthesis presented in the table below:

Table 1. Phases of the Development of ASEAN Forest Climate Policies

Phase	Period	Key Documents
Phase I: Norm Formation	1967-1996	Bangkok Declaration (1967), Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (1976), Manila Declaration (1987)
Phase II: Institutionalization	1997-2014	ASEAN Vision 2020 (1997), Hanoi Plan of Action (1999), ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (2002), Vientiane Action Programme (2004).
Phase III: Forestry and Climate Change Integration	2015-2025	ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025, ASEAN Strategic Plan on Environment 2021-2025, ASEAN Cooperation in Forestry, ASEAN State of Climate Change Report (2021), ASEAN Community Vision 2045.

Source: Processed by the author based on official ASEAN documents.

The documents were then analyzed and show that the forestry sector is no longer viewed merely as an issue of natural resource conservation, but also as an important part of the region's climate change mitigation strategy. Nevertheless, the approach used continues to maintain the character of the ASEAN Way. All policies are developed through consultation and consensus, provide implementation flexibility for each member state, and do not establish binding sanction mechanisms. Most instruments take the form of strategic plans, cooperation frameworks, and blueprints that emphasize coordination and political commitment rather than legal harmonization. The results of the analysis of these documents can be seen in the detailed data in the table below:

Table 2. Analysis of ASEAN Policy Documents on ASEAN Forest Climate Policies Based on the Principles of the ASEAN Way

ASEAN Document	Document Type	Document Objective	ASEAN Way Principles Analyzed	Indications in the Document	Analysis
Bangkok Declaration (1967)	Declaration	Establishment of ASEAN and the basic principles of regional cooperation	Consensus, Consultation, Respect for Sovereignty	Emphasizes peaceful cooperation, mutual respect, and problem-solving through consultation.	Serves as the normative foundation of the ASEAN Way, which later influenced the entire process of regional policy formation.

Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (1976)	Regional Agreement	Regulates relations among ASEAN states	Non-interference, Respect for Sovereignty, Peaceful Settlement	Affirms respect for sovereignty, non-interference, and the peaceful settlement of disputes.	Provides an institutional basis for regional policy formation that does not reduce the sovereignty of member states.
Manila Declaration (1987)	Declaration	Strengthens ASEAN's commitment to environmental protection	Consensus	Statement of common commitment to environmental management.	Shows the development of environmental norms as part of ASEAN's agenda.
ASEAN Vision 2020 (1997)	Vision Document	Sets ASEAN's long-term development direction	Consensus, Consultation	Positions sustainable development as a regional objective.	Provides a basis for integrating environmental issues into ASEAN's development agenda.
ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (2002)	Regional Agreement	Addresses transboundary haze pollution caused by forest fires	Consensus, Non-interference, Respect for Sovereignty	Implementation is conducted through regional coordination without intervention in domestic policies.	Shows that even ASEAN's legal instruments continue to maintain the character of the ASEAN Way.
Vientiane Action Programme (2004)	Action Plan	Strengthens the implementation of ASEAN cooperation	Consultation	Strengthening coordination and cross-sectoral cooperation.	Shows the gradual development of environmental cooperation (incremental cooperation).
ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 (2015)	Blueprint	Builds a sustainable ASEAN community	Consensus	Positions the environment and climate change as part of ASEAN community development.	Demonstrates the integration of environmental issues into regional community-building.
ASEAN Strategic Plan on	Strategic Plan	Serves as the direction for ASEAN	Consensus	Develops cross-sectoral cooperation on	Shows a flexible and non-coercive

Environment 2021-2025		environmental policy		environmental issues.	policy approach.
ASEAN Cooperation on Forestry 2016-2025 (2016)	Work Plan	Supports sustainable forest management and climate change mitigation	Consultation, Respect for Sovereignty	Implementation is adjusted to the national priorities of each country.	ASEAN functions as a facilitator of coordination rather than as a supranational regulator.
ASEAN State of Climate Change Report (2021)	Regional Report	Provides direction for ASEAN climate change policy	Consultation	Emphasizes the importance of regional coordination in climate change mitigation and adaptation.	Serves as a basis for strengthening ASEAN forest climate policies.
ASEAN Community Vision 2045 (2025)	Vision Document	Determines ASEAN's long-term development direction	Consensus, Consultation	Integrates climate change and sustainability as key ASEAN agendas.	Shows the continuity of the ASEAN Way norm in the development of regional environmental policies.

Source: Processed by the author based on official ASEAN documents

D. CONCLUSION

This study aims to explain how the ASEAN Way shapes regional environmental cooperation in the process of forming forest climate policies in Southeast Asia. Based on an analysis of various ASEAN policy documents and literature on regional cooperation, this study shows that the development of ASEAN forest climate policies is influenced not only by the increasing threats of climate change and forest degradation, but also by the regional norms that underlie relations among member states. In this context, the ASEAN Way functions as an informal institution that shapes the character of regional environmental cooperation through the principles of consensus, consultation, respect for state sovereignty, non-interference, and a flexible approach. The principles of the ASEAN Way remain the foundation of the policy formulation process. This is reflected in the dominance of policy instruments such as declarations, blueprints, action plans, and cooperation frameworks that emphasize political commitment, coordination, capacity building, and collective learning rather than legally binding mechanisms.

The findings of this study show that the character of ASEAN forest climate policies is a consequence of institutional preferences that have developed in the region. A consensus-based approach allows all member states to participate in the decision-making process and strengthens their sense of ownership over the resulting policies. At the same time, respect for state sovereignty and the principle of non-

interference provide space for each state to implement policies in accordance with its national conditions. On the other hand, this character also causes most ASEAN policies to remain voluntary and dependent on the political commitments of member states rather than on binding compliance mechanisms.

Theoretically, this study contributes by positioning the ASEAN Way as an explanatory concept for understanding the formation of regional environmental policies. Unlike most previous studies that focus on the effectiveness of environmental governance or policy implementation, this article shows that regional norms have a significant influence on how environmental cooperation is built and how forest climate policies are formulated. Thus, this study enriches the study of International Relations, particularly the study of regionalism, regional environmental cooperation, and ASEAN institutional dynamics.

From a policy perspective, the findings indicate that strengthening ASEAN environmental cooperation in the future requires not only the enhancement of institutional capacity, but also adjustment to increasingly complex climate change challenges. ASEAN needs to maintain the core values of the ASEAN Way as a foundation of trust and regional solidarity, while also developing more adaptive and responsive coordination mechanisms capable of strengthening the implementation of regional environmental policies without neglecting the principle of respect for the sovereignty of member states.

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