Defining Sustainability in Swedish Forest Policy

– a WPR-analysis of problem representations in the Forest Inquiry

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Abstract

The Forest Inquiry (Skogsutredningen, SOU 2020:73) has attempted to unite stakeholder interests and societal goals through suggested solutions for new and improved forest policies. These solutions have established certain explicit and implicit problem representations within Swedish forest management and forest policy. The aim of this study has been to investigate the problem representations in the Forest Inquiry that are related to sustainable forestry and the increased polarization in the Swedish forest debate. Apart from the problem representations, it has also been examined how the different actors are being constituted, and what the potential effects of the problem representations could be on Swedish forestry. To answer the research questions, a text analysis guided by Bacchi's framework 'What is the problem represented to be?' was conducted on selected parts of the Forest Inquiry. The analysis was supplemented with media articles covering the actors' positions, reactions, and opinions on the issues and policy proposals. The analysis resulted in three overarching problem representations: (1) an issue in defining sustainable forest management, (2) conflict and polarisation within the forest debate, and (3) the landowners' lack of biodiversity knowledge. Through these, it has been shown that the forest sector is influential in defining sustainable forestry, and that stakeholder groups are being excluded or simplified to achieve consensus in the policy making processes. The effects on Swedish forestry risks becoming a narrow discussion and further polarisation among the stakeholders.

Keywords: Sustainable forestry, bioeconomy, biodiversity, forest conflict, problem representation

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Abbreviations

ENGO	Environmental non-governmental organization
FSC	Forest Stewardship Council
PEFC	Endorsement of Forest Certification
SEPA	Swedish Environmental Protection Agency
SFA	Swedish Forest Agency
SNFP	Swedish National Forest Program
SOU	Swedish Government Official Report
SSNC	Swedish Society for Nature Conservation
WPR	'What is the problem represented to be?'
WWF	WorldWide Fund for Nature

1. Introduction

The Swedish forests are under immense pressure and are expected to serve several national and international biodiversity, climate, and economic interests. An attempt to assess and unite these goals has been through the Forest Inquiry (here forth used interchangeably with the Inquiry) which was released in November 2020 (SOU 2020:73 2020). The Inquiry was produced within the scope of the January agreement, which after the Swedish elections 2016, became the solution to form a Government after several months of deliberations (*Januariöverenskommelsen* 2019). Led by the Social Democrats and Green Party, with bipartisan support from the Centre Party and The Liberal Party, the agreement consists of a list of policy issues where the four parties have shared aims, including for the Swedish forest sector. The initial mission of the Forest Inquiry was to propose suggestions for strengthened property rights for landowners, identify goals of conflict, specifically between the international biodiversity objectives, and the strive to grow a circular bioeconomy in Sweden (Kommittédirektiv 2019:46 2019).

In conjunction with the release of the Forest Inquiry, the issues and proposals brought up in the document sparked a debate in media (e.g., Dagens Nyheter n.d.), and organisations within the environmental movement seized the opportunity to further bring light to their agendas through campaigns (Protect The Forest Sweden & Greenpeace Nordic 2021; Naturskyddsföreningen n.d.). One of the central questions in the debate is whether the conventional forest management conducted in Sweden should be considered sustainable or not. This exposed current competing understandings among forest stakeholders about what constitutes a sustainable society.

Environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOs) and other stakeholders coming from a bioecological perspective are criticising forestry companies for not considering natural values and biodiversity in their management methods (Nordén et al. 2017; Eriksson & Klapwijk 2019). In their point of view, the sustainability focus should be on decreased consumption, redistribution of resources, and local development (Holmgren et al. 2019). Simultaneously, industry stakeholders argue that they have more knowledge about biodiversity than they are given credit for (Hannerz & Simonsson 2020). Coming from a biotechnological and bioresource focused perspective, these stakeholders promote technological development within

forest management, and see increased production as a solution to the climate change issues (Holmgren et al. 2019). These two conceptions clash in the debate of how Swedish forests should be managed and what goals to aim for (Sandström et al. 2020).

1.1. Problem Formulation & Research Questions

The Forest Inquiry has attempted to unite stakeholder interests and common societal goals through suggested solutions for new and improved policies. Based on these solutions, the Inquiry has established certain explicit and implicit representations of the problems within forest management. Due to the extensive time horizons within forest management, the current problem representations and power effects that are produced by the Forest Inquiry will affect the Swedish forests policies for decades to come. Therefore, it is important to study these problem representations in detail to understand the potential impacts they will have.

The aim of this qualitative study has been to investigate the problem representations in the Forest Inquiry that are related to sustainable forestry and the increased polarization in the Swedish forest debate. Therefore, I formulated the research questions below to guide this thesis:

- How are the problems being represented in the Forest Inquiry?
- How are the actors constituted by the problem representations?

The first research question will be examined in the chapter 'Results & Analysis' (see *Section 4*) and the second question will be reviewed in the chapter 'Discussion & Conclusion' (see *Section 5*). In the latter section I will also discuss the potential effects, e.g., political, ecological, or social, that my results could have on Swedish forestry.

2. The Debate About Swedish Forests

The two competing discourses on Swedish forests and future forest use currently reflected in media and the policy debate is nothing new and has been present during essentially all the latter half of the 20th century (Lisberg Jensen 2002). Sustainability was introduced in Swedish forestry policy in 1948 when it was included in the Forestry Act (Appelstrand 2007). At the time it was production-oriented and referred to a sustained yield and future generations' right to wood resources (Wiersum 1995). Over time, sustainability in forestry has developed into a more encompassing concept and today it includes the environmental and social dimensions, at least in theory (Wiersum 1995; Appelstrand 2007).

The current strategic model for Swedish forestry was established in 1993 with the reformation of the Forestry Act (Appelstrand 2007). In response to national and international criticism towards the lack of biodiversity measures, an environmental goal was added to the Swedish Forestry Act and was given equal weight alongside the production goal (Appelstrand 2007). The leading concept since then has been 'freedom with responsibility', meaning that forest owners have the freedom to set up their own goals for their forest, as long as they ensure that new trees will grow (KSLA 2012; Skogsstyrelsen 2020c). This self-regulation is a common strategy in countries where the forest sector traditionally has been important to the national economy (Bergquist & Keskitalo 2016; Beland Lindahl et al. 2017a). In recent years, the equal goals of production and environment have garnered criticism from ENGOs which question whether they are equal in practice (Sandström & Sténs 2015). This critique has led to assessments indicating that the guidelines of the Swedish Forestry Model are vague (KSLA 2012). Research also confirms that the model leans heavily towards ecological modernization and maintains the status quo with a high focus on productivity (Sandström & Sténs 2015; Beland Lindahl et al. 2017b).

The current debate about the Swedish forests is influenced by the ongoing climate change debate due to the forest's close connection to it. It has been projected that the effects of climate change will result in a decline in timber production in boreal species in the Northern hemisphere due to warmer and more extreme weather, specifically through an increase in drought and forest fires (Brecka et al. 2020).

Monocultural production forests in Sweden have also started to experience an increase in damages from the European spruce bark beetle (*Latin:* Ips Typographus) which thrive in a milder climate (Skogsstyrelsen 2020b). The most important role of the forests in the societal sustainability transition is as a carbon sink, mitigating greenhouse gases and balancing out the emissions that are released from, e.g., transports, and production of goods and energy (Naturvårdsverket 2020). How this carbon sink is used most efficiently is where the forest stakeholders diverge into different opinions in the debate.

For stakeholders with a bioresource perspective, climate change is taken as an opportunity for intensifying forest production (Holmgren & Arora-Jonsson 2015) "while at the same time allowing for increased resilience to climate change, prevention of forest fires and promotion of regional development" (Ranacher et al. 2020:1856). The arguments for increased growth are that young, fast-growing trees have higher sequestration of carbon dioxide, the opportunity for carbon capture through long-lived products, and the substitution of non-renewable materials and fuels (Holmgren et al. 2019). The bioeconomy has become a central concept within this discourse defined by the European Union as covering "all sectors and systems that rely on biological resources […], their functions and principles" (European Commission 2018:4). However, research has argued that the bioeconomy concept is a reframing of old forest discourses, and the economic goals are still dominant compared to the ecological aspects (Pülzl et al. 2014; Hodge et al. 2017). Within this perspective the role of the state is expected to be more passive, providing knowledge and resources for technological advances which the industry take part in voluntarily (Holmgren et al. 2020).

The other discourse is connected to the bioecological perspective and these stakeholders press on the inadequate focus on biodiversity factors within the bioeconomy discourse (Holmgren et al. 2019). It is partly powered by recent reports establishing that Sweden is not reaching nationally set goals for nature and biodiversity protection due to climate change and resource exploitation (Angelstam et al. 2020). Thus, the critique of the bioresource discourse includes the lack of an ecological and biodiversity perspective when discussing and implementing the sustainability concept and a naïve attitude towards merging economic growth and a sustainable bioeconomy. These stakeholders instead advocate for a behavioural shift with decreased consumption, redistribution of resources, and local development (Holmgren et al. 2019).

Since 2013, policy dialogue and collaboration between stakeholders has taken place within the Swedish National Forest Program (SNFP) (Regeringskansliet n.d.). One of the main drivers for its formation from the government's perspective was the rise of the bioeconomy concept during the late 2000s and early 2010s (Johansson 2016).

It is built on collaboration between the forest stakeholders and should not be influenced by political ideologies (Näringsdepartementet 2018). However, there have been questions raised regarding the Swedish government's central role in the process, and its power in deciding who is invited to the forums (Johansson 2016). Adding to this critique, Fischer et al. (2020) note that the state is primarily supporting the discourse within the SNFP which is driven by the private sector, promoting their financial interests. This, together with a consensus seeking process, has been shown to lead to a marginalization of non-industrial perspectives (Beland Lindahl et al. 2017a; Fischer et al. 2020).

The Swedish forest debate is also influenced and affected by international discourses and policies. On the European level, primarily through the European Green Deal (European Commission 2019b), the EU Biodiversity Strategy (European Commission 2020) and an upcoming forest strategy within the EU (European Commission 2019a), member states are pushed towards implementing tougher sustainability measures into national forest policies. A part of this roadmap is a new taxonomy regulation within the EU ((EU) 2020/852 2020), which aims to aid in the assessment of sustainable investments. In a recent draft of the regulation, Swedish ministries expressed criticism toward the definition of sustainable forestry management since the majority of Swedish production forests would be excluded from this concept (Ministry of Finance et al. 2020). This critique came parallel to a ruling from the European Court which decided that Swedish authorities need to take more precautionary measures for biodiversity when allowing for felling permits (*Föreningen Skydda Skogen and Others v Länsstyrelsen i Västra Götalands län, C-473/19 and C-474/19* 2021). These events further show the international pressures on how forestry is expected to take biodiversity into consideration in order to be called sustainable.

2.1. The Swedish Forest Sector

The forest sector in Sweden has a long history and has become deeply connected to both the Swedish economy and the Swedish culture and identity during the 20th century (Lisberg Jensen 2002). I have made a distinction between the 'forest sector' and the 'forestry sector'. The forest sector is used in a more encompassing sense, including connected industries such as paper and pulp production. On the other hand, the forestry sector describes the industry and activities in a more traditional sense, meaning larger scale wood production, economic interests, and the forest owner movement. Historically the wood-based industries of the Swedish forest sector have been a large employer in countryside areas, especially in northern Sweden, and has been essential for job opportunities and rural development (Lundell 2011). Ownership of the Swedish production forests is divided between

privately owned corporations (ca 25 per cent), state-owned companies (ca 20 per cent), and individual forest owners (ca 55 per cent) (Christiansen 2018). On a global scale level, Sweden is one of the largest exporters of wood and paper products and the forest sector represents approximately 10 per cent of exported goods and 2,5 per cent of Sweden's BNP (Hallsten & Desax 2021). During the past decades, the forestry sector has slowly seen a shift in the owner characteristics (Ingemarson et al. 2006). Among the individual forest owners, fewer people live close to their forest and do not depend economically on its resources (Nordlund & Westin 2011) and only about 34 per cent of the individual forest owners are a part of a larger forest association (Christiansen 2014). The policies have yet to catch up to the changing complexities of ownership. Production focused views are still being reproduced in policy processes and the forest associations function as the echo chambers of these conceptions (Sténs & Mårald 2020).

The dominating method within Swedish forest management has since the 1950s been clear-cutting (Lundmark et al. 2013; Weslien & Widenfalk 2014). Simplified, this method involves planting trees of the same species and age which cut down when they are fully grown after 50-100 years depending on the conditions (Lundqvist et al. 2014). Landowners have a legal obligation through the Forestry Act in taking biodiversity into account during tree felling such as leaving dead wood and other important substrates (Weslien & Widenfalk 2014). Other forms of environmental protection in production forests, such as set-asides where a part of the forest is preserved for biodiversity purposes, are done primarily on a voluntary basis and without economic compensation (Skogsstyrelsen 2020d). Since the set-asides are voluntary, there is no explicit definition of what needs they should aim to fulfil (Skogsstyrelsen 2019). Landowners can also choose to manage their forest in ways that are thought to be more considerate of biodiversity, for example, through mixed forestry (i.e. different species), continuous cover forestry (i.e. different ages), or ecosystem-based forestry (i.e. adapted to the natural ecosystem) (Appelqvist & Andersson 2020). However, these management methods have a reputation of being less cost-efficient compared to clear-cutting methods (SkogsSverige 2017). Another way for landowners to manage their forests sustainably is through sustainability certifications. The organisations the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) and Programme for the Endorsement of Forest Certification (PEFC) are internationally accepted as confirming sustainable management practices. The two sustainability certifications are independent and voluntary, and their standards promote sustainable forest management beyond the national legal obligations (Skogsstyrelsen 2020a). However, the reliability of the FSC has been questioned by ENGOs. E.g., to what degree forest owners are held accountable when deviating from the requirements of the certification (Sahlin 2013) and the validity of the environmental standards, which allow clear-cutting and foreign wood species (Back 2018).

Leach et al. (2010) coined the term 'pathways to sustainability' to explain how different actors produce different narratives of what sustainability is and how to reach it. The Swedish forest model has been described as a 'more of everything'-pathway, meaning that increased exploitation of the forests and more intense management methods are thought to have a high impact on the mitigation of greenhouse gases (Beland Lindahl et al. 2017b). Compared to the original intent of the sustainable development strategy it is less focused on social change, and more on the economic growth, and consumerism part of the concept (Baker 2007). Both these paths are claimed as 'fact-based', but "where knowledge is lacking, the latitude for politicization and struggles over alternative interpretations is the greatest, and where reflection, humility, and precautionary approaches may be needed the most, it appears to be scarce" (Beland Lindahl 2015:121). According to Leach et al. (2010), this leaves the door open for powerful actors to frame the debate, dominate the discourse on sustainability, and maintaining the status quo. Against this background, it is important to investigate what notions of sustainability that the problem representations of the Forest Inquiry reproduce, and whether this challenge or pursue the current status quo in Swedish forestry and forest policy.

3. Research Design: Discourse Analysis

Discourse analysis has been used as both the theoretical framework and the methodological approach in this thesis, as suggested by Jørgensen and Phillips (2002). The authors define the analysis through four premises that encompass both theory and method (Jørgensen & Phillips 2002). First, the approach is critical toward taken-for-granted knowledge, i.e., the experienced reality is interpreted and categorized into patterns, but should be actively examined and questioned. Second, knowledge is a product of past interactions and its manifestation depends on the context where the knowledge was created. Third, discourse theory bridges knowledge and social processes. Interactions between people are essential in making sense of the world and are necessary for the construction of knowledge. Fourth, knowledge is linked to social actions which vary depending on the social understandings. Through these premises, it is understood that in text analysis the actors producing a text are not the primary focus. The meaning of a text is instead put into a larger context and understood through how it relates to or reproduces discourses (Bergström & Boréus 2018).

In the case of the Forest Inquiry, it is a social process produced within the context of an ongoing discussion between stakeholders with different problem representations of the forest and its management. The Inquiry, metaphorically, interacts with previous texts, e.g., policy documents and consultations, and adds to the sense-making and knowledge of forest use, now and in the future. By critically examining the claimed objective truths in the Forest Inquiry, one can understand the patterns that are produced and have the power within the forest discourse.

3.1. Analytical framework: 'What is the problem represented to be?'

To operationalise the understanding of discourse as theory and method in practice, I have applied Carole Bacchi's 'What is the problem represented to be?'-approach (WPR). This normative framework is grounded in post-structural and constructivist perspectives influenced by Foucault (Bacchi 2009; Bergström & Ekström 2018). It differs from other discourse approaches through the definition and use of discourse

as knowledges, not language (Bacchi 2018). Coming from political science, Bacchi (2009) emphasises that the knowledges are situated in political structures and, hence, are governed through them. The WPR approach aims "to understand policy better than policymakers by probing the unexamined assumptions and deep-seated conceptual logics within implicit problem representations" (Bacchi 2012:22). In other dominant policy approaches, Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) argue that the task is to attempt to solve societal problems through policy. However, the authors suggest that this "produce 'problems' as particular sorts of problems" (Bacchi & Goodwin 2016:16). This means that policies are produced through underlying assumptions and representations of the problem it aims to solve. Thus, the WPR-approach works backwards and looks at the solution to understand how a problem is being represented in policy documents. In the case of the Forest Inquiry, it puts forward an array of proposals and policy suggestions, all of which represent the Inquiry committee's understanding of the problems that need to be solved. Bacchi (2009) notes that in liberal democracies, there is a tendency of moving from government to governance 'at a distance', where subjects are encouraged to govern themselves through self-regulation. This sets up unintentional 'dividing practices' where marginalised groups, not able to govern themselves fully due to structural obstacles, are separated within themselves and from other groups. Bacchi (2009) suggests that how problems are represented and the way marginalised groups are managed in policy proposals, mirror the discursive patterns, assumptions, and problem representations that are present within policymakers and governing practices. This is something that is considered essential to study within the WPR-approach.

Table 1. The WPR-approach (based on Bacchi 2009)

Questions to apply to problem representations
1. What is the problem (e.g., of 'biodiversity', 'bioeconomy', 'forest management', etc.) represented to be in a specific policy or policies?
2. What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?
3. How has this representation of the 'problem' come about?
4. What is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be thought about differently?
5. What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?
6. How and where has this representation of the 'problem' been produced, disseminated, and defended? How could it be disrupted and replaced?

As an analytical tool, the WPR approach suggests six questions to analyse a collected dataset (see *Table 1*). The questions that have been central to this thesis have been: (1) "What is the problem represented to be?", (2) "What presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the 'problem'?", (4) "What is left unproblematic in this problem representation?", and (5) "What effects are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?". Questions three and six have been excluded from the analysis since the origin and historical aspects of the problem representations have not been the focus of this study.

Bacchi's (2009) first question (see *Table 1*), is the initial step to identify the underlying problem representations which affect policies and policy proposals. As mentioned previously this question operates in reverse, starting from a proposal to understand which issues have been identified as needing a solution.

The second question (see *Table 1*) refers to the taken-for-granted, or assumed, knowledge that policies and problem representations rest upon. It is about the consideration of "the shape of arguments, the forms of 'knowledge' that arguments rely upon, the forms of 'knowledge' that are necessary for statements to be accorded intelligibility" (Bacchi 2009:5). To engage with the presuppositions or assumptions of a problem representation, Bacchi (2009) suggests an analysis of the binaries, key concepts, and categories. Binaries studies the dichotomies in a policy e.g., nature/culture and urban/rural, and the hierarchical relationship between them. Key concepts are labels, such as sustainability, that at first glance seem to have distinct meanings, but are not as clear once they are dissected. Looking at the assigned meanings will help reveal presuppositions and assumptions underlying a problem representation. Lastly, categories are central to governing processes, often used for groups of people. Similar to binaries and key concepts, are used to "see how they function to give particular meanings to problem representations" (Bacchi 2009:9)

The third question (see *Table 1*) sheds light on where the limitations to a problem representation lie, and what is being silenced (Bacchi 2009). The objective is to reveal tensions and contradictions in how e.g., sustainability forestry is thought about or not thought about.

Through the fourth question (see *Table 1*), the aim is to look at the e.g., political, ecological, and social outcomes that representations and assumptions of sustainable forestry result in (Bacchi 2009). This is done through the examination of discursive effects, subjectification, and lived effects. The discursive effects speak about which options are closed off due to specific problem representations. Subjectification examines how groups of people are set up in opposition to each other in policies. This divide stigmatises targeted minorities and implies that 'they' are responsible for a problem representation, which aims to encourage desired behaviours from the

majority not targeted. Silences and impacts on affected groups are used as analytical tools in this case to reinforce the status quo. Lastly, lived effects "highlights the way in which policies create representations of problems that have effect in the real by materially affecting [people's] lives" (Bacchi 2009:18). I.e., what are the consequences for a person or minority affected by assumed knowledges and solutions within a policy?

3.2. Material & Method

The core of the data analysed in this thesis is the Forest Inquiry (SOU 2020:73 2020), a Swedish Government Official Report (SOU) published in November 2020. The process was led by a chief judge and included experts from the Ministry of Trade and Industry, Ministry of Environment, and Ministry of Culture. Also involved from the public sector was the SFA, the Legal, Financial and Administrative Services Agency, the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), the Swedish National Heritage Board, and the County Administrative Board in Västerbotten. Representing individual land- and forest owners were the Federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF), Norra Skog (a forest owner association in northern Sweden), the Swedish Landowerns' Association, and the Swedish Public District Association. Skogsindustrierna (*English:* the forest industries), and Naturturismföretagen (*English:* the nature tourism companies) were included as organisations representing their respective industry's interests. The ENGOs WorldWide Fund for Nature (WWF), and Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC) represented the nature and biodiversity perspective in the process. Experts from the Swedish Church and the Swedish Sami National Association also took part as experts in the production of the Forest Inquiry.

This is an extensive document with more than 1 200 pages in total, and it has been necessary to make certain choices and limitations when approaching the text. Based on the ongoing debate among the forest stakeholders, I identified three central concepts which I used as the basis for my data collection: 'sustainable forestry', 'biodiversity', and 'bioeconomy'.

When collecting my material, I started with 'sustainable forestry' where I did a word search in the PDF documents. Here I also included searches for variations of the concept. For the concepts of 'biodiversity', and 'bioeconomy', I identified three chapters in the Inquiry that went through these two topics thoroughly: (1) 7. A Growing Circular Bioeconomy Based in the Forest (*Swedish*: En växande cirkulär bioekonomi med bas i skogen), (2) 8. Environmental Policies and Sweden's International Obligations on Biodiversity (*Swedish:* Svensk miljöpolitik och Sveriges internationella åtaganden om biologisk mångfald), and (3) 9. A Clear

Forest Policy for Biodiversity and a Growing Circular Bioeconomy (*Swedish:* En tydlig skogspolitik för biologisk mångfald och växande cirkulär bioekonomi).

In addition to the Forest Inquiry, I read through the 'special statements' to understand the stakeholders' problem representations connected to three concepts. The special statements are part of the Inquiry where the involved experts and other stakeholders can make reservations about the content of the SOU. I have also included media articles where stakeholders further talk about and question the results of the Inquiry. This is to get more context and a deeper understanding of the discourses and the actors' positions, reactions and opinions on the issues presented, and policy proposals suggested by the Forest Inquiry. The articles included in this thesis are far from everything that has been written on the subject matter but is an attempt for a selection of different stakeholders and points of views that have emerged after the Forest Inquiry was published. Throughout the data collection process I have, to the best of my ability, searched for related documents that were referenced in the Inquiry. These have not been included in my dataset, but they have informed the contextual aspects of the data and deepened my understandings of the complexities in the different discourses on sustainable forestry, biodiversity, and bioeconomy.

Throughout my reading process, I identified text passages, paragraphs, and sentences connected to the three concepts "sustainable forestry", "biodiversity", and "bioeconomy" and put them in an excel-sheet. An understanding for analysing texts within the social science field is that they "show relationships between people and groups of people" (Bergström & Boréus 2018:17) and that they study themes such as power, politics, and conflict. When engaging with the investigation it has been important to relate it to the context in which it was produced, the implied readership that it is intended for, and what the authors aim to accomplish with the text (Bryman 2015). One thing I also have kept in mind throughout the reading process is that "[policies] often contain tensions and contradictions. There is seldom a single voice lying behind them" (Bacchi 2009:20). Further, it has been important to "[acknowledge] contesting positions within a document when they are apparent" (Bacchi 2009:20). It is also important to note that each messenger, receiver, or other person reading a text approaches it with some pre-conceived notions and prejudices that are products of one's time, culture, and context (Bergström & Boréus 2018). This means that the interpretation of one text will be shaped differently, depending on who reads and studies it. I want to note that all citations and quotes used from the Forest Inquiry in the results and analysis (see *Section 4*) has been translated from Swedish to English by me. This, of course, affects the interpretation and I have, to the best of my ability, kept as close as possible to the wording, meaning, and purpose of the sentence or passage.

After identifying the relevant material, I started coding the passages into general themes which helped me become familiar with the text and its content. In the next step, I applied the WPR-questions with help from the analytical tools suggested by Bacchi (2009) (see *Table 1* and *Section 3.1*). Through the WPR-approach, I have been able to critically engage with the material and problematise the representations and assumptions being made in the Forestry Inquiry which will be presented in the following chapter.

4. Results & Analysis

The Forest Inquiry presents issues within forest policy and forest debate that lays the groundwork for new policy proposals. Through Bacchi's (2009) WPR-approach, I have identified three problem representations in these policy suggestions that are connected to the core themes: 'sustainability', 'biodiversity', and 'bioeconomy'. The first problem representation is the definition of sustainable forestry in theory and practice. The second is the conflict and increased polarisation within the forest management debate and the last problem representation is the perceived lack of knowledge that the landowner possesses. It is important to note that these problem representations are not isolated from each other but are dependent and interact with one another. Based on these problem representations I have been able to examine how the actors are constituted and what the potential effects would be on Swedish forestry. These aspects will be reviewed in the discussion and conclusion part (see *Section 5*)

4.1. Defining Sustainable Forestry in Practice

The first problem representation that I have identified is the issue in defining what sustainable forest management is in practice. Before describing the problem representation in detail and presenting how the concept is used and defined in the Forest Inquiry, I will start by differentiating between the two words 'sustained' (*Swedish:* uthållig) and 'sustainable' (*Swedish:* hållbar) and how and in which context they are used in the Inquiry.

In the Forest Inquiry, the term sustained is primarily used in the context of production e.g., sustained production capacity (*Swedish:* uthållig produktions-förmåga) and a sustained and good return (*Swedish:* en uthållig och god avkastning). Thus, sustained is in this case focused on the economic dimension within the overall concept of sustainability and is about sustaining rather than changing. On the other hand, the term sustainable is commonly used in Swedish to describe the balance between the social, environmental, and economic dimensions. Compared to sustained, sustainable it is more frequently used in the Forest Inquiry. Therefore, going forward in this thesis, when I use the term 'sustainable', and other

forms of the word, it will be as the translation to 'hållbar', unless it is specifically pointed out differently. This is because I aim to understand the definition of sustainability in the more encompassing sense and how the problem representations surrounding this term are represented and implicitly problematized.

In the Inquiry it is stated that Swedish forestry is, or aims to be, managed sustainably:

> Sweden has a policy model for forestry and the environment that aims to manage the forest landscape sustainably and briefly this means that areas with high natural values are protected through formal protection or voluntary set-asides. On the remaining, relatively large, areas sustainable forestry should be conducted with high regard to the environments' natural and cultural values, and in some cases, also with special concern for reindeer husbandry and other public interests. (SOU 2020:73 2020:394)

This paragraph reflects how Swedish woodlands are divided into either protected forests or forests managed sustainably. Thus, this distinction leaves little space for alternatives. Further, the Inquiry takes its definition of sustainable forest management from Forest Europe[1], which functions primarily on a theoretical level:

> Sustainable management means the stewardship and use of forests and forest lands in a way, and at a rate, that maintains their biodiversity, productivity, regeneration capacity, vitality, and their potential to fulfil, now and in the future, relevant ecological, economic, and social functions, at local, national, and global levels, that does not cause damage to other ecosystems. (SOU 2020:73 2020:394)

This leads into the problem representation where the authors of the Inquiry acknowledge that sustainable forest management is lacking a practical definition and, thus, the solution is to develop this concept and its implementation further.

> There are […] definitions of what is meant by sustainable forestry which Sweden has recognised. However, a description of what sustainable forestry is in practice is missing. […] The methods to evaluate whether a production forest is sustainable or not, and to assess the need for additional measures that contribute to sustainable forestry needs to be further developed. (SOU 2020:73 2020:394)

However, the Inquiry also establishes that the definition of sustainable forestry depends on time, knowledge, and contextual view: "There are reasons to continue the dialogue and discussion regarding how a sustainable forestry can develop as new knowledge is added and considerations are made due to changes in for example society's view of what sustainable forestry means" (SOU 2020:73 2020:395). Looking at sustainable forestry as a key concept, a tool suggested by Bacchi (2009)

[1] Also called the Ministerial Conference on the Protection of Forests in Europe, an intergovernmental dialogue and cooperation process on the forest policies in Europe (Forest Europe u.å.).

to understand assumptions being made in problem representations, the definition of it is fluctuating depending on e.g., the context and the era. Thus, through the quote above there is an acceptance that sustainable forestry as it is constituted currently might not suffice for future definitions.

The two certification bodies that are considered to have legitimacy in defining what sustainable forestry is meant by in practice are FSC and PEFC (SOU 2020:73 2020:145). However, their criteria are not thoroughly dealt with by the Inquiry. These organizations also function and are accepted on an international level, thus the problem representation of defining sustainable forestry is affected by the global market forces and the choice to become certified is primarily driven by economic incentives: "To the extent that the demand for products from sustainable and responsible forestry remains strong, it will be profitable for companies to join such certification systems and conduct forestry in line with the certification requirements" (SOU 2020:73 2020:366).

Although the problem is represented to be the difficulties in defining sustainable forestry in practice the key concept is simultaneously defined as a part of the solution to greenhouse gas mitigation and climate change adaptation. E.g., within the strategy for the SNFP, which is repeatedly referenced in the Inquiry, one focus area is "A sustainable forestry with increased climate benefits" (SOU 2020:73 2020:149). It is also expressed in the Inquiry that "for forestry to be considered sustainable in an economic sense, is it important that the forests to a sufficient extent are resilient against climate change and [its] consequences" (SOU 2020:73 2020:395). The implicit problem which can be noticed in the last quote is the fear of the forests losing their economic value. Any measures in the forest to combat climate change become a way of protecting the current and future economic values of the wood but also to benefit society. This is further established when the Inquiry brings up game damage and management in the forest: "A sustainable forestry and increased growth need a game population in balance with the food supply" (SOU 2020:73 2020:528). This shows that the problem representation of defining sustainable forestry in practice is strongly connected to the inherent assumptions of the economic values of the forest resources. What informs this problem representation further is the language used about the forest within the SNFP. The vision for the program uses "the green gold" (SOU 2020:73 2020:300) as a metaphor for the forest which contributes to the notions of the forest as, primarily, an economic resource. However, the Inquiry notes that "Swedish companies are also affected by the general picture of how forestry is managed in Sweden and how the efforts of preserving and developing biodiversity in the forest are coordinated" (SOU 2020:73 2020:366). Thus, biodiversity consideration within Swedish forestry is not assumed to be irrelevant on the global market, but the effects are discussed as shown below.

> One aspect is the concrete finding that when forest land is set aside for nature conservation, the available area for rational and active forestry decreases. The other aspect is more difficult to define and on a more comprehensive level. It has to do with the market's trust in the Swedish system for the preservation of biodiversity. (SOU 2020:73 2020:366)

In this quote, it is apparent that forestry presupposes large areas with intense management to meet global market demands. Nevertheless, a good sustainability reputation is suggested to lead to a higher demand for Swedish forestry products. This notion and problem representation of defining what sustainable forestry is, therefore, implied to be driven by the market. The Inquiry notes that current market criteria for sustainable forestry demand that areas high in nature values and that are valuable for biodiversity are kept intact (SOU 2020:73 2020:367). Seeing the market's sustainability demands through the lens of WPR (Bacchi 2009) the key concept of sustainable forest management has a very narrow definition and silence other methods that might be better at keeping high nature values intact, e.g., ecosystem-based methods. Non-clear-cut forestry management methods, such as continuous cover and ecosystem-based forestry, are somewhat endorsed by the Inquiry, e.g., "Ecosystem-based forestry needs further attention and naturally regenerated forests need to increase" (SOU 2020:73 2020:375). However, the report does not go further into how it should be supported nor does it suggest any incentives to encourage these methods. It is therefore implied that the methods are not a prioritised part of sustainable forestry and end up in the periphery. Looking at Bacchi's (2009) framework it becomes a dichotomy between the 'normal' sustainable forestry mainly consisting of clear-cutting with environmental consideration, and these 'alternative' and continuous cover methods. From an industry standpoint, in general, alternative management methods such as postponing felling of mature trees is seen as a huge business risk since it "could generate a forest with high biological values [and] create uncertainties if felling for these trees will be allowed in the future" (SOU 2020:73 2020:320). However, the Inquiry sees an opportunity in developing "the knowledge about alternative management systems which allow that old, but healthy trees can be used for high-quality production" (SOU 2020:73 2020:320). The restoration of old wooden buildings, which are culturally and historically valuable, are presented as playing a key role in the demand for high-quality timber (SOU 2020:73 2020:320).

4.2. Conflict & Polarization in the Debate

The second problem representation that was identified was the issue of increased conflict and polarization in the debate about implementing sustainable forestry. An explicit goal with the proposals in the Forest Inquiry was to "contribute to a healthier climate of discussion in the forest-related issues" (SOU 2020:73 2020:28).

It stated that: "in basically all issues where the Inquiry's mission is concerned, there is a need to take Sweden out of the destructive spiral where dialogue has been replaced with a debate" (SOU 2020:73 2020:28). This "destructive" discussion climate was also noted in connection to sustainable forestry and its implementation. E.g.: "There is a continued lack of consensus when it comes to certain aspects of forest production and what characterizes sustainable forestry […] The discussion and debate is partially polarised and not always solution-oriented." (SOU 2020:73 2020:305), and "the focal point of the discussion has been strongly connected to the conflict of interests between biodiversity and forest production" (SOU 2020:73 2020:489).

Connected to the goal of improving the discussion climate is one of the mission statements of the Forest Inquiry, which was to "suggest how incentives for sustainable forestry and an improved legitimacy in the forestry- and environmental policy can be created" (SOU 2020:73 2020:3). Although it is not clarified in the statement how 'improved legitimacy' should be interpreted, later in the Inquiry, it is expressed that:

> [a] clear policy should be based on the measures that can best contribute to short-term goal fulfilment and not imply an unrealistic pursuit of incompatible goals. […] difficult trade-offs and priorities should take place at the political level, […] to create democratic legitimacy and to avoid conflict between authorities and other forest stakeholders. (SOU 2020:73 2020:50)

In this context, legitimacy is translated into an acceptance from the stakeholders of the environmental forest policy goals. However, who the different stakeholders are, is not explicitly identified in the Inquiry. The quote above indicates that the authorities risk being on one side in a potential conflict, but who is opposing them is not mentioned. And often it is left up to the reader to interpret what the conflict is about and who's interests is on the discussion table, as seen in the example below:

> In the last decades, the debate over how forests should be managed has been marked by polarisation. It has been negative for the opportunity to find constructive and broad solutions on how the forest should be managed so that different individual-, company- and societal goals will be reached. The lack of trust that appeared between different stakeholders have given rise to magnified conflicts and the opportunities to find common ground and synergies between different interests and industries has become more difficult. (SOU 2020:73 2020:498)

By silencing who is engaged and not engaged in the forest debate there is a limitation put on the problem representation and its complexity. This silencing of stakeholders leads to what Bacchi (2009) describes as the effect of subjectification where groups of people are set up in opposition to each other. By excluding certain stakeholder groups, e.g., landowners not affiliated with a forest association, from the forums and policy processes, the debate appears to have become further divided.

The push for consensus in the processes could also further contribute to excluding certain stakeholder groups that are believed to incite more debate and polarization.

The Inquiry suggests more communication and collaboration between forest stakeholders, and less responsibility on authorities, to bridge the problem representation where conflict stands in the way for successful implementation of sustainable forestry.

> Putting too much responsibility on authorities and the sector to balance different societal goals could lead to increasing conflicts between opposing interests in the forest. The dialogue between different stakeholders which is required for the Swedish forest model to be effective is facilitated by a clearly established framework within which collaboration is to take place. The focus for dialogue and collaboration can then be on means and not on goals. (SOU 2020:73 2020:512)

However, the ENGO's WWF and SSNC are not hopeful that the polarisation will be solved through the proposed solutions (SOU 2020:73 2020:1176, 1209).

4.2.1. A Growing Circular Bioeconomy or Protecting Biodiversity

The base of the problem representation for the conflict between stakeholders is grounded in the assumptions being made regarding the dichotomy of a growing circular bioeconomy and the protection of biodiversity. Bacchi (2009) explains that dichotomies between two concepts are presented as an either/or relationship. By choosing one of them, the other is automatically excluded. There is also a hierarchical undertone, where one of the concepts is considered to be more desirable than the other. Before going deeper into this, definitions of the concepts of circular bioeconomy and biodiversity will be presented.

The circular bioeconomy does not have a formal definition and originates from combining the concepts of circular economy and bioeconomy. In the Inquiry, circular bioeconomy is described as:

> partly built on sustainable management, production and extraction of ecological renewable resources and processing of these, partly built on a high degree of reuse, material recycling and separation. It is of great importance that both concepts of bioeconomy and circular economy are connected to create better conditions together to solve societal challenges. The circularity in a bioeconomy thus must consider the resource input to the system, not exclusively see the renewability as a circular system. How bio-based resources are produced, i.e., their sustainability, is crucial for not creating a too narrow system. (SOU 2020:73 2020:291)

The quote above critiques how resources within the bioeconomy are traditionally dealt with. Instead of assuming inherent sustainability in renewable resources, the Inquiry sees the need for circularity of finished products.

The definition of biodiversity is taken from the Convention of Biological Diversity:

> The variability among living organisms of all origins, including land-based, marine, and other aquatic ecosystems and the ecological complexities in which these organisms are a part of; this includes diversity within species, between species and of ecosystems. (SOU 2020:73 2020:398)

This definition is interpreted in the Inquiry as follows:

> biodiversity thus encompasses the genetic variability among individuals or populations within a species. For biodiversity between species, it is also referred to as the variability that exists within an ecosystem or an area. Biodiversity of ecosystems refers to the variability of ecosystems that exists within a larger landscape. Intact landscapes with a diversity of ecosystems where the natural processes may prevail are the rarest globally. (SOU 2020:73 2020:398f)

Comparing the two definitions, the circular bioeconomy is presented as an efficient and sustainable way of extracting, producing, and using the resources from the forest. On the other hand, biodiversity is presented as; the more variability, larger area, and quantity, the better it is for nature conservation.

As mentioned in the first problem representation (see *Section 4.1*), one underlying issue of defining sustainable forestry is the difficulty of implementing it into practice. This has crystallized into the second identified problem representation of an increased conflict of which stakeholder perspectives should be prioritized in the operationalisation of sustainable forest management:

> There is a continued lack of consensus when it comes to certain aspects of forest production and what characterizes sustainable forestry, which is needed for a growing bioeconomy. On one hand, a wish and vision about the forests' and the forestry sector's opportunities to contribute to the transition and development to a fossil-free and sustainable society. On the other hand, a fear that goals for biodiversity and other ecosystem services cannot be reached. (SOU 2020:73 2020:305)

There are two assumptions to be unpacked in this quote. First, the key concept 'transition' is in the quote above assumed to be connected to a growing bioeconomy. According to Bacchi (2009), the definition of key concepts informs the implicit practices within policymaking. In this context, transition suggests that only through growth, both in economic terms and literal growing of bio-based resources, and innovation-based in forestry can a sustainable society be reached. However, this is only one interpretation of sustainable transition. Assuming that it can only be achieved through bioeconomic growth, suppress other interpretations. Another interpretation can be found in the special statement from SEPA:

> It is emphasized [in the Inquiry] that we need to extract more biomass from the forest to cope with the substitution needed for a climate transition. However, there is no clear link between

> felling volumes and the degree of substitution. […] there seems to be potential for increased substitution through an increased share of long-lived products within the limits of the already harvested volumes. (SOU 2020:73 2020:1208)

Thus, a sustainable transition does not have to entail increased consumption of bio-based products, as is assumed in the first quote, but could instead suggest a change in consumption behaviour.

The second assumption to unpack in the quote above (SOU 2020:73 2020:305), is the binary and implied hierarchical relationship between the growing bioeconomy and goals for biodiversity. As mentioned above the presuppositions of binaries imply a hierarchy where one side is preferred before the other. Since there is an expressed preferential for a sustainable transition of society, it is assumed that protecting and working towards biodiversity goals interfere with a growing bioeconomy. This is further made explicit through the following quote:

> The proposals [*Authors note*: to manage the conflict of goals between circular bioeconomy and nature conservation] aim to build better prerequisites for sustainable forestry, which build better prerequisites for a growing circular bioeconomy, efficient nature conservation and increased trust between the state and the [forestry] sector. (SOU 2020:73 2020:493)

The formulations, 'growing circular bioeconomy' and 'efficient nature conservation' further differentiates these two concepts and the implied goals of sustainable forestry. It is assumed that a sustainable society is reliant on continued economic growth and increased input from bio-resources. Simultaneously, it is presented in the Inquiry that the goals for biodiversity can be reached through increased connectivity in the landscape and that there is no need to set aside any larger areas for protection (SOU 2020:73 2020:495, 541, 586). This appears to contradict the earlier definitions of the key concepts mentioned at the beginning of this section. WWF notes in the special statements that: "better nature conservation quality […] needs to be combined with enough area protection" (SOU 2020:73 2020:1176) expressing a mismatch among the forest stakeholders in the assumed needs for resilient biodiversity.

The Inquiry concludes:

> short-term it is practically impossible to reconcile Sweden's international commitments regarding biodiversity with the growing circular bioeconomy that is needed to reach other societal goals. […] A clear policy should therefore start from the realistic expectations regarding what can be achieved in the balance between incompatible goals. (SOU 2020:73 2020:492f)

It is made clear through this quote that the Inquiry suggests that the focus of Swedish sustainable forestry and its practical implementation should be primarily driven by the goals for a growing bioeconomy.

To combat the conflict between stakeholders, the Inquiry put a lot of trust into research to make the trade-off between circular bioeconomy and biodiversity an easier choice. Natural science research is expected to help decide what the healthiest type of forestry management for biodiversity is, and how it can best combat or help adapt to climate change. This, the authors argue, would lay out the concrete facts as basis for decision-making and limit the polarisation between involved actors:

> Reliable knowledge collected with scientific methods should constitute the basis for how policies should prioritize nature conservation in the forest. […] Otherwise, there is a risk for preconceived notions and political arguments to manifest in the interpretation of the conditions of nature, to try to fit reality into a target. (SOU 2020:73 2020:48)

There is a high emphasis on biodiversity measures being backed up by valid and trustworthy research. However, it is left unproblematic that these demands are not being put on forestry management methods. Referencing WPR (Bacchi 2009) this distinction further implies the hierarchical relationship between biodiversity and bioeconomy, mentioned earlier.

In the quote above, and throughout the Inquiry, it is also assumed that scientific methods are objective and cannot be contested. However, in media, through interviews with researchers focusing on forest issues, another picture is brought forward. A researcher on biomass mentions that: "There are researchers that are guided by an ideology. The connection between the forest and climate is complex. Studies regarding how the forest is best used to combat climate change not seldom come to different conclusions." (Röstlund 2021). Another researcher in climatology, also points out that it depends on "what perspective of time you have […] There are different views – but one does not have to exclude the other." (Röstlund 2021). On each side of the imagined spectrum between endorsing a growing bioeconomy or increased protection of biodiversity, there is a professor in the forest's ecology and care, and a professor in the natural sciences. The former proclaims that with "more forest growth […] more forests can remain to sequester carbon, simultaneously as more can be cut down and used for renewable products" (Röstlund 2021), while the latter suggest "that these absorbers are being replaced with large emissions of carbon dioxide from the grounds of clear-cuts, and wooden products themselves – 80 per cent become short-lived products" (Röstlund 2021).

In the Inquiry, natural science research is presented as specifically important for political trade-offs: "environmental efforts also need to be consistent with the natural scientific research assessments of what is necessary to reach the politically

set ambitions" (SOU 2020:73 2020:490). Linking this to Bacchi (2009) it can be understood that the trust in research is left unproblematic by the Inquiry. It is presupposed that natural science research is objective. This together with excluding other fields of research leads to a simplification of the issues and limits the representation of the complex issues within forestry. In the following section, the concept of knowledge in the Forest Inquiry will be further explored.

4.3. Landowners are Lacking Knowledge in Biodiversity

The third problem representation that has been identified as an obstacle for sustainable forestry is the landowners' lack of knowledge about biodiversity. Knowing about high natural values in one's forest is implied to be a vital aspect for sustainably managed forests:

> it should be uncontroversial to consider that good knowledge of where there are high natural values in the forest increases the landowner's opportunities to conduct sustainable forestry and the Swedish Forest Agency's opportunities to provide good advice. (SOU 2020:73 2020:839)

The gap in the landowners' knowledge about the natural values in their forests is expressed as follows:

> There is often a lack of knowledge among forest owners about which measures are needed to develop natural values in voluntary set aside areas. These are, therefore, left to roam free to a great extent, which in some areas is not the most favourable for biodiversity. There may also be a widespread uncertainty about what measures should be taken for nature conservation reasons in an area that, for example, is classified as a key biotope. (SOU 2020:73 2020:526)

Two solutions are offered to this problem representation. First, the requirement of knowledge for landowners should be made more explicit in the Swedish forest legislation:

> The requirement means that the landowner in advance, and to the extent considered reasonable, must acquire the necessary knowledge to take sufficient account for the demands of consideration regarding the interests of natural and cultural environmental protection following the Forest Conservation Act. (SOU 2020:73 2020:44)

The second solution that is suggested is increased communication and knowledge sharing in collaboration with the authorities: "There are therefore reasons to commission the SFA, in consultation with SEPA, to produce guidelines and advisory material for nature conservation management in voluntary allocated areas" (SOU 2020:73 2020:526). Connecting to WPR (Bacchi 2009), the assumptions being made in these solutions, look at the authority category as having the knowledge needed by the landowner category. Other actors possessing or having

inherent knowledge e.g., ENGO's, are not brought up by the Inquiry and are thus silenced from the processes.

Representatives from different landowners' associations and specific larger landowners (e.g., the Swedish Church) express criticism toward some proposals that are meant to increase knowledge about biodiversity and natural values in the forest. They suggest that it "indicates a mistrust against forest owners' and the forestry planners' knowledge and judgements" (SOU 2020:73 2020:1194). Simultaneously, they oppose that too much responsibility is being put on landowners "to make the subjective assessment whether the logging has enough impact on the natural environment that it demands consultation. A responsibility that can be sanctioned with penalty" (SOU 2020:73 2020:1195).

Although there is an expectation on landowners to understand their forest's ecological values, the Inquiry expresses an awareness that increased knowledge in biodiversity is not the entire answer.

> There is however a limit of how great expectations that society can put on the individual landowner without economic incentives. There are also needs for additional measures and instruments to steer toward sustainable forestry with the aim of reaching the environmental quality objective of Living Forests. Letting nature conservation, to varying degrees, constitute a simple and profitable way of using land is considered to be a feasible path to reach the equal goals [*Authors note:* of production and environment] in the forest policy. (SOU 2020:73 2020:597)

The aspect of landowners having the main responsibility of assessing natural values is not further problematised by the Inquiry. Although there are forest stakeholders that want to do better regarding the protection of biodiversity, the economic aspect still weighs heavy when making management decisions. This is highlighted by the Nature Tourism Association: "today's model, 'freedom with responsibility', is strange. It means that those who are considerate in their forestry are affected financially, while those who place themselves on a minimum level regarding nature considerations become economic winners." (Hansson 2020). In this problem representation, how the landowner is defined is central for the presuppositions being made in the suggestions being laid forward. Bacchi (2009) mentions that people categories are central for governing processes and how people look at others and themselves. In the Inquiry, landowners are considered to have a strong right to their forests and therefore the right to decide the management:

> The Swedish forest policy is to a great extent built on 'freedom with responsibility'. A landowner should have great freedom to decide on their own goals and means in land use but also have […] a big responsibility in preserving the biodiversity and cultural environment in the forest both by voluntarily setting aside forests worth of protection and by managing their forests sustainably. (SOU 2020:73 2020:597)

However, despite the strong property rights and the Inquiry's proposals for making it even stronger, there is a notion that landowners' responsibilities for nature and biodiversity protection should not increase following the report's suggestions: "The inquiry shall enlighten how far the responsibility of the landowner extends to preserve biodiversity, without increasing the landowner's responsibilities" (SOU 2020:73 2020:757). Despite this, the presented suggestions from the Inquiry: "presupposes that the landowner takes greater responsibility for [acquiring] knowledge about their forest than what has happened so far in practice" (SOU 2020:73 2020:28).

The landowner category is generally treated as a homogenous group that privileges production. The heterogeneity and diversity within this group are silenced and forest- and landowners that are not part of a forest association have been excluded as experts from the process (SOU 2020:73 2020:3f). A representative from The Nature Tourism Association, which were part of the expert committee for the Inquiry expressed his experience in media after the publication of the Inquiry: "Forest owners are more positive towards the proposals in the inquiry than LRF […] I meet a lot of forest owners that are interested in biodiversity and that are more than willing to do set-asides under the right conditions" (Hansson 2020). By marginalising the diversity of in-group perspectives, the problems and possible solutions are delimited (Bacchi 2009).

5. Discussion & Conclusion

At the beginning of this process, I set out to understand which problem representations make up the discourse on sustainable forestry in the Forest Inquiry, how the actors are being constituted, and what the potential effects would be on Swedish forestry. This study has found three problem representations that are connected to the concepts of 'sustainable forestry', 'biodiversity', and 'bioeconomy', that made up the basis for my data collection. In this last section I will summarize the problem representations parallel with a discussion on how the actors are constituted by these representations and what the potential effects are on Swedish forestry.

The first problem representation was identified as an issue in defining sustainable forest management. At this moment in time, the production focus and the financial interests still appear to be influential over the sustainability pathway (Sandström & Sténs 2015; Beland Lindahl et al. 2017a). This is traced back to market forces and how sustainability is legitimized in an international context. Thus, the definition of sustainable forestry in theory and practice will likely not change unless there is a push from external or international instances, such as the policymaking level or through consumption trends. This problem representation is also affected by how the concept of sustainability is dealt with by the Forest Inquiry. Sustainability is described as a dynamic and changing concept that is dependent on the current discourse and who is in power (Wiersum 1995; Leach et al. 2010). This means for Swedish forestry that sustainable forest management can change in symbiosis with time and develop through added knowledge. However, my analysis shows a downside as there is an apparent conflict between different practical interpretations, seen in the second problem representation.

Conflict and polarisation within the forest debate are expressed as unwanted by the Forest Inquiry, because the aim of dialogue processes is to seek consensus. This could exclude opposing and important voices which are believed to disturb the balance and consensus in the forest discussions (Beland Lindahl et al. 2017b; Fischer et al. 2020). The consequence of this is that the existing status quo never, or rarely, is challenged, which ties into the dynamism of the sustainability concept that needs to be questioned to evolve (Leach et al. 2010). An added layer to this issue is the avoidance of defining the involved stakeholders. Only the roles of the

authorities, landowners and the forest industry are somewhat touched upon by the Inquiry. How the other actors are constituted are, at best, vaguely described. This could be the result of not wanting to blame any stakeholder groups and focus more on the issues at hand. This could, however, obscure what the 'real' problems are and for whom the problems are perceived as valid issues.

The dichotomy between biodiversity and bioeconomy is presented as the base of the stakeholder conflict by the Forest Inquiry. In the trade-off between these two aspects, the governmental authorities should take charge, while the operationalisation of the choices is left up to the stakeholders to discuss and implement. Here, there are potential issues when the state wants to disclaim responsibility and lean on self-regulation (Bergquist & Keskitalo 2016; Beland Lindahl et al. 2017a) for the conflict matters but are still considered as a stakeholder itself within the forestry debate. The authorities taking a backseat in the local and regional processes possibly leaves the space for other actors to take a leading role in the practical interpretation of sustainable forestry. In this case, the discourse within Swedish forest policy and bioeconomy is seemingly still influenced by the forest industry's production goals (Sandström & Sténs 2015), in line with the sustainability pathway 'more of everything' (Beland Lindahl et al. 2017b). Within this pathway, the more intangible long-term biodiversity goals, without an explicit economic value, end up in the periphery and risk being pushed into the future indefinitely. According to the Inquiry, making the trade-offs between a growing circular bioeconomy and protecting biodiversity should decrease the polarization. It is also suggested that the state should lean on objective research aimed at biodiversity to make informed decisions. There is an emphasis on objective science to support each biodiversity measure in the Inquiry. However, there are no such demands on production. This further speaks about the obstacles put up for increased protection of biodiversity but is deemed unnecessary for forest production due to the risk of restricting the landowners' property rights and the economic aspects within forest management. This also restricts who can be involved and who's knowledge is considered valid in the policy making process.

The third problem representation further explores the knowledge concept in the Forest Inquiry. It has been identified that the landowners' lack of biodiversity knowledge is seen as a hindrance to sustainable forestry. The measures to account for biodiversity is put on the landowners in collaboration with knowledge provided by the state authorities. However, research has shown that the state authorities tend to agree with the industry's line of thinking (Fischer et al. 2020), which questions whether the measures based on this biodiversity knowledge is for the sake of nature or production. There is also an expressed mistrust in the part 'specific statements' coming from the landowners' associations regarding this problem representation, where they claim that the landowners are being misjudged as untrustworthy and

ignorant. There is an issue in only including the landowners' associations as representatives of the landowner's voice. They function as echo chambers that empower landowners, but could also reduce the understanding of outside perspectives within this group and lead to increased polarisation (Sténs & Mårald 2020). The landowners are constituted as a homogenous group, something that even further endorses the production focused sustainability pathway. By not presenting the diversity within the landowner group, or any other group, the group can easily become villainised by stakeholder groups with different goals.

Finally, I want to echo what previous researchers (e.g., Beland Lindahl et al. 2017b; Fischer et al. 2020) already have concluded. There is a need to include more voices in the policy making processes which decides the future for the Swedish forests. I believe based on the results from this study that the inclusion of additional relevant stakeholders, both groups that are not currently included as well as in-group individuals with other perspectives, will bring more nuance and in the best-case scenario, deescalate a destructive spiral. This, however, cannot be made possible by maintaining the focus on consensus in the policy making processes. A dialogue with an acceptance of the stakeholders' different perspectives and goals can be just as effective in creating sustainable forest policies.

5.1. Limitations & Further Research

As mentioned in the methods and material part (see *Section 3.2*) the Forest Inquiry is a broad and encompassing document that brings up a plethora of complex and contradictory themes and issues. Due to time constraints, I did not have the possibility of reading it all, which could mean that I have missed out on parts that could have further informed this study. Going into this thesis process, the topic of forestry was very new to me. Something that can be both a positive and a negative. I tried looking at the field with curiosity and without preconceptions about the issues or conflicts. However, I have spent a lot of time reading up on and understanding the different nuances of the issues and within the stakeholder groups and I still find it challenging to entirely grasp. Although I have entered the topic without much knowledge about it, I still have biases that probably play into my interpretations of the material. I come from an environmental perspective, which has the potential to spill over into my approach to the Forest Inquiry.

In this thesis, I have mainly focused on the economic and environmental dimensions of the sustainability concept meaning that the social aspect has not been thoroughly examined. It would be interesting to further look at how this dimension is discussed or not discussed in the Forest Inquiry in relation to the other two aspects. Another angle would be to dig deeper into the mechanics of the strong

property rights and how it affects and is affected by the conflicts connected to sustainable forest management. Finally, the Forest Inquiry was sent out for consultation during the spring of 2021, I would also be curious to see how discourses and problem representations are constituted by the different stakeholders, which stakeholders are included, and which are left out from consulting, and the implications of this for Swedish Forestry.

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