



Sveriges lantbruksuniversitet
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Problematizing Productivity

– Exploring patterns of thought in the Swedish National Food Strategy

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Credits: 15 HEC

Level: First cycle, G2F

Course title: Independent project/Degree project in Rural Development

Course code: EX0523

Programme/Education: Agriculture Programme - Rural Development

Place of publication: Uppsala

Year of publication: 2017

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Online publication: <http://stud.epsilon.slu.se>

Keywords: WPR, agriculture, discourse, Sweden, strategy, policy, problematization, agricultural, sustainability, productivity, intensification, livsmedelsstrategi, jordbrukspolitik, diskurs, Sverige, produktivitet

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Abstract

This thesis explores what agro-political discourses define the Swedish National Food Policy from 2017. By analysing how the problems of environmental sustainability and productivity are addressed, the study aims to excavate unearthed ways of thinking. The findings show that environmental sustainability is assumed to be attained through increased and intensified production, hoping to substitute 'unsustainable' international produce with Swedish 'sustainable' produce on the world market. Environmental sustainability is also addressed through intensification, as it is understood as a matter of resource efficiency. By examining how productivity is problematized, the study finds the presence of two understandings of the concept: as 'resource productivity' and as 'value productivity'. The latter is shown to be very similar to profitability and competitiveness. Through the conceptualization of productivity as 'profitability', policy responses to achieve productivity are promoted in part through a 'simplification rationale' that is used to scrutinize different environmental policies specific to Swedish agriculture. 'Simplification' is also employed to open for an overhaul of the law on land acquirement, as the national strategy hopes for a structural rationalization spearheaded by transnational capital. Marginal smallholders are being advised to diversify and find income support through extensification measures in the Rural Development program. The study argues that the aspiration for this divergent development, the 'dichotomization of landscapes', must be seen as a break from earlier 'productivist' policies emphasizing the family farm as primary unit of agricultural production. The results of this study repeatedly point to the conclusion that the National Food Strategy is subscribing to a 'neo-liberal' discourse. The results also reveal how 'multifunctional' elements interact with and reinforce the neo-liberal discourse.

Keywords: WPR, agriculture, discourse, Sweden, strategy, policy, problematization, agricultural, sustainability, productivity, intensification, livsmedelsstrategi, jordbrukspolitik, diskurs, Sverige, produktivitet

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1. Introduction

Previous discourse analysis has shown that the development of the Common Agricultural Policy over the last 25 years have seen the waning of the ‘productivist discourse’ focusing on food security through state-supported maximized production (Erjavec and Erjavec 2009; 2015; Erjavec et al. 2009; Skogstad, 1998; Wilson, 2001). Along with the productivist discourse, two competing discourses have been established. The first, ‘multifunctional discourse’ is promoting an increased focus on common goods, regional development, land use, and environment issues (Almstedt et al., 2014, Dibden et al., 2009, Potter and Burney, 2002, Potter and Tilzey, 2005). Lastly, a ‘neoliberal’ discourse is encouraging an opening of CAP to the world market as well as a deregulation of income support (Potter and Burney, 2002, Swinbank and Daugbjerg, 2006). This development sums up three competing discourses regarding the right way to conduct agricultural policy (Dibden et al., 2009; Erjavec and Erjavec, 2009; 2015; Erjavec, et al. 2009; Liepins and Bradshaw 1999; Potter 2006; Potter and Burney 2002; Potter and Tilzey 2005; Rutz et al. 2014; Swinbank and Daugbjerg 2006).

The European agricultural debate is fast-changing and under constant negotiation, comprising a complexity that always presents a need of further investigation. This study is set to examine the Swedish National Food Strategy, using research on the discourses of in CAP as a backdrop. The influx of new political rationalities in agricultural policy agenda has been reflected in public debate, as agriculture is increasingly intertwined with issues of climate change, land use, overfertilization, biodiversity. Recently, an increased medial interest has emerged in Sweden, regarding national food security (Sveriges Radio, 2016-12-12) and the aspects of organic contra conventional farming (Dagens Nyheter 2016-07-16, Svenska Dagbladet 2014-11-16, Sveriges Television 2014-11-18).

The debate on agriculture thus have a lot of issues on its agenda. However, the agro-political discourses also cover a wide spectrum of solutions, seldom seen in policy-making of today. Whereas a lot of policy areas have seen a “rolling back of the state”, agricultural policy debate still offers a range of ‘legitimate’ solutions (Potter and Tilzey, 2005).

Sweden has explored three major solutions. During the cold-war era the country have been adhering to a state interventionist and protectionist policy while suddenly scrapping it for a heavily deregulated and market oriented policy in 1989 (Daugbjerg and Studsgaard 2005). On the very same day the liberalization policy entered into force, Sweden applied for

entry to the EU. Liberalization policy thus never really came into play, as Sweden was integrated to the inner market in 1995 (Flygare and Isacson 2011).

The goals on how to influence the CAP was presented in 1998 (Prop. 1997/98:142), though Sweden has not until now presented a grand agricultural policy (Prop. 2016/17:104). During this time, the multifunctionality and common goods provided by agriculture has been increasingly stressed in agricultural debate, as well as an increased pressure for liberalising the EUs agricultural policy (Erjavec and Erjavec 2009, 2015; Lovec, 2016).

Along with the development of the debate, the inner market also has changed. Notable factors are the inclusion of new countries, a decoupling of most of the state support. Sweden has during this time seen a generally decreasing agricultural sector, where self-sufficiency levels have halved from being nearly full and the long development of increasing yields have stagnated (Flygare and Isacson 2011; Prop. 2016/17:104). It is therefore of interest to analyse the Swedish position, as the country has already proved flexibility in the radical change from state intervention to free market policies (Daugbjerg and Studsgaard 2005, Flygare and Isacson 2003; 2011).

Since its integration to the European market, Sweden has profiled and prided itself on its “sustainable” agriculture, with internationally high environmental and animal welfare standards. Sustainable development as a political aim is however often vaguely defined and often used as a symbolic commitment, masking policies adhering to ecological modernization and increased productivity (Baker, 2007). Similarly, in CAP reform debate, ‘environmental sustainability’ have no concrete reference but, rather, is used to authorize certain action (Erjavec and Erjavec 2009:218, Erjavec et al. 2009:42, Lovec 2016:38).

Drawing on the identified discourses of productivism, multifunctionalism and neoliberalism, the overall purpose of this study is to analyse what discourses are defining of the National Swedish Food Strategy. To make these discourses visible, the analysis will primarily focus on how the goals in the food policy regarding productivity and environmental sustainability are addressed. The central question to achieve the purpose is:

How are the problems of productivity and environmental sustainability represented in the Swedish national food strategy?

With reference to previous discourse analysis on CAP, I hope to make to make a small contribution to the field of agro-political discourse analysis in general. The findings of this study might also prove helpful in analysis of agricultural policies in countries with similar conditions as Sweden. This study also aims to provide an opening to social constructivist analysis of Swedish agricultural policy and point out a general agro-political trajectory of the country.

2. Guiding concepts and discourses

2.1 Discourse analysis of agricultural policy development

The European Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) has undergone detailed studies on the ideas and discourse constituting its development through the last twenty years-or-so. In the development of the policy, researchers (; Dibden et al 2009; Erjavec and Erjavec 2009; 2015; Erjavec et al 2009; Potter and Tilzey 2005) have identified three discourses in political tug-of-war for hegemony.

Research shows that the CAP originally has followed a productivist discourse that since the 1990's has been rivalling for hegemony with two opposing discourses: the neo-liberal and multifunctional discourse. It has to be stated that the studies on CAP policy development differ in their interpretations of discourse, some (Cloke 1996; Coleman 1998; Skogstad 1998, Wilson 2001) not even using the term. Their contributions must however be seen as milestones in what can be described (Erjavec and Erjavec 2015) as a consolidation of a policy-as-discourse tradition which in turn have crystallized the three main discourses.

Given the research on the CAP and that these discourses also have been identified in the development of food policy in the US (Skogstad 1998), New Zealand (Cloke 1996; Liepins and Bradshaw 1999) and Australia (Dibden, *et al.* 2009), it is arguably safe to assume that they provide a reasonable instrument of analysis in a Swedish context. Most importantly, since the CAP defines most of Swedish law on agriculture, Swedish agricultural policy is very much inseparable from the ideas governing European regulations, perhaps impossible to understand without a contextualization.

The three discourses will be described to provide a backdrop upon which the Swedish National food strategy will be analysed. Discourse is defined as “socially produced forms of knowledge” (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016) where knowledge function as ‘interpretive framings of causation, problems and solutions’ (Potter and Tilzey 2005).

2.1.1 *The productivist discourse*

To sum up, the ideologies that define and compete in the construction of the CAP can be sorted under three discourses. The first one, which has been identified as “the state-assisted paradigm” or “agricultural exceptionalism” (Skogstad 1998) share traits and are summarized as the “Neo-mercantilist” by Potter and Tilzey (2005).

A key idea to productivist discourse is that of self-sufficiency and food security, not surprising as this discourse is historically rooted in a Europe ravaged by the second world war and dependent on foreign aid. Agricultural produce and its producers are regarded as public goods, securing food supply and a populated countryside (Erjavec and Erjavec 2015). These are viewed as exceptionally vulnerable to the volatility of weather and price fluctuations. The discourse is defined by its idea of the state as a vanguard for enduring production and export. The productivist discourse focuses, as the name suggests, on maximizing agricultural output through a “modernization’ of the ‘national farm’” (Lowe, et al. 1993). This is done through state support and subsidies based on yield, thus forming an industrially driven model of agricultural production (Wilson, 2001).

This discourse has been dominant throughout the cold war era and since the formation of the CAP in 1962 (Potter and Tilzey 2005 p. 591). It’s arguably safe to assume productivism as the dominant discourse in the Swedish agricultural policy from 1947 until 1990, a claim that will be further substantiated later in this chapter (See for example Flygare & Isacson 2003; 2011; Daugbjerg & Studsgaard 2005).

2.1.2 The multifunctionalist discourse

Further stressing the idea of public goods in agriculture is the ‘multifunctionalist’ discourse. It interprets the role of agriculture as expanding beyond that of food security, also encompassing biodiversity, job creation in rural areas, cultural aspects of heritage and landscape, and more (Potter and Burney, 2002:35, Coleman 1998).

This discourse has been further incorporated into the CAP since the beginning of the 1990’s. The Cork declaration from 1996 exemplifies a breakthrough for this discourse, by stating the diminishing economic significance of conventional agriculture in marginal areas. The declaration instead emphasized new justifications for public subventions of common- and public goods (Potter 2006). The MacSharry (1992) and Fischler (2003) reforms also represents this discourse, proposing a decoupling of farmer payments by transferring funds from the “productivist” income support of Pillar 1 to the rural development focused Pillar 2 (Swinbank and Daugbjerg 2006).

Proponents of this discourse are generally environmental- and farmer groups, who have criticised the CAP for providing incentives to an excessively rational agriculture, wiping out small-scale family holdings and marginal farmland. In this sense, multifunctional discourse, or as Wilson (2001) calls it, the “post-productivist agricultural regime”, is an

antithesis to the productivist discourse. Multifunctional discourse claims that unnecessary harm is done to the environment by subsidising overproduction. Instead, the CAP funds ought to facilitate a greener and diverse production as well as rural development.

2.1.3 The neo-liberal discourse

A major break from the productivist and multifunctional discourses are to be found in the 'neo-liberal' discourse. Obviously, de-regulations within the EU and tariff reductions are key examples of reforms taking place inspired by this set of ideas. The discourse regards the state and its economic instruments as inefficient and seeks to establish free market solutions undistorted by state intervention. The neo-liberal discourse sees globalization as offering vast opportunities of growth and progress if one 'catches the train' but regression if one is left behind, fighting the inevitable. According to Erjavec & Erjavec (2009) recurring indicators of neo-liberal discourse are the positive terms of 'market orientation', 'flexibility', 'simplification' and 'liberalization'. This discourse can be seen as contrasting the other two as it does not perceive state support as necessary for the agricultural sector.

The advocates of this discourse are many – most powerful is the WTO (Swinbank and Daugbjerg, 2006) and a long list of countries that wants open access to the European market (Erjavec & Erjavec 2009:22). Major exporting nations such as Brazil, New Zealand, Australia and many of the least developed countries are examples of actors that make for this *external* pressure of European market liberation. But also within the EU, the proponents come in part from food industries not engaged in primary production, typically the European Roundtable of Industrialists (ERT), the Confederation of Food and Drink Industries of the EU (CIAA) and the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) (Potter & Tilzey 2005:589). Other internal pressure come from charity organizations and some net payer countries such as Denmark, Netherlands and the United Kingdom.

2.2. Problem redefinition in past Swedish Agricultural Policy development

To further contextualize The Swedish National Food Strategy, a brief presentation of the historical underpinnings of Swedish agro-policy development will be made. Although there has been no previous analysis of discourses on the subject, one can witness tendencies and draw parallels to the three discourses presented.

Sweden has throughout the post-war social democratic era adopted an intricate system of economic instruments to plan the objectives of rationalization and self-sufficiency while also securing decent farmer income (Flygare and Isacson 2003; 2011). The close similarity to the policy of the European Economic Community suggests that this also can be regarded as productivist.

The 1980's however proved to be a decade of intense agro-political debate. The apparent failure to avoid over-production along with the demise of Keynesianism in the general debate of political economy paved the way for the *Omställning '90* (Swedish for 'transition') reform. As one of the first of its kind in Europe, the policy was passed in 1989, aiming towards the ultimate de-regulation of agricultural produce (Flygare and Isacson 2011).

Daugbjerg and Studsgaard (2005) explain this radical shift as a redefinition of problem. Following an escalating inflation rate of the Swedish krona, the agricultural policy was absorbed into a wider economic debate. Identified as a contributor to this inflation, agricultural policy transformed from being a matter of securing farmer income to being a matter of "sound economic policy" (Daugbjerg and Studsgaard 2005). The productivist policy was also undermined by an overhaul of the national security. Inquiries stated that for one, the war-time readiness goal of withstanding three years of embargo was excessive. Secondly, they pointed out that the real limits to war-time readiness were to be found in the dependency of imported fertilizer, machinery and electricity – factors that until then had been overlooked. These results undermined farmer demands, questioning the very *raison d'être* of the cold-war regulated market. (Daugbjerg and Studsgaard 2005)

The reform of a policy based on income support and protectionism to deregulated free trade reform can be interpreted as a shift from a productivist policy towards a neo-liberal one. This study will further examine manifestations of discourse in Swedish agricultural policy in a contemporary setting. How this will be done will be covered in the next section.

3. Theoretical background and analytical framework

3.1 Theoretical underpinnings

Central to my analysis the Swedish National Food Strategy is the theory of '*problematization*'. Problematization is in this context not primarily an idea of questioning a certain phenomena or ideas, as the term may be used in everyday speech. Its meaning is instead shifted to the idea of conceptualizing a problem as a specific type of problem.

This idea takes the constructivist stand that public policies do not necessary address problems that simply exist out there. Instead, policies are to be seen as shaping the problems by defining how they should be addressed. By changing the perspective of policies as *problem-solving* to *problem-making*, one can expose underlying presuppositions and assumptions of a particular problem (Bacchi, 2009; Bacchi & Goodwin 2016; Knill & Tosun, 2012). Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) exemplify this with the issue of childhood obesity – by addressing the problem with additional sports classes in school shapes the issue as a problem of inactivity. On the other hand, responding with restrictions on fast food advertisement during childrens TV-shows makes obesity a problem of aggressive advertisement. It has to be stressed that the “making” in this sense is ongoing, shifting our understanding *towards* something, although never succeeding in being completely defining, as there are always contesting understandings.

The problematization theory that Bacchi and Godwin (2016) presents is heavily based on Foucauldian post-structuralist discourse analysis, viewing discourse as *socially produced forms of knowledge* (Bacchi and Godwin 2016:35). Other poststructuralist theorists have a more linguistic focus on patterns in dialogue, rhetoric and communication, a perspective represented in the agro-policy discourse research (Dibden *et al* 2009; Erjavec and Erjavec 2009, 2015; Potter and Tilzey 2005; Rutz *et al* 2014), focusing primarily on actors and how discourse is formed. The perspective offered by Bacchi and Goodwin (2016:37) by contrast, views discursive practice as having “*nothing to do with people conversing*”. The focus on problem representations (Bacchi 2009) or problematizations (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016), however, bear close similarities to the idea of “*interpretive framings of causation, problems and solutions*” presented by Potter and Tilzey (2005), as both focus heavily on the deeper implications of addressing issues.

In addition to making problems into specific kinds of problems, these *problem representations* (Bacchi 2009) also shape certain “subjects”, “objects” and “places”. The physical existence of these things is not questioned – instead, the values and meanings they

bear are in constant transformation. Along with values and meanings, this *subjectification* process assigns role form.

3.2 Framework and execution

The research in the study at hand is done by following Carol Bacchi's (2009) 'What's the Problem Represented to be?'-analysis (WPR-analysis) as it presents a uniform approach encompassing a firm theoretical base, an analytical framework but also a practical guide on how the analysis is to be made (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016). It follows a set of questions, subsequently "working backwards" from the policy as it is stated.

Table 1. *Heuristic schedule of the WPR- approach.*

(Amended from Bacchi, C. and Goodwin, S., 2016, 'Post-structural policy analysis – A guide to practice')

What's the Problem Represented to be? (WPR) approach to policy analysis
Question 1: What's the problem represented to be in a specific policy or policies?
Question 2: What deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem"?
Question 3: How has this representation of the "problem" come about?
Question 4: What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the "problem" be conceptualized differently?
Question 5: What effects are produced by this representation of the "problem"? How do the problem representation produce 'objects', 'places' and 'subjects'?

Although validity is difficult to supply using the non-positivist approach offered with a social constructivist perspective (Bergström and Boréus 2014:41), this instrument of analysis is proven to be a valid instrument in analysing deeper implications of policies as it has been used in a large number of policy areas and geographical contexts (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016:11). By carefully reading and taking notice of presuppositions and problematizations and re-reading with new questions in mind, the study will try to excavate the underlying patterns of thought in the food policy. Citations of the document will provide transparency and reliability of interpretation (Bergström and Boréus, 2014:42). All of the questions mentioned in the table above will be helpful in interpreting the strategy, though answering all

these questions will not be accounted for unless they are of significant interpretive relevance. To not overextend the scope of study, I will instead focus on three questions.

My primary question is the first, '*what is the 'problem' represented to be?*' as it is the most basic in the analysis and central to the study, focusing on the representations of "productivity" and broader understanding of "environmental sustainability". It has to be noted that a problem can have several representations (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016:20).

The second question examines which deep seated presuppositions, and in a Foucauldian sense of discourse, '*knowledges*' (Bacchi & Goodwin 2016, 20ff), that make for this problematization. This is of particular interest as this will be the link to previously presented discourses thereby to the purpose of the study, to find which discourses are defining the Swedish National Food Strategy. The previous discourses and research also provide reliability for the study, as my interpretation will be used in relation to interpretations made of similar documents (Bergström and Boreus 2014:42).

The fifth question, "*What effects are produced by this representation of the problem?*" is also relevant. Stressing that we're using a social constructivist perspective, this question is of certain attention as it is used to expose the making or un-making of "subjects", "objects" and "places" as they are made in the text. Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) clarifies this as: '*effects ought to be thought about as political implications rather than as measurable "outcomes"*' and this question serves to 'bring down' the discussion again and show how problem representations and discourses are 'played out' on a lived level.

4. Material

Central to this study is the government bill ‘*En livsmedelsstrategi för Sverige – fler jobb och hållbar tillväxt i hela landet*’ (Prop. 2016/17:104), which translates into ‘A food strategy for Sweden – More jobs and sustainable growth in the whole country’. The proposition must be seen as the executive extension of the official report “Attraktiv, innovativ och hållbar – strategi för en konkurrenskraftig jordbruks- och trädgårdsnäring” (‘Attractive, innovative and sustainable – strategy for a competitive agri,- and horticultural industry’, a.k.a. “The Official report on Competitiveness”) (SOU 2015:15), as the disposition of goals and areas are generally identical. The strategy makes clear how the government assesses a certain goal, discussed in relation to the verdict of the Competitiveness Report.

The bill is aiming to be a guiding principle until 2030 where coming governments are bound to relate to it and set up their own *action plan*. The *action plan* for this government has already been presented, listing a concisely described list of short-term goals until 2019 that aim to help realize the strategy. The national strategy was presented as a goal in the national budget of 2015 and the work on forming one began later that spring as soon as the official report ‘Attractive, innovative and sustainable’ was completed. The action plan was itself published a week later. An English short version has also been presented, which will primarily be assessed for translations when quoting the original text.

5. Analysis

5.1. Presentation

This section aims to provide a basic understanding of the goals of the policy and how they are presented and prioritized. This is necessary to provide an understanding for later deeper analysis focusing on their '*problematizations*' in how they are to be reached.

5.1.1. Overview of the goals

The bill "A food strategy for Sweden – More jobs and sustainable growth in the whole country" covers 136 pages and 11 chapters. The first chapters cover the development of the policy, arguments for why the strategy is needed and the role of agriculture. It also states a general goal to be reached by 2030.

"The overall objective of the food strategy is a competitive food supply chain that increases overall food production while achieving the relevant national environmental objectives, aiming to generate growth and employment and contribute to sustainable development throughout the country. The increase in production – of both conventional and organic food – should correspond to consumer demands. An increase in production of food could contribute to a higher level of self-sufficiency. Vulnerability in the food supply chain will be reduced."

(English short version of Government bill 2016/17:104)

The goals on increased produce, higher self-sufficiency and lower vulnerability are centrepieces of traditional post-war productivist discourse (Erjavec and Erjavec 2009;2015, Erjavec et al 2009). It is also clear that the goal for production should be prioritized, notably over consumer demand. The goals of employment and sustainable development throughout the country are to be viewed as multi-functionalistic, as is the focus on environmental goals. Neoliberal discourse elements are basically absent, only vaguely expressed in "competitiveness" and the hope for the increased production to correspond with consumer demands.

The strategy identifies three fields of special attention to achieve the general goal stated above. These fields are Rules and regulations, Consumers and markets and Knowledge and innovation. These three fields are proposed by the Competitiveness Report and follow a similar disposition, argumentation and objectives. The chapters regarding these three

fields are of interest for analysis of *how* goals are to be reached, thereby providing a basis for a WPR-analysis.

A determinant factor for categorizing the paper in a European perspective is its explicit goal to work along previous Swedish policy lines in CAP development (prop. 1997/98:142), aiming for a “deregulated, market oriented and competitive agricultural sector, directed by consumer demand as well as climate- and environmental goals and consideration to animal welfare.” (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 20). Along the lines of thinking of Erjavec and Erjavec (2009, 2015), this should be regarded as a decisive example of neo-liberal discourse, defining the paper to the category. According to Erjavec and Erjavec (2015), the green elements stated are part of, but not *necessarily* expressing, multifunctional discourse, while deregulation is clearly stated and fundamental of neoliberal discourse. Influx of other discursive elements, such as those arguing strongly for the environment, should according to Erjavec and Erjavec (2015) be regarded as *hybrid discourse*. This can be done by reinforcing an agenda with arguments traditionally stressed in other discourses (Erjavec and Erjavec 2015).

4.1.2. *Presenting the role of agriculture*

Under the headline “The impact of Swedish food production” follows an argumentation that employs a multifunctional discourse - the food production is instrumental in sustaining several common goods: “There are several positive connections between a sustainable agricultural production and an improved environment. This has to do, among other things, with positive environmental effects - so called common goods.” It is maintained as the key to realize rural development, employment, climate and environmental action, public health as well as crisis preparedness. Agriculture is also deemed necessary for other industries such as tourism thanks to the landscapes it maintains. It states that “the implication of agriculture is bigger than its contribution to GDP, as it also contributes to a varied landscape [...]” (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 10).

All discourses are thereby expressed in the opening chapters of the national food strategy and it hard to determine any dominance of a particular discourse. The role of agriculture is regarded as a provider of not only food security but a plethora of common goods associated with multifunctional discourse. These parts refer to the *explicit* definition of problem *why* a strategy is needed. This can be regarded as a framing of problem, to provide medial and political leverage to the policy by strengthening the reasons as to why a new

agricultural policy is needed and widening who it would affect (Knill & Tosun, 2012:103). This is done by pointing to how necessary agriculture is to rural communities, environmental action and crisis preparedness. Who this policy is relevant to is increased by not only making Swedish agriculture an issue for domestic farmers but increasing the scale to national and even global interest of food security and climate.

4.2 Environmental sustainability

The previous chapter pointed to how discourses are used in the presentation of the policy. In this section follows an exploration of how the national food strategy addresses the issue of environmental sustainability in a broader sense. The *problematization*-analysis will seek to unearth patterns of thought that can be more deeply connected to the agro-political discourses.

4.2.1 Concretization

Sustainability is generally pushed for in the food strategy, though it is seldom concretized or discussed *what* sustainable agriculture consists of. The strategy simply states the dimensions of social, environmental and economic sustainability (Prop. 2016/17:104, p.9). Instead of making these issues clear, it refers to other documents (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 37f) – such as the national environmental goals that have been developed since 1997 (Bet. 1998/99:MJU6, Prop. 1997/98:145), or the UN development goal of decreasing food waste (A/RES/70/1).

Under the paragraph of sustainable production and consumption follows a short mention of the necessity of continued work to improve the Swedish food productions in respect to issues of climate, biodiversity, overfertilization, pollution and water protection (Ibid. p 37.). The environmental problems that are associated with agriculture are mostly discussed on global or general terms while seldom really *specifying or quantifying measures* that Sweden needs to do.

These issues are presumably understood more a matter of the second pillar of the CAP, specified in the Rural Development Programme of 2014-2020 (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 87). Environmental goals are therefore not concretized in the prioritized goals of the national food strategy as a whole, offering no political “to-do” list, as it does for sections regarding rules, markets and innovation. A problematization analysis of the *lack of concrete action* suggests an underlying assumption that Sweden has “done enough” on the subject. This points to an estrangement from multifunctional discourse.

4.2.2 Resource efficiency

In addition to pointing to the multifunctional idea of acknowledging agricultural activity as providing common goods such as landscapes and biodiversity shown in the presentation, the national food strategy especially stresses an idea of increased environmental sustainability through resource efficiency. It argues that sustainability is reached by using less resources per unit of produce (Prop. 2016/17:104, p.9, 38). Increased productivity is therefore pushed for as

one of the main solutions to mitigate climate effects and environmental problems. Environmental sustainability is thereby problematized as an issue of productivity.

Holmgren and Arora-Jonsson (2015:239f; see also Holmgren 2015) point to similar assumption through fertilization and introduction of faster growing species.

Identifying the “silences” to see what is left unproblematic as part of the WPR-analysis (Bacchi 2000) is efficient but also risks being detrimental in the long run, as it gives no regard to the environmental viability.

4.2.3 *World market substitution*

“Food production in Sweden is relatively eco-efficient and climate efficient and has high standards in animal welfare and health. Climate change is set to make the production of food more difficult in some parts of the world. The Government therefore believes that it is vital to make the most of opportunities to produce food where conditions are favourable and thus reduce the impact of production on climate change.” (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 17)

Following this quotation, the strategy expects climate change to extend the growing season and increase food demand, especially (Swedish) ‘sustainable’ produce (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 38), thereby highlighting an opportunity for increased production. Here, climate change is represented as a global problem, while not really being of issue in Sweden. Instead, climate change is offered as a reason to increase production.

Sustainability is problematized in terms of consumer demand and market shares. The explicit goal for a “consumer oriented” agricultural sector is evident, as instead of targeting production with ‘multifunctional’ environmental protective legislature, the global demand is regarded as a determinant of what should be produced. Hence, the goal is to quench the global demand with as much Swedish ‘sustainable’ produce as possible. This interpretation further points out that how, in line with Holmgren and Arora-Johnson (2015), the need for climate and environmental action is globally a challenge nationally not a real problem but being made a “business opportunity”. This is primarily done through the problematization of increased production and productivity is regarded as environmental work. Additional suppositions can be traced in the following statement, where an idea of stagnant or decreasing domestic production as failing not only the Swedish environment:

“Increased resource effectivity without disfavouring the production is also central to reach the generation goal of handing over to the next generation a society in which the major environmental problems in Sweden have been solved without exporting environmental problems to the world.” (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 89)

Hence, in addition to making climate change a business opportunity, the document shapes the idea of sustainable agricultural practice in relation to place. While increasing domestic production is made a central form of environmental action, a failure to do so is regarded as “exporting environmental problems”. The National food strategy does not give foreign agricultural production the privilege or the potential of being a necessary provider of landscape, biodiversity or rural development.

Foreign production is instead being made an environmental problem. By making *foreign* production an environmental problem, a making of “place” is also evident. Sweden is being made unfaulty and sustainable while the foreign is regarded as being incapable of handling their agricultural resources sustainably. Holmgren (2015:67) again provides similar conclusions in the forestry sector, where conservation, not being expressed as a viable climate mitigation mechanism in a Swedish context, is the key for increased sustainability and climate mitigation in tropical areas. Holmgren also points to a reproduction of a classic North-South dichotomy in the international context of the REDD+ partnership where developed countries pay developing ones to ensure that “*tropical forests are [...] conserved and protected from local populations’ irrational and unsustainable forest use.*” (Holmgren 2015:67). Although the national strategy is not specifying which regions have an environmentally problematic agriculture, there is a parallel to be drawn to the example of the forestry sector, as there are different conceptions on how to best work for sustainability in a domestic and global context, where the national production is regarded as sustainable. By making the foreign unsustainable, it also becomes an object for policy. This can be seen further stressed in the chapter regarding animal husbandry, where it is stated that Sweden needs to work internationally to promote animal welfare and protection (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 56).

Summing up, three interconnected problematizations have been identified in regard to environmental sustainability:

- 1) Biodiversity and landscape as an issue of continued agricultural practice
- 2) Resource efficiency as intensification
- 3) Global environmental work as world market substitution of 'unsustainable' produce in favour of Swedish 'sustainable' produce

As shown, a multifunctional framing is used shown in the presentation the addressing of problems through intensification does not correspond with the multifunctional discourse used in the *framing* shown in the presentation section. The multifunctional 'framing' is used to give leverage to a policy response adhering to the neo-liberal discourse, as it is pushing for increased production and world market shares. Notably, a multifunctional problematization can be seen of foreign agriculture, as its practice is deemed as too stressful to the environment.

4.3. Productivity

The National Food Strategy states that increased productivity is motivated as environmental action. In turn then, how should productivity be increased? This section provides understanding of how the problem of productivity is problematized throughout the food policy and what discourses these problematizations express.

4.3.1 *Efficient technology and methods*

Productivity is not consistently specified in the strategy. Sometimes, it is understood as using less of a certain resource for a certain amount of produce (Prop. 2016/17:104, p 9, 11, 38, 56f), such as milk per cow or tonnes per hectares, thereby taking a somewhat “physical” outlook on economics. It is also in this meaning productivity is understood as being environmental action, putting emphasis on the efficiency at which natural resources are used in production.

This ‘resource productivity’ is especially conceptualized in the pig production, where Swedish pig stables have high standards of health and hygiene, thereby leading to very fast-growing pigs which require less food and antibiotics (Prop. 2016/17:104, p.105, 52f). It is in this sense productivity is defined in the introduction of the bill, emphasizing resource efficiency as putting less environmental stress per resource. In this meaning, productivity is to be increased by new technology and methods through research and development, spreading of knowledge, entrepreneurialism (Prop. 2016/17:104, p.105, p. 78), and introduction of new agrochemicals (Prop. 2016/17:104, p.45) and plant breeding techniques (Prop. 2016/17:104, p.46). The strategy is however worried that the resource productivity-development of Swedish agriculture has stagnated (Prop. 2016/17:104, p.45).

4.3.2 *The duality of productivity*

Notably, the idea of productivity changes when further analysing what responses are given to increase productivity. The following paragraph “Competitive conditions” in the chapter of Rules and regulations makes a notable example of problematization:

“Regulations and other policy instruments that affect businesses should be designed to support increased productivity and competitiveness in the food supply

chain. Efforts to achieve simplification for businesses should continue to be of high priority.” (Prop. 2016/17:104, p.27)

The focus is in this sentence shifting. In this setting, productivity is no longer the solution as in the previous chapter, but an issue with an offered solution - simplification. Simplification is in this context the aspirations to lower administrative burden and its costs.

Following the assessment quoted above, the document also points to taxes as hindering of productivity, naming those on labour, diesel, pesticides and fertilizers as most obstructive (Prop. 2016/17:145, p. 28, 100). This has another understanding of input, solely as economic costs, thereby stripping the term of its physicality. By representing productivity as a problem of costs, the productivity term can be understood as “capital productivity” or “value productivity”, where the output and input are measured only in monetary terms. This conversion to value productivity blurs the lines between the concept of productivity and that of profitability as it downplays the connection to the environment and natural resource use.

4.3.3. *Simplification*

By problematizing productivity as profitability, the strategy opens for a “simplification rationale” to question laws that are constituent of the Swedish ‘sustainable’ agriculture, such as the taxes on inputs deemed environmentally adverse. The representation of productivity as an issue of profitability is also a basis for a lack of argumentation for *more* regulation supporting environment action, climate mitigation and especially animal protection. Examples of these rules in use are those that stipulate that dairy cows and sheep must be grazing for certain times as well as regulations on how stables must be built to hold a lesser density of animals than their European counterparts. As stated earlier, the strategy identifies the *foreign* as the *place in need for policy* (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 57) in regard to issues of climate, environment and animal protection, while Sweden generally prescribed with *a lack thereof*, essentialized as simplification.

The strategy states that new laws are to be passed with utmost attention to how they affect the competitiveness of Swedish businesses. The policy continues to suggest simplification in a lot of matters. One is the area of public controls (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 36f), expressing the state as inefficient in these matters. Other notable simplification matters are the implementation of new technologies in plant breeding (Prop. 2016/17:104, p.45) and in the introduction of new chemicals for plant protection (Prop. 2016/17:104, p.46).

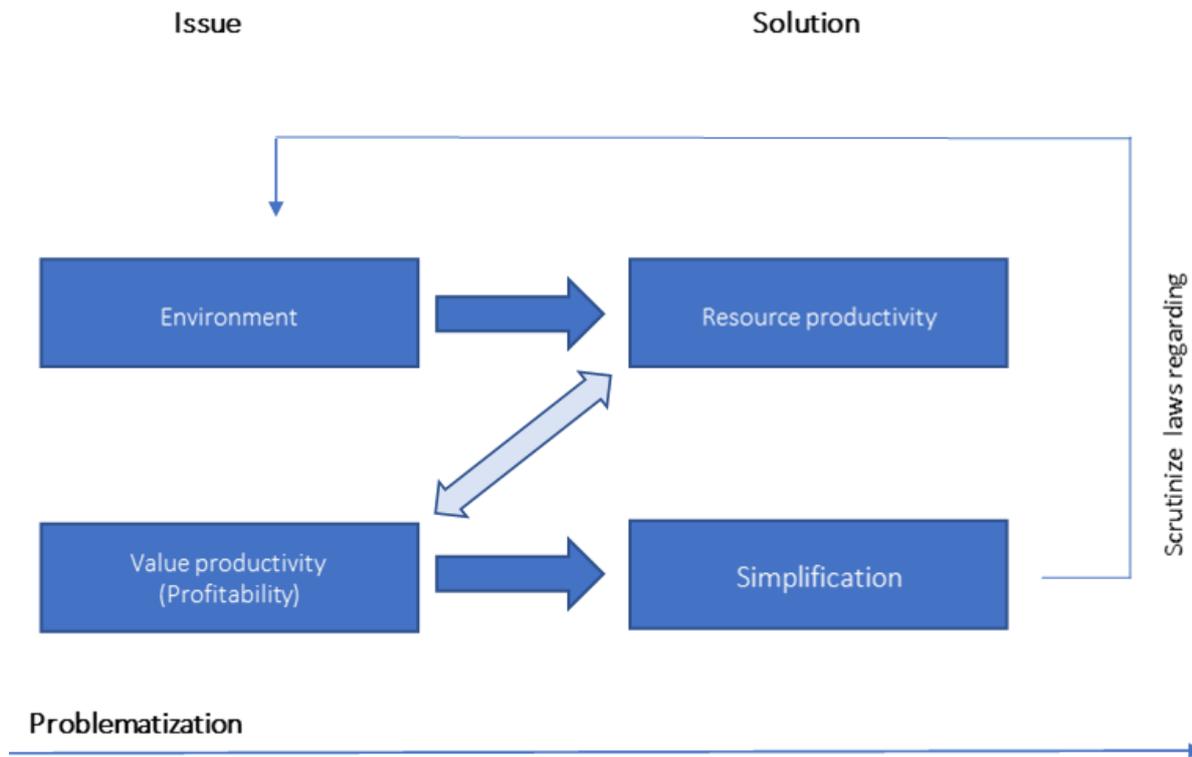


Figure 1. The flow-chart above illustrates how the shifting implication of productivity allows for a simplification rationale to question 'multifunctional' extensifying legislations on environment and animal protection. (Source: Personal collection)

It should be noted that simplification as an overarching agro-political strategy is to be regarded as opposing the prioritizations of multifunctionalist discourse. Research show that simplification of conservation programs, such as programs present in the Swedish Rural Development Programme, have been proven to severely undermine their environmental goals. After simplification, biodiversity benefits from such programs have been halved or even nullified (Armsworth, *et al.* 2012). Simplification has been previously described as a neoliberal idea (Erjavec and Erjavec 2009; 2015; Lovec 2016), along with 'competitiveness', which bear close resemblance to the concept of 'value productivity' and 'profitability'.

'Resource efficiency' as environmental work is related to the *knowledge* of ecological modernization, stressing an optimistic win-win for industry as well as environment through efficient resource use (Baker, 2007). A direct link to any of the established discourses is hard to draw, but the idea is contrasting the multifunctional emphasis on extensive agriculture.

4.4 Structural rationalization

Earlier problematizations will be further explored with attention given to the question of the *effects* of these representations. This section aims to further visualize dominant discourses in the National Food Strategy and the implications of policy on a ‘*lived*’ level.

4.4.1. *Investment and area growth*

The simplification idea is also used to promote structural rationalization. The grazing requirements mentioned earlier are scrutinized for hindering the areal growth of companies dedicated to animal husbandry, as scarce and fragmented grazeland often means that herds must be divided and transported to different locations.

As well as pointing to grazing requirements as hindering structural rationalization, the document also questions the land acquisition law (1979:230) as thwarting the areal expansion of agricultural companies in general. The law requires an official permit to buy land in sparsely populated areas (Jordbruksverket, 2011). Also offering simplification as a remedy, it is proposed that a review of the law should be done, as it ‘*hinders the growth of limited companies and the necessary supply of external capital*’ (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 30). In the same vein, the food strategy states that the stagnation of productivity is worrisome and that a focus on “business development” and “structural transformation” is needed.

The problem of productivity can be interpreted as a problem of too small agricultural entities and the inability of limited companies to expand and invest in farmland (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 30). This again makes a value biased connotation of productivity, as it gives focus of structural rationalization and *area growth*. Area growth is generally a strategy to improve margins through economics of scale, not really related to the technology-centered idea of resource productivity.

“The structural rationalization of agriculture will to a higher degree imply large capital investments. It will require an increased dynamic, new owners and new categories of owners to be able to transfer and invest in companies.” (Prop. 2016/17:104, p.32).

As one can see here, the assumptions and presuppositions that lie buried here is a view of agriculture as an industry “like any other”, which can be dated back to the days of “*Omställning '90*” (Jordbruksdepartementet 1989, p. 165). It expresses a neo-liberal prioritization of a capitalist production form where property and labour are divided. The quote points out *who* will produce, namely big business. The next quote continues:

“A national goal for increased production help create and *communicate* a long-lasting foundation for companies in the food supply chain to develop and grow and motivates companies to invest in Sweden. Swedish companies of today work on an international and open market where *many competing countries* have explicit strategies to optimize growth in food production.” [My translation and italics] (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 21)

The quotation above also shows clear neo-liberal problematization. It regards Sweden as competing with other countries for the capital needed to increase production – and while improving possibilities for foreign and domestic capital to grow is important, so is *marketing* the possibilities through a grand strategy – as other countries have done. In this light, the strategy can be understood as “making itself” an object comparable to an application or an advertisement for investment, addressing the “peripatetic nature of transnational capital” (Potter and Tilzey 2005:588).

4.4.2 *Un-making of family farms*

Highlighting the silences as part of WPR-analysis, it’s left *unsaid* that the land acquisition law is designed to uphold the objective of populating rural areas through the idea that the owner of property should also live on it. These are ideas present in productivist and multifunctional discourse (Dibden et al., 2009, Potter and Tilzey, 2005). The centrepiece of this idea is the

family farm. It is infusing a social aspect of agriculture, highly represented in European post-war of agricultural policy (Potter, 2006). As a part of productivist discourse, it is regarded as the constituent of both a populated countryside and the paramount objective of food security. Family farms (*familjejordbruk*) in Sweden have also been the backbone for food production policies during the twentieth century (Flygare and Isacson, 2003, Flygare and Isacson, 2011). Family farms, being “as much ideological imagery as it is socioeconomic fact” (Bennett et al., 1982, p. 112), is a fundamental idea in productivist discourse, as it is central to the establishment of the ‘agricultural social welfare state’ (Potter 2005; Sheingate, 2000).

The ‘ideological imagery’ described by Bennett (1982) is based on a perception of family farming as constituent of ‘rurality’ and the rural as a place of social life, but also as bearing wider societal values of democracy, stability, justice and equality (Gray, 2000:35). The family farm as a socioeconomic fact remains however, as the absolute majority of Swedish farms are owned and worked by family households (Andersson, 2014, Flygare and Isacson, 2011).

The strategy is void of the term family farms, instead identifying farms of all sizes mostly as *companies*. By not continuing the heritage of assessing *family farms*, instead using other terms, one can interpret an *un-making* (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016) of family farms as an entity of governance, along with the “ideological imagery” related to it. This suggests a further estrangement from productivist discourse.

4.4.3 *Two new units of production?*

Further distancing itself from the social values of productivist discourse and the family farm as a political object of governance, the strategy stresses the fact that 20 % of the companies in parts of the sector stand for 80 % of the production and that a ‘continued structural transformation’ is necessary to increase (value) productivity and to face global competition. Smaller companies are allotted to diversify their businesses and/or turn to organic farming (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 32).

Structural rationalization contra extensification of smaller businesses is an expression of the divergent patterns in agriculture that has been noticed (Potter 2006; Wilson 2001). On one hand, a neo-liberal discourse promoting intensification, simplification and structural rationalization make way for the big and world market oriented companies that, especially in Sweden, need to be of a massive scale to keep down costs and be competitive.

In addition to these competitive companies based on farmland with high economic potential in a global setting, one can witness that “operators in more marginal locations are retained through rural development measures and direct income support to supply the nature, leisure and niche products which growing numbers of urban-based consumers appear to demand” (Potter, 2006) which can be regarded as an embodiment of the multifunctional discourse.

This puts focus on the productive aspect of policy. In the wake of un-making family farms as the primary unit of production, one can witness the contours of two opposing agricultural entities being *made* with implications of *place* and *practice*, with one being consistently premiered when objectives of competitiveness and productivity are paramount.

The bulk of increased production and competitiveness are appointed to the role of the transnational competitive company which have a potential to compete on a deregulated and global market. The “place” of this entity can be interpreted as the far-stretching and high yielding farmlands of southern Sweden. Arguments of intensification and world market substitution discussed earlier also help make this neo-liberal production unit ‘sustainable’.

Acknowledging that not all farms can be rationalized, the marginalized farmers are advised to diversify and extensify their production. These extensification measures are only shortly mentioned in the chapter “How the Food Strategy contributes to action on the environment” (Prop. 2016/17:104, p. 87) with referrals to different subsidies covered in the Rural Development Programme. Extensification as environmental work is thus heavily subordinated to the neo-liberal conception of ‘sustainable’ intensification in the National Food Strategy. The concentration on de-regulation, food production, productivity and competitiveness makes the ‘multifunctional’ farmer merely complementary to the large-scale businesses, not even playing the main role in environmental action, but only as to fill out farmland of little economic value and to cultivate these ‘blank spaces’ with a substantially different practice.

5. Conclusions

What discourses are defining of the Swedish national food strategy? This study has mainly pointed towards a neo-liberal one, most explicitly expressed in the stated goal for major deregulation. A multifunctional discourse is employed by emphasizing the “role of agriculture” as a contributor of common goods such as landscapes and biodiversity. Hybrid discourses have likewise been identified in Erjavec and Erjavec’s (2015) study of the CAP 2014-2020 reform documents, stating that “hugely popular” environmental aspects traditionally adhering to multifunctional discourse have been picked up and emphasized in both neo-liberal and productivist discourses. This study has provided some further understanding as regards to how multifunctional elements can interact with and reinforce a neo-liberal discourse.

In line with Erjavec and Erjavec’s results, the WPR-analysis has shown that merely prioritizing the issue of environmental sustainability does not suffice to categorize the Food Strategy as multifunctional. Although environmental sustainability is a prioritized issue, the proposed solution is of neo-liberal character as the document labels intensified production and increased world market share as environmental action. A traditionally ‘multifunctional problem’ is thereby neoliberally represented as a business opportunity.

The study's results regarding the problematizations of environmental sustainability and productivity shows the assumptions and presuppositions that make reasonable the seemingly counterintuitive proposal to increase and intensify production with as a means enhance environmental sustainability. By recognizing Swedish agricultural practice as ‘sustainable’ in relation to the ‘unsustainable’ management in other countries, increased and intensified production is assumed to attend to environmental problems, domestically as well as abroad. This is a promotion of an idea of Swedish agriculture as sustainable. In line with the findings of Holmgren and Arora-Jonsson (2015, see also Holmgren 2015) the study at hand points to a ‘making’ of Sweden as sustainable. The social construction of a “sustainable Sweden” might make an interesting case of further study in agricultural policy and possibly other areas of natural resource management. The making of ‘place’ - providing a certain setting with a sustainability label - again unearths the hybrid discourse, as the national strategy proposes mainly neoliberal intensification and

simplification solutions for Swedish agriculture, while employing multifunctional responses to other countries, mainly through legislation and extensification.

By then asking the question how the problem of productivity is represented, this study suggests that two understandings of productivity are used interchangeably. One is 'resource productivity' which is perceived to be equal to environmental action. In this meaning, productivity is problematized as resource use, mainly stating innovation and knowledge as central to find new and efficient farming practices to enable intensification. The other implication of productivity is problematized with a wider understanding of input that is not resource based, but value based. This is exemplified in the problematization of productivity as a matter of high costs, leading the term to be comparable to profitability and competitiveness. This second understanding of productivity makes possible to dispute 'multifunctional' legislations. 'Value productivity' is also used to promote the neoliberal rationale of simplification. Together, these understandings motivate structural rationalization and transformation, which again brings the 'productive' aspect of policy into light – how policy makes or un-makes 'objects', 'subjects' and 'places'. The National Food Strategy can be regarded as a final divorce from the productivist conceptualization of the family farm as the primary unit of agricultural production. Instead, the capital-heavy transnational companies inherit the lead role in agricultural production, based on farmlands with high economic potential. Marginal farmers and farmland are advised to 'pillar two' extensification measures. This divergent pattern suggests a 'dichotomization of landscapes'. This geographical implication of policy makes an exciting case of further study.

Through an analysis of The National Food Strategy, taking into account the comprehensiveness of the government bill along with the complexity of agricultural policy in general, this study has tried to balance a width of tendencies that suggest discursive trajectory while providing plausible depth through problematization analysis. The results presented are open for deeper analysis with the same WPR approach as in this study. The discourses used for categorization have at times proven a somewhat blunt tool to discern ambiguous policy responses and patterns of thought. Still, the discourses have provided strong contextualization in a European setting. The heavily social constructivist approach used in this study is open for criticism from a positivist point of view. The pros and cons of these perspectives are always up for debate, but one can undoubtedly say that this study has not taken a positivist perspective. An analysis of agricultural reform based on indicators along the lines

of this tradition is desirable to give a complementary understanding of Swedish agricultural policy.

This study has made way for several questions that need further examination. Firstly, this study has shown how the food strategy adheres to the idea of appraising the divergent evolution described by Potter (2006), with big, competitive, trans-national companies on one hand and small-scale marginal farms on the other, pointing towards a dichotomization of landscapes. In this case, this document might be identified as one part and where the Rural Development Programme of 2014-2020 is the other. The rural development programme should be studied in comparison to give a better description of the discourses at hand in Swedish agricultural policy – especially to elaborate a problematization of environmental sustainability or to help further distinguish the ‘divergent patterns’ or dichotomization of landscapes. Of course, policy documents used in EU negotiations regarding agriculture may also be of interest in these regards. By analysing Swedish international negotiations regarding agriculture, one could also further examine of possible multifunctional pressure for extensifying measures on foreign agriculture that have been briefly examined in this text. The results of this study might that prove helpful in analysis of the ongoing CAP reform debate, especially among EU member states known for advocating market orientation such as Denmark and the Netherlands. The United Kingdom has also been regarded as a proponent of neoliberal discourse (Erjavec and Erjavec 2009; Potter and Tilzey, 2005). With the recent notification of its withdrawal from the EU, a massive negotiation for a new national agricultural policy is expected, presenting a rare opportunity to further develop the calibration of discourse and WPR analysis in an agro-political setting, as well as to deepen the understanding of agricultural policy developments in market oriented open economies. The present study could provide insight into potential hypotheses regarding the countries' preferred policy direction.

In summary, the study has shown how discourses identified in a certain context can be used to provide understanding of agricultural policy in other settings, provided insight into agro-political priorities in market oriented and environmentally minded open economies, as well as deepening the understanding of the interplay between the objectives of sustainability and productivity and their implications.

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