



# Exploring the mechanics of power in Swedish forest management

Narratives by self-proclaimed critics' and their understanding of the power dynamics transforming the Swedish forest landscape

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# Abstract

The Swedish forest landscape is being transformed as more natural forests are replaced by production ones, increasing the number of threatened species. As a result, Sweden will neither fulfil its national nor its international environmental goals connected to the forest. In this study, I analyse the mechanics of power behind the transformation of the forest landscape from the perspectives of self-proclaimed critics, active in the struggle to include more values into forest management. I do so by focusing on the power mechanisms within the Swedish forestry model and how these are resisted by the self-proclaimed critics. The findings stem from an analysis of the narratives of self-proclaimed critics as expressed in interviews. My analysis suggests that a vacuum of power and unclear responsibilities arose within Swedish forest management due to weak legislation and the abdication of responsibility on the part of the state. In the absence of clear rules and mandates, the historically powerful forest industry filled the vacuum by dominating the relationships and interactions with a plethora of other actors through superior resources and an appearance of expertise. I argue, based on the narratives, that power resides in the interactions which are found to be dominated by the forest industry resulting in a strengthening of the status quo which sees economic values trump alternative ones. The domination of relationships and the pursuit of economic growth contribute to explaining why Sweden fails to fulfil its environmental goals.

**Keywords:** Power, Power relations, Forests, Forest industry, Environmental goals, Narratives, Values



# Table of contents

<b>1. Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
<b>2. Background</b> .....	<b>9</b>
2.1. Forests, environmental goals and current trends.....	9
2.2. The politics and values behind the trends .....	11
2.3. Governance and dialogue.....	12
2.4. Making sense of power .....	14
<b>3. Method</b> .....	<b>17</b>
3.1. Approach .....	17
3.2. Analysis .....	18
<b>4. Results</b> .....	<b>21</b>
4.1. The vacuum of power and responsibility .....	21
4.2. The case for rewriting the Forestry Act .....	25
4.3. How the industry occupies and controls the vacuum.....	27
4.3.1. Reducing plurality among small forest owners .....	28
4.3.2. Framing reality and lobbying politicians .....	29
4.3.3. Controlling consultation processes .....	31
4.3.4. Setting future norms and beliefs .....	32
4.4. Resisting the status quo.....	33
<b>5. Discussion</b> .....	<b>35</b>
5.1. Reflecting on the power mechanics shaping the vacuum .....	35
5.2. Global power structures and Swedish forestry .....	39
<b>6. Conclusion</b> .....	<b>42</b>

# 1. Introduction

As the transformation to a sustainable society becomes more urgent by the day, issues concerning forest management become more crucial as well.

Understanding the role of the forest in the transition to a sustainable society, however, forces us to acknowledge that forests, while existing outside the realm of humans as well, are social constructs (Putz and Redford, 2009). The Swedish forest is no different and can, as a social construct, take on different forms. On one hand, it can be seen as the home to roughly 21300 species, a complex ecosystem providing the inhabitants of Sweden with fresh water and plenty of recreational values. On the other hand, it can be seen as an industry employing 17400 people, 4900 full-time employees across Sweden (Skogsstyrelsen, 2018). These understandings or valuations of the forests are important when talking about sustainability as the perception tends to guide the practices which determine the fulfilment of the environmental goals. As it stands Sweden will not fulfil its environmental goals connected to the forest (Sverigesmiljomal.se, 2020; see Section 2.1) Natural scientific research has found the main reason to be the transformation of the forest landscape from natural forest to production forest through the method of clear-cutting (Larsson, 2011). Achieving the goals would require larger areas of old-growth forest to be protected as well as a switch from clear-cutting to alternative forestry methods (Naturvårdsverket, 2019).

While practices like clear-cutting, in the end, determine the status of the ecosystem and the condition of its non-human inhabitants, the values underpinning the practices and the power relationships enforcing certain values are essential to study to grasp why the environmental goals will not be fulfilled. However, other perspectives such as policy analysis are also crucial in the pursuit of understanding the reasons behind the failure to fulfil the environmental goals.

To understand power relations in Swedish forestry, social constructs of the forest and different valuations of it become crucial to understand why Sweden will fail to fulfil its environmental goals. By listening to and analysing narratives from self-proclaimed critics, perceptions of power can be illuminated and the issues that underpin Swedish forestry understood from an alternative perspective, an important aspect since these voices are considered marginalized. By focusing on the power relations and by drawing on Foucault's idea of power as a structural circumstance in which actors are vehicles but do not possess power as such (Foucault, 1980), new explanations arise of why the environmental goals will not be fulfilled.

The importance of power relations in the governance of Swedish forests is a consequence of how the Swedish forestry model operates. The Swedish forestry model is a model of deregulation, that on paper puts environmental and production interest on par (KSLA 2009, p. 2). To fulfil the environmental goals the model requires forest owners to go beyond existing legislation (Appelstrand, 2007, p. 293-299). Furthermore, it trusts in processes of citizen dialogues, involving several actors, to create shared visions and values (ibid). The mechanics of the deregulated reality are best understood by focusing on the interactions and relationships between the involved actors. Rather than directly observing these interactions and relationships, I study these here through narratives as told by self-proclaimed critics of the Swedish forestry model. These narratives are important since they provide alternative discourses to the prevailing one, based on radically different valuations of Swedish forests. Listening to alternative voices and their experiences of power provides new entry points into understanding how power operates within Swedish forestry and why Sweden will fail to fulfil its environmental goals. The narratives by self-proclaimed critics provided in this study should be considered as complementary to existing research that attempts to make sense of the deregulated reality of Swedish forest governance. For example, Fischer and colleagues (2020, p. 8) found while analysing the concept of bioeconomy in the national forest program, a “strong emphasis on creating consensus around a single story of the forest-based bioeconomy”, a consensus

striving to reestablish the central role of forestry in the Swedish economy to stimulate economic growth. Other research has found that the deregulated reality of Swedish forest governance has led to a model that the authors dubbed “more of everything”, a reality where it is believed that the Swedish forest can provide both more production values and more ecological values, reflecting beliefs held in ecological modernization where economic growth and ecological values are not considered conflicted (Lindahl et al., 2017). However, as Lindahl et al. (2017, p. 54) conclude in the following quote: “more of everything is likely to result in *“more” for those who have voice and influence, and “less” for those who lack resources and networks*”. This is a conclusion that makes the narratives of self-proclaimed critics even more relevant as their voices do not fall into the bracket of those who hold resources.

My research thus aims to contribute to a better understanding of the deregulated reality that governs the use of the Swedish forest. By analyzing narratives from self-proclaimed critics and by providing their perception of the power relations and interactions between actors, I hope to provide insights into why the environmental goals will not be reached, as well as answering the following three research questions:

- How do self-proclaimed critics of Swedish forestry understand the existence and configuration of a unified Swedish forestry model?
- What do the narratives provided by self-proclaimed critics tell us about the use of power and power relations between key actors and how does this use influence forest practices?
- How do self-proclaimed critics attempt to acquire influence or resist the current reality?



## 2. Background

### 2.1. Forests, environmental goals and current trends

Sweden is a heavily forested country with roughly 70 % of the surface area covered by forest (Data.theworldbank.org 2020). The number, however, depends on how you define a forest. In the book “Skogslandskap Farväl” written by 16 nature conservationists in Sweden, it is pointed out that trees and forests are two different concepts. The authors of the book distinguish between the two concepts by claiming that trees can be planted while a forest can not (Oldhammer *et. al.* 2017, p. 366). Putz and Redford (2009) acknowledge that the term forest and its meaning will always be a social construct but argue that it should be one firmly grounded in ecosystem structure and composition

The Swedish nature conservationist suggests that tree plantations are referred to as plantations, production forest or wood fields (Oldhammer *et al.* 2017, p. 367). Putz and Redford (2009) suggest the term managed forest. I will from now onwards use the two terms ‘production forest’ and ‘natural forest’, the latter meaning a forest that has “functioning natural processes” as well containing plenty of deadwood and threatened species while still being influenced to a small degree by human management (Oldhammer *et. al.* 2017, p. 367).

Understanding different interpretations of the term forest is crucial to grasp the state of Swedish forests today since many different realities and understandings of the current state exist.

What is clear though is that Sweden will not fulfil its national environmental goals connected to the forest (Sverigesmiljomal.se, 2020). The international Nagoya Protocol, committing Sweden to protect at least 17 % of its terrestrial area by 2020 in a way that integrates the protected areas into the wider landscape (Cbd.int, 2020) will neither be fulfilled. The national goal, which aims to preserve production interests, biodiversity as well as consider social and cultural values, has nine subgoals which serve as clarifications (Skogsstyrelsen, 2019). These goals have indicators to measure the fulfilment or failure of the goal. In general, the indicators show negative trends or stagnating trends with a few positives, not enough, however, to fulfil the overall goal of “living forests” (Sverigesmiljomal.se, 2020). The well-debated trend concerning protected forest area will neither be fulfilled (Sverigesmiljomal.se, 2020, *Skydd av landområden, sötvattensområden och marina områden*). Data shows that 9 % entire forested area of Sweden is formally protected (Statistiska Centralbyrån, 2020) which does not fulfil the national goal of 20 % protected forest or the international Aichi goal of 17 %.

To understand the trend, one must look beyond the quantitative goals and look at the biodiversity of these ecosystems. The concern for the biodiversity situation in Sweden stems from the fact that about 2000 species residing in Swedish forest habitats are on the Swedish red list (Larsson, 2011). The number of threatened species is believed to stem from the transformation of natural forests, rich in biodiversity, to biologically more monotone production forests (ibid.). The change can be illustrated by highlighting the fact that 60% of Sweden's forested lands have been clear-cut since the 1960s, on top of older clear-cutting, and the trend is expected to continue, turning 95 % of Sweden's productive forest lands into production forests around 2030 (ibid). The transformation of the forest from natural to production forest is believed to be responsible for 75 % of the species found on the red list (ibid).

## 2.2. The politics and values behind the trends

The trend of reduced natural forests and increasing numbers of threatened species are found by opinion polls to be unwanted. In 2002 an opinion poll showed that 64% of Swedish citizens believed that preserving biodiversity should be the primary use of the forest while only 24% considered forestry to be important (Naturskyddsföreningen, 2002). In 2018 a survey by SIFO on behalf of WWF showed that 67% of Swedes agreed that forestry that damages forests and water should be banned, only 7% disagreed with the claim. Furthermore, 80% of the participants claimed that it is important or very important to them that forests with high biological values are protected from logging, and only 3% claimed that it was unimportant to them (Världsnaturfonden WWF, 2018). Despite these numbers, showing that Swedish citizens value ecological and recreational values above economic ones, 55000 hectares of forest habitats with particular importance to flora and fauna were cut down between 2000 and 2018 (Elfström, 2019).

Understanding the forces behind these trends and numbers, which seemingly go against the will of the population, requires contributions from many disciplines. An attempt to understand the main driving force behind the transformation of the Swedish forest landscapes has been done by Lindahl et al. (2017) who argue that the Swedish forestry models' pathway to sustainability is grounded in the belief that more of everything is possible. More in the case of Swedish forestry means increasing wood production for timber as well as bioenergy while still preserving biodiversity and ecosystem functions (ibid). While the government claims this is possible and a precondition for a biobased economy (Bill [Proposition], 2007/08:108), other policy documents have identified a conflict between bioenergy production and biodiversity preservation (e.g. SOU, 2006:81; Bill [Proposition], 2007/08:108; Bill [Proposition], 2013/14:141). As mentioned, the Forestry Act also expresses the idea of coexistence between production interests and environmental ones by stating that production and biodiversity should be in balance and of equal importance (1 § skogsvårdslagen). However, at the moment production is prioritized due to the belief that it can solve economic as well as environmental issues (Lindahl et al., 2017). It has been argued that the economic

aspect of sustainability has been prioritized since Swedish politicians' embraced the ecological modernization frame in the 1990s, taking to the belief that economic growth and environmental objectives are not conflicting but complementary (Sandström and Sténs, 2015). Leach and co-authors (2010) offer a potential explanation as to why particular pathways such as the ecological modernization pathway occur and shape practices. The explanation takes an interest in power by exploring the narrowing of discussions and choices which force actors to follow particular framings and pathways so that stability and control, i.e. the status quo can be maintained (Leach et al., 2010). Understanding why and how these framings and pathways, understood as expressions of power dynamics, influence the fulfilment of the environmental goals require some insights into the governing of Swedish forests.

### 2.3. Governance and dialogue

In 1993 Sweden laid a new foundation for its forest politics as a response to the 1992 UN conference in Rio de Janeiro (Olsson, 1992), resulting in the Forestry Act which aspires to balance production and environmental values by handing more freedom to forest owners (Appelstrand, 2007). To achieve the goal of the Forestry Act, the role of the state changed to advising and informing forest owners rather than incentivising them using economic control means. This strategy has come to be known as freedom with responsibility (ibid). The strategy was believed to hold the potential to improve biodiversity in the forest but the opposite has happened (Forsberg, 2012). To achieve the environmental objectives, forest owners were and still are expected to go further than what legislation demands (Olsson, 1992). However, data from 2010 showed that 37 % of the loggings did not even comply with existing legislation (Skogsstyrelsen, 2011).

Understanding the discrepancy between goals and reality demands an understanding of forest governance; more precisely in Sweden, though, an understanding of the conflicts that surround the forest. Appelstrand (2007) describes the historical conflict as one taking place between the common interest,

represented by the state and expressed through legislation, and the self-interest of the forest owners. This historical dynamic between common and self-interests has changed since the state adopted goals of production as well as biodiversity goals leading also to a conflict of interest *within* the common interest (ibid). As a consequence of this, the environmental goals depend on forest owners going beyond legislation for the state to fulfil the national targets. In this arrangement, the state has taken on a different role, the role of an administrator through agencies (ibid).

A key aspect for achieving the targets is thought to be citizen dialogues, involving several actors to create shared visions and values that reconcile the self-interests and the common interests (ibid). The success of this approach so far can be questioned as the environmental goals connected to forest environments remain unfulfilled, and the degree of influence of people and organizations who lack networks and organising capacities is found to be limited (Lindahl, 2008; 2013). In theory, the model of governance, using combinations of flexible control means, could create better environmental protection using fewer resources (Appelstrand, 2007). The broad form of governance which sees the state as an enabler and partner opens up space for actors to influence outside those who historically influenced practices (ibid). These processes of dialogue and collaboration are key aspects of the forest governance model in Sweden (Lindahl et al., 2017).

Structuring the governance in a way that requires functional processes of dialogue raises the question of how these dialogues take place, how power dynamics influence them and what the outcome has turned out to be. Analyses from Lindahl (2008; 2013) regarding a consultative process on forest protection initiative by the state found that mandates and accountability were unclear benefitting the “stronger” voice coming from the traditional forest industry. Sundström (2005) describes similar situations and refers to the situation in these deliberative arenas as “blurred”, where historically dominant actors benefit. Further examples exist, such as during the Wilhelmina forest model deliberation where indigenous Sami people, the state and the private sector were represented. The analysis of the

deliberation found that the process had legitimised the dominant discourse rather than promote political participation (Klenk et al. 2013, p. 173). Fischer and colleagues (2020) conclude, based on their discourse analysis of the Swedish National Forest Program, that focusing on consensus in Swedish forest policy has led to the marginalization of interests and values that are not in line with the prevailing neo-industrial story that dominates policy. As suggested by Sundström, Lindahl and Fischer the prevailing story is one set by the historically dominant actors, namely the private sector and supported by the state (ibid). The turnout may not be the desired one since the ambition was to involve more actors in decision-making processes, an ambition which has turned out to reduce the voice and influence of the actors who lack networks and organising capacities (Lindahl, 2008; 2013). Despite the advantages held by the historically influential actors, Lindahl (2017) points out that forest policy discussions are considered inherently political, meaning values, desires and practices embodied by various actors constantly struggle in the pursuit of influence. This is an important acknowledgement as the struggle touches on power and power dynamics within Swedish forestry.

## 2.4. Making sense of power

Talking about power requires some definitions due to the many interpretations and definitions that exist in the social sciences (Vainio & Paloniemi, 2012). Avelino and Rotmans (2009) claim that general distinctions in the debate on power can be drawn between discursive, structural and instrumental understandings. Instrumental understandings focus on actors and their opportunities to pursue self-interests while structural perspectives point out that institutions and material structures regulate the opportunities held by the specific actor (ibid). The discursive form takes an interest in norms, ideas, beliefs and discourses to comprehend what power entails (ibid). The discursive perspective, however, also comes with two different ideas, the structural, promoted by Foucault, and the agent-based, promoted by Habermas (ibid). In the discussion

section of this paper, the focus will lie on the discursive, drawing on Foucault's idea of power as being exercised by structures (discursive) through various actors (Foucault, 1980). The discursive understanding of power allows one to focus on norms, ideas, frames, values and beliefs as key components in the organizing of society (Avelino & Rotmans, 2009). These aspects can be found in Foucault's concept of disciplinary power, understood as power that aims to make actors surveil themselves and correct mistakes or wrongdoings until they are transformed into new subjects that conform to the dominant structural norms or ideas (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). It does this by training actors into certain ways of acting or behaving through institutions and discourses, rewarding self-improvement by getting them to accept and embrace certain values and goals that represent the dominant ideas and convictions rather than the actors own (ibid).

Considering the deregulated governance system which has required new relationships to be formed and new power dynamics to take place in Swedish forest management, the concepts of norms, ideas and values become central to understand how the forest is managed and why the environmental goals will not be fulfilled since they provide insights into the discursive form of power. Studying power is not easy. In this paper, power is studied through those who regularly engage and oppose the prevailing discourses and narratives in Swedish forestry. More precisely, power is studied by listening to the stories and narratives told by these people. Narratives are well suited to capture human experiences in all their complexity (Webster, 2007). This is crucial since it is through the experiences of individuals that this paper aims to understand how power operates within Swedish forest management. The concept of a narrative should, however, not be understood as short term experiences or memories of certain actions but rather as long chains of events and actions that together constitute an understanding of a phenomenon (ibid). Some narrative theorists claim that beyond describing, certain narratives hold the potential to explain their descriptions as well (Hinchman, 1997). This, in Swedish forestry, could be understood as though the narratives provided by self-proclaimed critics are not only suitable to describe that the Swedish forest landscape is being transformed

but also why. Although narratives are not considered to mirror reality, they do provide stories with a clear sequential order that offers insights into the world (ibid). Considering the focus of this study, narratives seem particularly useful due to their ability to not only paint a picture, based on personal experiences, of how power operates in the realm of Swedish forests but also why it operates as it does.



## 3. Method

### 3.1. Approach

A self-proclaimed critic in this paper is understood as a person who explicitly questions the methods found in Swedish forestry. This study does not, however, include anyone or everyone who uttered a critical thought, rather, the critics selected as participants in this study are people with rich experiences of forest issues but whose desires and opinions on how the forest landscape should be managed are far from the current management See figure 1. For these reasons, their narratives hold the potential to offer in-depth insights and perspectives on why Sweden will fail to fulfil its environmental goals. Furthermore, academic literature lacks the voice and the worldview provided by the self-proclaimed critics. Interviews with this group, therefore, offered valuable narratives with potential explanations concerning the failure to fulfil the environmental goals. Furthermore, these narratives allow new perspectives to enter the academic world surrounding power in the realm of forest management.

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Occupation</b>	<b>Generation</b>	<b>Gender</b>
1	NGO 1	40-50	Man
2	Forest owner	50-60	Woman
3	County administrative board (CAB)	30-40	Man
4	CAB and conservationist	50-60	Man
5	NGO 2	40-50	Woman
6	Concerned citizen	60-80	Man
7	NGO 1	30-40	Woman
8	NGO 4	30-40	Woman

9	NGO 3	20-30	Woman
10	Concerned citizen	60-75	Woman

*Figure 1: Basic data on the interviewees.*

Understanding the perspectives of the self-proclaimed critics, how they perceive the status quo, other actors and how they resist the status quo was done through semi-structured qualitative interviews. When picking self-proclaimed critics for interviews there were two requirements and three goals. The requirements were that the interviewees had explicitly criticized Swedish forestry and that they had experience working with forestry or conservation (paid or voluntary work), either in the forest or in a more political sense. Furthermore, the goal was to create a group of interviewees with a good distribution between men and women, and one where voices from different generations were included. The final goal was to include several perspectives to cover as many experiences and points of view as possible. All of the interviews were recorded following consent from the interviewees and participants anonymized in order for them to feel free to fully express themselves. An interview guide contained questions about the participants' understanding and experience of power and power relations that govern forestry practices and the fulfilment of the environmental goals connected to forestry. The interview guide acted as support but since narratives from the critics were the focus, it mainly served as a frame. Documents complemented the interviews, written by the interviewees following various encounters with other actors to record these encounters. Overall 10 interviews were conducted, averaging a time of 48 minutes per interview.

### 3.2. Analysis

The analysis followed a model presented by Burnard (1991). It started during the interviews through reflection and short notes on important themes discussed by the interviewee. The analyzing continued during the transcribing of the recorded interviews as the data was further internalized and common themes reflected upon. Once all of the interviews were transcribed they were reread and thought

through to identify reoccurring themes and connections. Following these steps, a list of six themes emerged. Once the themes were identified, each transcript was read thoroughly again, highlighting text that correlated with each theme through given colours and gathering quotes from all transcripts under each theme. All coloured parts were then extracted from the transcripts, pasted under their respective theme and reread. Following this coding, the narratives of the participants became clearer and the writing process could begin. Overall the analysis can be described as a thematic analysis, understood as a method that seeks to “describe patterns within qualitative data” (Braun & Clarke, 2006 p. 79). The thematic analysis used was, furthermore, an inductive approach, meaning the analysis was done without trying to fit pre-existing coding frames, allowing me to identify reoccurring themes in the transcripts for further analysis (ibid.).

The analysis identified crucial elements of the narratives that portray the self-proclaimed critics understanding of the way power operates within Swedish forestry. The elements all play a part in constituting how the other elements function and how the system as a whole operates. An integral element of the narratives was how the forest industry interacts with other actors and how they set the agenda for the practices in the forest. However, that domination cannot be understood without the other elements found in the narratives, namely, the vacuum of responsibility and power that followed after the state transformed from an enforcer to an advisor and the Forestry Act got deregulated. The vacuum as an analogy, based on the narratives descriptions of the role of the state and the legislation, refers to the struggle for influence, a struggle that exists as a result of weak legislation and the state abandoning responsibility. This vacuum can be understood as an empty frame for a puzzle and the Forestry Act, the power relations and lastly, as the final element of the narratives, the resistance toward the status quo can all be understood as bricks that when puzzled together constitute a full picture. This picture can be seen as a critical understanding of how power operates within Swedish forestry.

The result section presents the narratives from a zoomed-in perspective where each specific puzzle piece can be understood in detail. Quotes of the interviewees illustrate each puzzle piece. In the discussion section, the puzzle is assembled. Connections between the various themes are laid out and personal interpretations as well as attempts to situate the narratives in literature and theory are made.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. The vacuum of power and responsibility

The first element presented in the results section describes the frame in which the various actors are seen to operate. It attempts to portray the self-proclaimed critics' understanding of the Swedish forestry model and how the model attempts to structure the relationships between various actors. This is a crucial part of the overall narrative describing the failure to fulfil the environmental goals as it sets the terms for interactions. Furthermore, the section explores how the model is perceived to relate to itself, i.e. the difference between its claims and intentions and its practices.

The unifying characteristics of the Swedish forestry model, as understood by the interviewees, can be divided into two elements, the first a practice and the second a value underpinning the practice. The practice was the act of clear-cutting, an act driven by the desire to maximize profit. Despite the historical importance of forestry, the prevailing idea among the critics claimed that the present challenges demanded that more values, beyond profit maximization, were included to guide the practices of forestry. Including more values has in a way already been done on paper as the Forestry Act explicitly states that its goal is to put production and biodiversity on par, thereby including the value of biodiversity. Furthermore, environmental goals have been defined and recreational values identified. The difference between what is said/written and what is the reality in terms of practices is however experienced as a large one, believed to result in the failure to fulfil the environmental goals connected to forests.

The common narrative found across the data concerning the inability to fulfil the objectives was one concerned with responsibility and power. I refer to this aspect in the narratives as a vacuum which refers to the lack of responsibility and unclear power dynamics and relationships among actors in the forestry sector. The vacuum of power does not imply that actors are unable to interact or push for their agenda, quite the contrary. It rather refers to the important change in the frame in which Forestry Actors operate.

The narratives, in general, described the transformation of the state from an “enforcer” to an “advisor” in 1992 as a crucial change in the frame that set the terms for interactions between actors within the realm of forestry. The change shuffled the relations around, and more actors could enter. The vacuum then refers to the rearranging of relationships and mandates that followed that change and which led to unclear mandates and responsibilities. According to the narratives, the inability to fulfil the environmental objectives was a reflection of the lack of responsibility that existed in the governance of Swedish forests. This lack of responsibility was thought to stem from unclear mandates held by the actors in a constant struggle for influence within the vacuum of power. The following quote (interviewee 1) illustrates the belief that the abdication of responsibility by the state forced new mandates on to different actors:

*“The forest has turned into a naive expectation by the state, an expectation that this [balancing environment and production] is something forestry can handle by themselves... The fact that the state rejects responsibility when it comes to all kinds of things means that it spills over on the certification to take care of including environmental values in the forestry practices as well”*

The role of the state within this vacuum remained unclear to the interviewees. This lack of clarity, however, holds potential explanations for understanding why Sweden is far from fulfilling its environmental goals. As the quote above states, this lack of clarity resulted in other actors taking on those responsibilities, an outcome which could be beneficial but that the critics believed to favour production over environmental values. One such actor was the certification systems FSC and PEFC who had, according to several interviewees, taken it

upon themselves to solve “this”, meaning including environmental values into forestry practices. These certifications, however, lacked the necessary monitoring and were far from capable to produce sustainable landscapes even though some of the critics (2) thought they had contributed to small improvements.

According to interviewee 2, the implementation of certification systems in Sweden in 1996 came due to the threat by German paper consumers to stop buying paper from Sweden as forestry practices were seen to be brutal. The rise of certification schemes was thus a reaction to the absence of environmental considerations in forestry practices and an attempt to fill the void in the vacuum left by the state. The critics considered the lack of environmental consideration to be a reflection of the power dynamics at the time where production-oriented actors had come to control the vacuum. These actors were perceived by the majority of the interviewees as a united group with vast resources and with a production agenda which they brought along as they filled the vacuum and cemented the status quo where production by far outweighed concerns for environmental values.

Although the interviewees disagreed to what extent the actors who were seen to make out this united group agreed internally, they all acknowledged that from the outside they came across as tight and united, emphasizing that they only had access to the “outside-perspective”. Referred to as the forest industry (skogsnäringen) they consisted of sawmills, pulp industry, large forest companies, landowner organisations and according to some, the forest agency as well. The critics claimed that these companies and organisations determined the practices in the forest by dominating the relationships with other actors. This domination was seen to reside in many aspects that influenced practices, from the education of foresters to lobbying politicians and swaying public opinion. Underlying all of these practices was believed to be the desire to uphold the status quo, where production and maximizing profit trumped every alternative value that could be attributed to the forest. The perception of the forest industries mentality shone through in the following quote by interviewee 3:

*“They [the forest industry] say that they have always clear-cut the forest, they will always clear-cut the forest, it is what gives the best economy. And I can’t understand why they are so unbelievably traditional and conservative, and why they refuse to embrace new facts”*

The critics agreed that the reason why the forest industry refused to embrace facts was that the inclusion of more values might come to compromise their main objective, to maximize profit. This desire, to maximize profit, was expressed explicitly by the self-proclaimed critics, but they also acknowledged that people who were not deeply entangled in forest issues and politics probably perceived the forest industry and forestry in a completely different light, a light that did not exclude alternative values but rather included them as a core part of their existence. Interviewee 4 called this the forest industries mantra, a set of messages that industry actors were seen to hammer into the heads of politicians and the public with claims that they will “Save us from the climate [crisis], we conduct the world’s most sustainable forestry and other shit like it”.

The need to portray themselves as something more than a business with nothing but profit on their minds shows the mechanics of the vacuum, i. e. what is required to uphold the status quo. As the narratives highlighted, power was not believed to be held or fixed but rather to reside in the interactions between various actors. This understanding of the struggle for influence in the vacuum was thought to force the forest industry to portray themselves as something which the critics meant they were not, namely as caring for more than profit and the preservation of the status quo. Challenges to the status quo and the current power dynamics could potentially arise from several points of departure. The many private forest owners that together own roughly half of the Swedish forest were considered one potential challenger of the status quo. Another was political through legislation both at EU and national level. As several interviewees pointed out, public opinion mattered for politicians so, therefore, public opinion mattered for the industry to preserve the status quo as well. Market forces could also challenge the status quo, as could self-proclaimed critics and other environmentalists. Currently, the forest industry was thought to be preserving the status quo through what the critics



labelled as vast resources. However, the critics' did not perceive the current power relations as static.

Understanding how the vacuum of power and responsibility functions and how it can be challenged requires insights into the other elements that support the overall picture. Below follows the critics' perception of the legislation (Section 4.2), their understanding of how the industry filled the vacuum (Section 4.3) and also how it could be challenged (Section 4.4).

## 4.2. The case for rewriting the Forestry Act

The continuation of clear-cutting and the privileging of commercial values was thought to be a reflection of the forest industries' ability to shape and control the power relations that existed within the vacuum where the struggle for influence and between alternative valuations of the forest was considered as continuous. But are the industry actors not operating within the legal framework? And if they are, is it not clear that the responsibility to change the current trend and ensure that the environmental goals are fulfilled falls on the legislators? Interviewee 5 described the legislation in the following way:

*“The problem is that there is and has been this belief that it will work by itself and even though sector responsibility has been defined by various prepositions and investigations it remains imprecise; it is required that landowners take more responsibility than the law requires but at the same time no one knows what the law requires since it is deregulated and that does not apply to all landowners but only landowners as a collective. So it is so unbelievably fuzzy what freedom with responsibility entails”*

The legislation was not only considered unclear but weak as well (interviewee 4):

*“With the Forestry Act, you can practically do whatever you want. That is because it consists of recommendations, “you shouldn't do like this” but when you have done like that nothing happens because unless the forest agency has told you beforehand that you must follow the Forestry Act's recommendations, well then you can't get caught even though you have broken the law. And the*

*forest agency does not do any recommendations, maybe they do 200 a year and they get 60000 logging entries a year. So you could break the Forestry Act in 59800 loggings. It's completely mad!"*

The critics agreed that the fault of the Forestry Act and the reason it did not live up to its own goal laid in both its design and its implementation. However, suggestions that the Forestry Act actually functioned as intended, since it was nothing but a production legislation decorated with words of biodiversity and alternative values, were also brought up. Interviewee 2 said:

*"If you are going to look at the 1993 legislation, to me it is the 1990 legislation because that is when they did the big investigation. As close as 1987 they were only interested in increasing the logging and only focus on production. They wanted logging demands on forest owners etc. So you should not believe that in three years the forest industry changed their minds completely. So what you call the Forestry Act really is just a forest production act. Since 1903 there have been 5-6 major decisions about that act and every single one has been about securing production. It has nothing to do with biodiversity"*

The Forestry Act was in other words perceived as weak and serving production interests. Furthermore, in a lot of cases, the critics claimed that it was not even followed due to the reliance on the forest agency to provide recommendations. The forest agency, in turn, was described as lacking the necessary resources to conduct its tasks. On top of that, the majority of interviewees perceived the forest agency as divided with internal tensions between production proponents in majority and individuals who cared for ecological values as a declining minority, as the agency had in recent years become more production-oriented.

The unclarity of responsibilities did not end with the deregulation that came with the Forestry Act. Parallel to the Forestry Act runs the Swedish environmental code. Contrary to the Forestry Act, the environmental code has absolute measures rather than recommendations. The critics, however, claimed that the two legislations were poorly synchronized and pointed out that having two different acts and different monitoring agencies led to further unclarity. Including the Forestry Act in the environmental code was proposed as a possible solution by

two of the critics. A few interviewees even suggested that once you included forestry and its environmental impacts in the environmental code you could abolish all demands on production put on the landowner. Interviewee 6 said:

*“The Forestry Act can be scrapped just like the majority of the forest agencies work, apart from conservation work, information and restoration to increase environmental values. That can be regulated through the environmental code. Caring for “forests”/ timber fields is something landowners are capable of doing without a Forestry Act”*

The perceptions, explanations and feelings expressed in the narratives of the self-proclaimed critics could not be clearer. The Forestry Act was seen as more of a veil to hide the practices, it was neither ambitious enough nor followed to the necessary extent. The critics, therefore, claimed that the forestry act had to be remade or included in the environmental code if the environmental goals were to be fulfilled and the ecosystems protected.

### 4.3. How the industry occupies and controls the vacuum

As mentioned earlier, it was not the belief of the critics that the power residing with the industry was static. Their hold on the forestry practices was not considered permanent but required significant effort to protect the status quo. In their narratives, the interviewees identified the presence of a multitude of actors who had desires and opinions on how to manage the forest and that potentially could come to challenge the status quo. Key actors in this struggle between values, ideas and stories included local and private forest owners, politicians, policymakers, students, NGOs and the general public. These groups were identified as important in the sense that they had the potential to acquire influence and challenge the status quo. Controlling the opinions and practices of these actors required different strategies on the part of the actors that made out the industry. Below follow the narratives concerning how their control was maintained.

#### 4.3.1. Reducing plurality among small forest owners

One actor that the industry had to control was the plural group of private forest owners, a group described by the critics as heterogeneous, with vastly different valuations of their forests. This plurality was, however, something that landowner organisations, considered to be an important actor within the forest industry, deliberately reduced by speaking on behalf of all forest owners without their consent. Interviewee 5 said:

*“Private landowners are definitely not a homogenous group, they have many different points of view, aspects and desires of what they want to do with their forest. Unfortunately, landowner organisations have made themselves into spokespersons for all of these poor landowners, and they [the landowner organisations] follow the opinions of the industry [sawmills and pulp]. So it is a complex interaction going on there”*

Not only were these organisations seen to reduce the plurality of values and opinions. The critics also claimed that opportunities to pursue alternative ways of managing one’s forest were limited, as all consultancy and “expert advice” by timber purchasers, employees of actors within the forest industry were concerned with maximising profit resulting in clear-cutting:

*“Private landowners often rely on a forest entrepreneur, often connected to landowner organisations to conduct their forest practices. These [the entrepreneurs] advise the landowner when doing a forestry plan, they say “you should do this and that” and there is a clear conflict of interest between conservation and production. The landowner organisations want timber to the industry [pulp and sawmills] and do not have the will of the landowner on their mind”*

(Interviewee 5)

This is of significance to the fulfilment of the environmental goals as landowners are expected to go beyond legislation to fulfil the national goals. This, however, requires knowledge, which not all landowners have. The forest agency is supposed to inform landowners and provide them with the necessary knowledge. However, as the critics pointed out, the forest agency lacked the necessary resources to provide such guidance. The void was filled by other actors. On rare occasions, that could be biologists or conservationists but, according to the

narratives, the industry was most likely to fill that void. A possibility they had due to their vast resources, a fundamental aspect in the attempt to preserve the status quo. A second aspect that allowed them to nourish their interest and reduce the plurality of practices was their appearance of being knowledgeable. Interviewee 1 said:

*“It is very difficult to discuss with a person who has a PhD in forestry when you come from an NGO or as a private forest owner. And it becomes a power balance, and we know that knowledge can be framed in different ways, and if you enter with the idea that we should produce more, well then you frame the knowledge and if you have a PhD you are probably very good at that and then it is hard for someone to counter that”*

Although the critics perceived the industry to reduce plurality, they did not experience that as something the industry did openly. The story told by the interviewees rather claimed that the industry paints a picture of small forest farmers who manage the forest in a diverse set of ways. In reality, however, that image was considered far from true, again highlighting the discrepancy between what is said and what is done. The prevailing conviction among the critics was that framing and neglecting facts were part of preserving the status quo and favouring production. This became even more evident when the relationships between the forest industry and politicians as well as the public were examined.

#### 4.3.2. Framing reality and lobbying politicians

While lying was claimed to be common and found in many arenas where the forest industry operates, it was perhaps most clear in the narratives explaining the critics' experiences of the interaction between the forest industry and politicians. Interviewee 3 said:

*“The forest industry is pretty tight with the parliament and the government. They really have the right contacts so they can control how the government and authorities act in Sweden, concerning the forest”... And a very large part of the politicians does not understand how bad the situation is in the Swedish forest. Most of them believe the information they are fed from the forest industry, they believe we have to clear-cut the forest to have an economy, they believe that the forest has given us the wealth we have today”*

The lobbying from the industry was considered relentless as some critics claimed that they had enough resources to have lobbyists working in Brussel and the parliament every day. This relentless lobbying and manipulation came down to the same two factors as the controlling of forest owners did. Vast resources that allowed them to hire lobbyists who solely focused on persuading and the appearance of superior knowledge.

Controlling politics was, however, not only done through lobbying the politicians and policymakers. Controlling public opinion was believed to be another component required to keep the status quo. Although the critics did not agree to what point public opinion mattered they expressed a feeling of general ignorance among the broad public concerning the state of the Swedish forest. This state of general ignorance has led to a tug of war over public opinion. The struggle over public opinion was experienced as an arena where facts were overlooked and lies, or manipulation of facts, were more the rule than the exception. The success of the strategy was, however, something that the critics disagreed over. Some critics claimed that the people had been misled while others considered the “environmental movement as winners”, as interviewee 8 said:

*“The environmental movement has in some way won the debate since most people think that biodiversity is important and it should govern the practices to a larger extent but at the same time that is not reflected in the forest politics, probably due to the strong economic interest”*

It may seem like the narratives differ in terms of which idea the public has taken to, the forestry industry’s interpretation, or the environmental movement’s view. Taken as a whole though, the narratives suggest that the public considers biodiversity to be important but have come to believe that Swedish forestry is good at caring for biodiversity. The split in opinion among the interviewees rather consisted in, on the one hand, the thought that public opinion was crucial and, on the other hand, the belief that in the context of political and economic interests, public opinion mattered little. What was clear, however, was that the forest

industry was very present in the public debate and that facts and science mattered little to them if it stood in the way of production interests. Interviewee 4 said:

*“They [the forest industry] make things up that suit their agenda. And no matter how stupid it is or how easy it is to reveal it they push it so hard that people eventually believe it and when people eventually believe it, they know that, okay, now we have them on our side and if we get revealed we will push an agenda that the revealing is false. And it does not matter if it comes from scientist, mathematicians or voluntary conservation”*

The vast resources were believed to allow the industry to hire skilful salespeople and communicators: People who created a facade where the words painted one picture, a picture of a force of great good, while the practices, critics claimed, painted a picture that was far from a force of good. Furthermore, the narratives suggested that what politicians and the public saw was rarely the actual practices but the words and text that came from lobbyists and communicators. It was considered a form of power over thought and the shaping of people’s reality: all to preserve the status quo.

#### 4.3.3. Controlling consultation processes

Further arenas where power could be acquired or lost were found in consultation processes. These processes of dialogue and collaboration are, as mentioned, key aspects of the forest governance model in Sweden (Lindahl et al., 2017). The desire to open up space for more voices was, however, one that was barely existing according to the critics, and where it did exist, the industry dominated the processes through various tools. One such way was to exclude perspectives from the process altogether, as interviewee 9 experienced:

*“It is very sad that it is only jobs and growth that get attention all the time when the forest is discussed and even if we can come with some input they have already laid the foundation in a different direction than the one we would like to discuss”*

Framing conversations, meaning excluding certain perspectives and promoting others, was not an uncommon experience among the critics but far from the only one believed to reduce the critical voices. The sheer difference in numbers

between people representing a production agenda in relation to a more ecological agenda was also emphasized. Interviewee 5 said:

*"A fundamental problem is that ecological and recreational interests are severely underrepresented in these processes [of dialogue] which makes things a lot harder for those poor people who sit there, like me, to get things through, to be heard"*

This underrepresentation, some suggested, was a desire from the industry and measures were taken to make it hard for ecological and recreational NGOs without resources to participate. Interviewee 2 said:

*"Here [in a recent consultation process] the forest agency offered to conduct a broad consultation and then they say that they won't pay any travel expenses or other expenses for NGOs but then nobody can come. Who ends up joining? Well, those paid by the industry. So it turns into a friends group from the forest industry who are there"*

In general, the consultation processes were believed to be experienced by the forest industry as an evil that had to be dealt with. The critics either explicitly or implicitly expressed that the forest industry would rather do without them. However, now that they existed the need to control both the process and the outcome became an important aspect to preserve the status quo. The means to control these processes came down to the opportunity to be present, hence vastly outnumbering alternative values represented to frame agendas and conversations into directions that better suited their production interests.

#### 4.3.4. Setting future norms and beliefs

Controlling and maintaining power within the vacuum to preserve the production-oriented agenda of the status quo required measures beyond the past and present. The preparation for the future and the creation of norms and values started already at the educational level where foresters went to study forestry. The critics claimed that the education was very one-sided, focusing almost exclusively on production and clear-cutting. Interviewee 4 said:



*“The forester title makes you know forestry but you don’t know forests anymore. Historically when you studied to be a forester you would study forest ecology but today you almost only study forest economy and you don’t know anything about ecology”*

Several critics expressed that the practice of clear-cutting, a norm set by primarily attributing financial values to the forest stemmed from these programs and that since the method of clear-cutting was adopted, almost all of the higher education programs concerning forestry have taught clear-cutting. Students who went on to do research have studied how to do clear-cutting, the machines have been adapted to do clear-cuts. A trend which according to some of the critics led to the point where private forest owners who wanted to manage their forest could only buy one product, namely clear-cutting. Questioning this technique was not something that the interviewees saw as common among foresters. A more common idea was that they stuck together like a ”clan”. Interviewee 2 said:

*“These foresters are like a little clan. They carry vests at parties that are red and green. The green represents the forest and the red represents camaraderie, that you stick together. So you need to make sure to not stand out and come up with your own interesting methods. You should stick to what exists [clear-cutting]”*

The diversity of experiences of how the industry operates to maintain the power it has found within the vacuum shows the complexity of pinpointing responsibility and separating truth from lie. The reason why Sweden fails to fulfil its environmental goals is, however, believed to be found in these operations which continuously tries to maintain the status quo.

#### **4.4. Resisting the status quo**

The vast economic and human resources held by the forest industry and the number of arenas where they put those resources to use meant that resistance from self-proclaimed critics’ was diverse in its nature. Furthermore, the diversity in resistance measures was necessary due to the unclarity of where the actual responsibility and opportunity to influence lied. The measures stretched from

forest hikes to participating in political processes. One common theme that applied to all of the resistance measures was the critics' belief that while the forest industry continued to lie and spread "fake news" the voluntary forces found within conservation, for example, had facts and science on their side. Despite the conviction that science and truth would prevail, the resistance methods and the belief in which of them would be effective was not unanimous. The belief that public opinion mattered was questioned by some critics while others saw it as crucial that the general public got informed on what is happening with the forest. The belief in the market was another arena where some put the majority of hope into. Interviewee 5 said:

*"To move this ship, and it is a damn difficult ship to move, but to move it slightly out of position, I believe we have to influence the entire industry [from pulp to timber to forestry]. I believe the market can do that, I don't believe public opinion can do that so well"*

Other resistance measures included using the legal system through appeals, doing forest inventories and occasionally occupying forests. Despite resisting in several ways and adopting several tactics, the feeling, throughout the narratives, was that not enough had happened, that the status quo prevailed leading to a great sense of frustration among many of the critics. Interviewee 10, a local voice, felt frustrated:

*"We are always underdogs and I sometimes write articles and then I get a pat on my head "little sweetie", I am 69 years old and have a lot of experience and I get a pat on the head like I have not understood anything. I feel pissed, I do not want anybody sitting on me just because they make money doing what I am criticising"*

Despite the picture painted by the narratives of a strong and resourceful group of actors filling the power void left by the state and the legislation, the critics saw the possibility to change the current power relations and include more perspectives and values in Swedish forest practices. They might not be certain about how as the many forms of resistance shows.

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1. Reflecting on the power mechanics shaping the vacuum

The narratives told by the self-proclaimed critics focused heavily on the operation of power and the power relations in Swedish forestry. And while the official roles of various actors were experienced as unclear, identifying where the main power resided was not. Critics perceived the forest industry as setting practices and using their superior resources to preserve the status quo where the economic values are believed to trump environmental ones. As my analysis shows though, this power was neither believed to be static nor a given but found within the interactions and relationships between various actors. The vacuum was seen to come with a plethora of power relations and interactions between the various actors. It was through the interactions and relationships that power was manifested, seen in examples such as the framing of consultation processes (Section 4.3...) or excluding alternative values from forestry education (Section 4.3...). These manifestations, in turn, determined the Swedish forestry model and the fulfilment of the national environmental goals connected to the forest.

While the narratives extensively engaged in issues of power and power relations, they rarely mentioned these explicitly. To further understand how power operates it is worth applying theoretical concepts that offer ideas which can contribute to further explaining and breaking down the meaning of the elements found within the narratives as well as the narratives as a whole. The understanding of power brought by the critics' narratives draws Foucault's idea of power, as something that is exercised and circulates, to mind. Furthermore, as located at levels of struggle and manifested in the effect of the struggle (Haugaard, 1998). This

definition sees power as being a force which resides in the interactions between “bodily opponents”, a decentralized network where actors live under the influence of norms which govern practices but that can also be challenged in the pursuit of establishing new norms or systems of thought (Haugaard, 2015). This can be interpreted as being the case in Swedish forest politics and management where struggles between values and desires occur constantly. Although some critics stated that the forest industry held the power to control the practices in the forest, the narratives taken as a whole suggest that power did not reside with a particular actor in such a way that the actor had the potential to influence others as they might desire. The narratives rather pointed towards Foucault’s explanation of power as a structural circumstance in which actors are vehicles but do not possess power as such (Foucault, 1980). The vacuum as a structural circumstance gave rise to a series of relationships between actors with alternative valuations of the forest and different ideas of how to manage it. It is my interpretation, based on the narratives, these relationships governed the practices. As the narratives go into great depth to point out, the lack of authoritative control in the vacuum where the struggle for influence occurs means that the power did not lie with a particular actor but in the interactions that produce the relationships between them. These relationships and interactions were considered crucial: Whoever manages to define the stories and values come out on top of the struggle that constantly takes place within the vacuum. The narratives could not be clearer regarding who sets the stories and values and thereby the practices within the vacuum today. The forest industry comes across as the powerful actor among the rest since their ideas and values trump the other actors and underpin the practices of Swedish forestry. Fischer (2020) and Lindahl (2017) have made similar conclusions, claiming that the historically dominant actors shape the prevailing story and that uneven power relations exist which favour these actors.

A central conclusion that can be drawn from the narratives is the role of superior resources and appearance of expertise that the forest industry is perceived to possess and use in order to dominate the relationships that shape the vacuum (Section 4...). The shaping of the vacuum has a lot to do with the shaping of

knowledge, a concept which Foucault saw as being closely related to that of power, even stating that “*the exercise of power perpetually creates knowledge and, conversely, knowledge constantly induces effects of power*” (Foucault, 1978, p. 52). The resources and the appearance of expertise were two factors that allowed the forest industry to create certain social constructs and realities according to the narratives. The continuation of the status quo can be understood as upheld by these realities, dubbed by Hajer as discourse coalitions (Hajer, 2002). These discourse coalitions are explained by Hajer (1993) as a body consisting of a set of stories, actors and practices that are conforming to the stories (Vainio & Paloniemi, 2012). As seen in the narratives, the prevailing discourse coalition is one adopted by the actors who jointly make out the forest industry, as well as the majority of politicians and small forest owners. The stories adopted by these actors are ones that hide production interests under a set of stories, which fall under a larger umbrella story, namely that forestry is good for Sweden and the world. The substories differ and adjust based on the actor it interacts with but was always considered to support the larger story, that forestry is a necessity for society. These interactions, enforcing the main story portraying the necessity of forestry on a societal level, can be understood as a foundation or an enforcer of disciplinary power. A form of power that aims to make the actor surveil themselves and correct mistakes or wrongdoings until the actor has transformed and adopted the same values and beliefs as the prevailing discourse coalition (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). It does this by training the actor into certain ways of acting or behaving, rewarding ‘self-improvement’ by getting the actor to accept and embrace certain values and goals that represent the other rather than themselves (ibid). The disciplinary power which according to Foucault attempts to enforce a certain behaviour or set of values by training (Foucault, 1995, p. 129) can be found in plenty of examples in the critics’ narratives. The training of foresters where ecological and recreational values were excluded, the consultation processes where discussions were framed to solely include production discourses, the creation of an “us”, as in landowners, vs “them”, as in conservationists, by landowner organisations were just three examples of the pruning of foresters and

landowners into adopting the desired behaviour and the same values as the forest industry (Section .3...).

The existence of disciplinary power can further be seen by corresponding resistance measures as the connection between resistance and power is an entangled and interconnected one, where the two forces create and reinforce each other (Lilja, 2008). In general, resisting disciplinary power aims to destabilize the institutional control of behaviour by for example avoiding or rearticulating particular discourses. An example of this was the critics' attempt to avoid talking about the forest in monetary terms or when they did so often downplay its importance to Sweden's current economy. This avoidance of economic discourses (to a large part) can be seen as a means to challenge the value of maximizing profit, a value that the critics perceived as underpinning Swedish forestry. The avoidance of economic discourses was not the case for all of the interviewees as a few adopted the opposite strategy and explicitly attacked the forest industries' economic storyline, claiming that the contribution of forestry was not as important to the Swedish economy as they thought the forest industry made it.

Another form of resistance to this power comes from acknowledging and using the fact that meaning can never be fixed. Resisters then challenge or reverse dominant discourses in an act that challenges the dominating norm to which actors try to fit (Butler, 1995). A clear example of this form of resistance can more precisely be found in the narratives when the critics speak about climate change and why climate change should be a reason why clear-cutting should stop, an almost identical argument as the industry makes for why clear-cutting is needed. This can be perceived as a reversed discourse where critics include arguments, words and norms utilized by the dominant discourse to challenge it (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014).

## 5.2. Global power structures and Swedish forestry

While the dynamics between actors involved in forest management was a complex system of relationships and forces shaping these relationships, the critics considered the isolation of forestry from the rest of society impossible. The majority of them claimed that the underlying force determining the practices and the discourses were desires of economic growth. In this connection links to Foucault's notion of biopower can be found. Biopower as a force is interested in the health and effectiveness of the human population, focusing on populations rather than individuals, with the underlying desire to improve the life quality of its members (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). Hence, biopower has a formative influence on society as a whole (Alim, 2019).

As identified by the interviewed critics, forestry was situated within a system operating at a larger scale, the economic one. This distinction is made by Foucault as well who claims that his forms of power (including sovereign power) operate in tandem with each other but at different scales; disciplinary can then be seen as a part that enforces biopower (ibid). The fact that biopower is considered, by Foucault, a positive form of power with the intention to do good can be discussed as forces like economic growth entail positives for some but negatives for others, which the narratives confirm. For the fulfilment of the environmental goal, however, the concept of biopower can help by illuminating the reasons behind the experienced discrepancy between the practices and the words found in legislation as well as the environmental goals. Some critics referred to the Forestry Act as a paradox, insisting that increased production was incompatible with the preservation of ecological values. These thoughts force one to question whether the inclusion of more values than the prevailing economic one into forest practices is possible at the disciplinary level of power or whether the desire to grow the economy leaves no room for the inclusion of these values in the realm of forest management? Future research ought to delve deeper into how the desire and push from the global economic system to grow the economy influences the disciplinary mechanisms among the actors connected to Swedish forest management. The critics' narratives and the analysis as well as the reflection that

followed them, however, show a clear example of how disciplinary power enforces biopower as the literature suggest it does (Alim, 2019). Future research could, however, turn this finding around and look into how the biopower limits the practices and discussions at the disciplinary level of power in Swedish forest management.

My analysis of the narratives shows that shifting the understanding of how and where power is performed, what forces are driving the extinction of the forest landscape and what supports those forces will also change the resistance responses. Resisting biopower is challenging due to the advanced character of it. However, in general, resistance attempts to biopower try to undermine or avoid the managing of social groups, policies and institutions by acting in alternative ways, not rarely in subcultures, and by propagating different values (Lilja & Vinthagen, 2014). One shape that resistance to biopower takes is when the transformation of the self, a form of resistance to disciplinary power, grows and turns into a mobilization of a larger group. If the group avoids becoming part of the enterprise, ie. integrate into the influence and existence of biopower, they may be able to create the conditions for an autonomous and alternative way of living, a radically different society or different institutions (ibid). The number or size of the mobilization is a crucial factor in the resistance to biopower since a few individuals acting differently might even strengthen the overall system (ibid). Growing awareness and the care for the forest was a resistance strategy that all of the interviewees mentioned. However, public opinion was considered very important to the industry as well which led to what was described as a tug of war over public opinion. A tug of war which was experienced as difficult to understand by some of the critics since the connection between support for the ecological values and actual political change was believed close to non-existing. A belief based on some of the interviewee's experiences of the dynamic between caring and changing. Others experienced that there was hope in the belief that if enough people became aware, the pressure on forest practices to change could alter the opinions of the people who worked with forestry. The difference stemmed from alternative understandings of where the power resided. Some saw



the politicians as key while others considered a bottom-up approach more likely. Either way, the common understanding was that due to the difference in resources, the public was likely to hear the forest industries' version more often, making the mobilization of a large group of people, as Lilja and Vinthagen (2014) claimed necessary, unlikely according to the narratives.

## 6. Conclusion

The Swedish environmental goals will not be reached in time (Sverigesmiljomal.se, 2020). The reason, the critics argue, is that such ambitions require the inclusion of alternative values like ecological and recreational considerations, not only on paper but also in practice. According to the critics' narratives, the Swedish forestry model will be a product of whoever best controls all the actors that struggle for influence in the vacuum of power that exist as a result of weak legislation and the state abandoning responsibility. The narratives claimed that this currently is the forest industry. Emphasis should, however, be on the word 'currently' as power is neither believed to be static nor held authoritatively. The analysis rather understands the power of the vacuum as residing in the interactions among the actors or more precisely the stories told by the industry during these interactions. The story slightly adjusts depending on the actor but generally cements the status quo by claiming that production and clear-cutting are great for the economy, for jobs, or the climate. This story was acknowledged by Lindahl (2017) who referred to this as the Swedish forestry model and dubbed it "More of everything". Fischer (2020) found a similar reality when analyzing the Swedish National Forest Program and claimed that the focus on consensus in Swedish forest policy has led to the marginalization of values that are not in line with the prevailing neo-industrial story that dominates policy. This paper supports these findings but furthermore attempts to explain how this story prevails as well as provide an insight into how it is resisted. Reflecting on the interviewees' narratives and applying Foucault's notion of disciplinary power and biopower provided the framework to analyse the relationships and interactions between various forestry actors. The conclusions drawn are that within the vacuum, where the interactions take place, a series of disciplinary forces, stories and norms, shape the minds and values of the other actors. These values and the practices that follow in turn serve the global economies desire to grow. Although

the connection to economic growth is a relevant finding the main contribution of this paper is related to the performance of power in the vacuum. The narratives and the analysis have highlighted how the very voices which were meant to be empowered by deregulation have actually been suppressed. The need for new prevailing stories and power relations are obvious if the environmental aspect of Swedish forestry is ever going to be embodied.

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# Appendix 1

## Interview Guide:

### Relationer till skogen

- Vilka värden har de Svenska skogarna, personligen och för samhället, anser du?
- Skulle du säga att svensk skogsindustri är en homogen enad grupp med enade metoder?
  - Vad enar de olika aktörerna inom skogsindustrin och vad skiljer dem?
- Hur ser du på svensk skogsindustris påverkan på den svenska skogen?
  - Finns det några andra krafter som påverkar den svenska skogen? Vilka och hur isåfall?
- Vad är din uppfattning av personerna eller organisationerna som formar svenskt skogsbruk idag vad gäller deras relation till skogen? Sätter de andra värden på skogen än vad du tidigare (i intervjun) gjorde?
  - Upplever du en skillnad mellan deras (personerna/organisationernas) faktiska agerande och hur de pratar om sig själva och sina aktiviteter? Vad är skillnaden isåfall?
- Hur förhåller du dig till dessa metoder/denna grupp? Hur motsätter du dig dem? Alternativt, hur förstärker du dem?
- I vilken utsträckning interagerar du/ni med dina/era meningsmotståndare?
  - Hur ser denna interaktion ut? Vem sätter agendan/anger villkoren?

### Lagar och beslut

- I skogsvårdslagens första paragraf så likställs biologisk mångfald/miljö med avkastning och ekonomi. Hur ser du på förhållningssättet till denna lag generellt i svenskt skogsbruk?
  - Anser du att skogsvårdslagen bidrar till att uppfylla våra åtaganden om att bevara den biologiska mångfalden? Hur isåfall?
  - Om inte... Anser du att felet ligger i utformningen av skogsvårdslagen eller i implementeringen av den?
- Uppfyllandet av miljömålen bygger ju mycket på att skogsägarna ska ta eget ansvar men detta kan vara svårt och kräver kunskap och rådgivning, ett ansvar som Skogsstyrelsen erhållit. Vad är din uppfattning av hur rådgivningsprocessen går till i praktiken? Finns det möjlighet för andra aktörer att påverka denna process? Kan du/ni påverka?
- Finns det andra reglerande mekanismer som styr hur skogsbruket genomförs?

- Vem stiftar dessa? Hur uppfattar du möjligheten att påverka dessa mekanismer?
- Ser du några normer som styr skogsbruket som inte grundar sig i lagstiftning.
- Frihet under ansvar har ofta sålts in som vägen till ett mer mångfacetterat skogsbruk med alternativa skogsbrukssätt. Hur upplever du att denna ambition fungerar i realiteten?

**Resurser och röst:**

- Hur tror du den allmänna uppfattningen av Svensk skog påverkar brukandet av skogen?
- Hur ser du på samspelet, interaktionen mellan allmänhet - icke skogsägare - och skogsindustri, hur kommer de i kontakt med varandra?
  - Vem sätter agendan för interaktionen mellan allmänhet och skogsindustri? Ser du någon möjlighet att ändra dynamiken i interaktionen för gemene man?
- Vilka möjligheter finns det för allmänheten att påverka skogsbruket och skogens bevarande?
- Vilken roll har utbildning i allmänhet och utbildning av jägmästare i synnerhet för inverkan på skogen och relaterade miljömål?
- Det finns opinionsmätningar som visar att en majoritet av Svenska folket tycker bevarande av skog är mycket viktigt. Vad tror du klyftan mellan det ökade antalet hotade arter i skogen och viljan hos svenska folket beror på? Är det en medveten strategi från industrin eller brister det i förståelsen, intresset?
- Något annat du önskar lägga till?