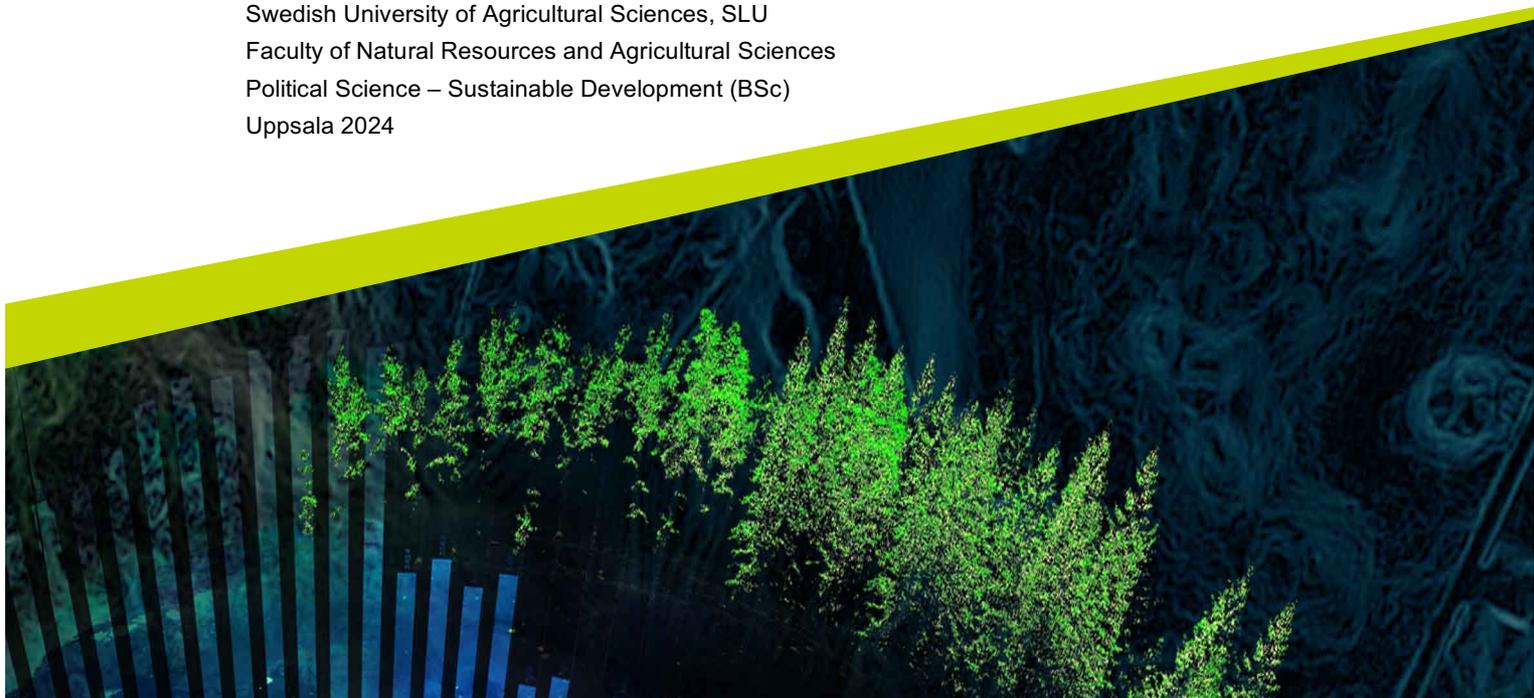




Biodiversity – a service for humans or a right of every species and nature in itself?

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Biodiveristy – a service for humans or a right of every species and nature in itself?

Biodiversitet – en tjänst för människor eller en rättighet för alla arter och naturen i sig själv?

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Abstract

Within the topic of sustainable development, the loss of biodiversity is one of the most urgent global challenges of our time. We are in the midst of our planet's sixth mass extinction, caused by human activity, where we constantly lose more and more species. This led me to wonder how we as humans view this issue and which aspects lie behind how we choose to work for biodiversity. The objective of this study is therefore to identify different views on nature and to study the correlation between these views and how the problem of biodiversity loss is represented in the work for biodiversity.

The research questions that led this investigation have been the following: *What different views on nature can be found in actors within environmental work for biodiversity?* and *What correlations can be found between the actors' view on nature and how they present their work for biodiversity?* To investigate these questions, a mix of semi-structured interviews and text/policy analysis have been used to get a broad perspective of the actors. Five actors in the form of organizations and agencies have been investigated, all within the field of working with biodiversity. To analyze the gathered information, three theoretical frameworks have been used to shine the light on different aspects of view on nature. These three are: *environmental ethics*, *nature-culture dualism* and Hillevi Helmfrid's categorizations.

In the analysis, multiple views on nature connected to the collected material from the organizations and agencies were detected. Even if some of the actors clearly were tilted towards certain views, it became clear that views on nature often contain contradictions and that it's not easy to categorize a whole establishment within a single view on nature. The correlation between view on nature and work for biodiversity showed to be complex and was not always predictable.

Keywords: Biodiversity, View on nature, Intrinsic value, Environmental ethics, Convention on Biological Diversity

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Abbreviations

| | |
|-------|--|
| CBD | Convention on Biological Diversity |
| EU | European Union |
| IPBES | Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services |
| SBC | Swedish Biodiversity Centre |
| SEPA | Swedish Environmental Protection Agency |
| SFA | Swedish Forestry Agency |
| SSNC | Swedish Society for Nature Conservation |
| WWF | World Wide Fund for Nature |

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

During my bachelor's degree in sustainable development, I have regularly observed with genuine surprise how many actors within the sustainability field present an unexpectedly human-focused view within their work. Human interests seem to be the primary source from where our goals are constituted even though environmental issues clearly carry a great impact on other species on the planet. We are unarguably facing a range of different problems when it comes to sustainability but one that sticks out to me is the loss of biological diversity. The term *biodiversity* is used to describe the genetic variation of species and all living things on Earth or within a specific region or ecosystem (National Geography Society 2024). Biological diversity is a cornerstone for all life on earth and is therefore fundamental for a healthy planet (Convention on Biological Diversity 2022). Today, we are in the midst of our planet's sixth mass extinction and the driving force for this destruction is human activity (WWF 2020). Three quarters of all the Earth's species is in risk of going extinct over the next few centuries (Naturskyddsforeningen n.d.). Despite this acute situation for nature and animals that we humans have created, we are only doing minimal progress in managing this global challenge (Tideström 2022).

The questions are left hanging in the air: why is the work for biodiversity insufficient in a time like this when the planet is in need of strong and vigorous commitments? And what exactly is our place and responsibility as humans here? These questions led me to the subject of this thesis. I decided that I wanted to look deeper into what lies behind how we decide to work for biodiversity and how we as humans can view our role within this problem. Helmfrid (2007) explains that how we talk about nature, the ways in which we view it and how we see humans in relation to the environment seems to affect which type of goals we have for sustainability work (Helmfrid 2007). Therefore, I decided that I wanted to explore different perspectives and views on our nature and environment. I wanted to see if and how these factors are related to the level of support and work we see for biodiversity in policies and practice today.

Further I also wish to relate aims for biodiversity work to the Convention on Biological Diversity (Convention on Biological Diversity 2022) since this is our most extensive framework for biodiversity on an international level. From here a discussion can take place about how views on nature might affect management of biodiversity and get a glimpse of how different views could be correlated to different levels of adaptations of the global framework. This could possibly give an idea about how a shift in how we view nature could affect the chances of turning the trend of biodiversity loss around.

1.2 Purpose and research questions

This paper aims to identify different views on nature held by actors within work for biodiversity and investigate the correlation between these views and thoughts on how we should work for biodiversity, including which goals are seen as desirable. This with the purpose of understanding how different ways to view nature possibly can affect our management of biodiversity and thereby influence our chances of turning the trend of biodiversity loss around. The following research questions will be leading in this investigation:

- *What different views on nature can be found in actors within environmental work for biodiversity?*
- *What correlations can be found between the actors' view on nature and how they present their work for biodiversity?*

2. Method and methodological framework

In order to answer the research questions, I have collected information and data from three organizations and two agencies within the environmental field. The agencies are: The Swedish Forestry Agency¹ (SFA) and The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency² (SEPA). The organizations are: The World Wide Fund for Nature³ (WWF), The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation⁴ (SSNC) and The Swedish Biodiversity Centre⁵ (SBC). The justification for choosing these specific organizations and agencies was the hope that they would contribute with different views and perspectives for the study.

First, I wanted to get a handle on their views on nature. To uncover this, I have collected information about how they define what nature is and what it's not, which parts of nature they consider having an intrinsic value and how they view human's place within nature. Secondly, I had to collect information about how they view the problem of biodiversity loss, how they desire to work with this issue and which goals and aims they have for this work. This includes which aspects of biodiversity loss they consider problematic, what policies their work is based on, what this practical work can look like and how they prioritize within the problem. In order to collect the information above, two different methods have been used: interviews and policy/text analysis. These two methods have been combined with the purpose of uncovering a broader perspective than what would have been possible if only one of them had been used.

In the section of results and analysis the investigated organizations and agencies will be presented together with statements that were found related to their view on nature and work for biodiversity. Statements and quotes from the organizations and agencies will be connected to aspects presented in the theoretical frameworks in order to thematize different views on nature according to *environmental ethics: antropocentrism* and *ecocentrism* (Washington et al. 2017), *nature-culture dualism* (Haila 2000) and Helmfrid's three categorizations: *the infinite source*, *the fragile*

¹ Skogsstyrelsen

² Naturvårdsverket

³ Världsnaturfonden

⁴ Naturskyddsföreningen

⁵ Centrum för biologisk mångfald

eternity machine and *the common body* (Helmfrid 2007). The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework will also be accounted for in the study. This with the purpose of providing a framework to relate the actors work for biodiversity to and for opening up to a discussion about adaptation levels of the global framework.

2.1 Semi-structured interviews

I have conducted interviews with representatives from different organizations and agencies to get a picture of how they would answer the questions mentioned in the section above. The respondents were selected on the grounds that they all have a significant insight to biodiversity work in their professional roles. The respondents that were interviewed are the following: Johanna from SFA, expert in territorial protection, Margareta from WWF, former expert on biological diversity, Jörgen from SSNC, expert on biological diversity and Torbjörn from SBC, research leader.

Interviews is an appropriate method to use here because it makes it easy to ask targeted questions and get detailed answers in return. The representatives are a source for particular insights and first-hand experience of the organizations' and agencies' work. Interviews are practical due to their flexible basis, they are adaptable to the purpose of the investigation and it's a reasonable method to use within a relatively short time frame (Bryman 2002) such as this one. The method also opens up for receiving interesting information that I initially wouldn't know would be of interest and that otherwise could have been left undiscovered. Information about individual experiences and perspectives can emerge through interviews which would be difficult to get a grip on in other ways (ibid.). In this study, semi-structured interviews have been used to better understand and collect knowledge about what the person in question considers to be relevant and important. How the representative speaks about a subject can shed light on how priorities and values about the subject matter looks. Semi-structured interviews are also appropriate when the goal is to compare different interviews (Bryman 2002) which is the case in this study.

An important aspect to point out is that the interviewed respondents are individuals who speak based on their role at their organization or agency. This is only one voice out of all the existing voices within an establishment and their answers can't be translated to the mindset of the whole organization or agency. What the answers from the interviews can bring is examples of insights that seem to be held within the establishments and the respondents' subjective view on how the establishments position themselves. The research questions cannot be given exhaustive answers through the information collected in this thesis, but the investigation can bring

examples of different views that exist within actors. One limitation that I encountered in the research process was that only a few of the informants that were contacted were interested in participating in an interview. As a result of the time limitation and the low amount of answers, only four interviews were able to take place. These interviews also varied in length from 20 minutes to over an hour which is one of the reasons for why the amount of information about the different establishments varies quite a bit in the result.

2.2 Text and policy analysis

To complement the interview material, text and policy analysis have also been used. Information has been gathered from the organizations' published reports, policy documents, websites and newspapers. This with the purpose of absorbing a perspective of how the establishments express their positions outwardly in writing. The analyzed texts and policies have constituted a detailed basis which has invited for a thorough analysis of formulations about nature and biodiversity. This has been carried out with the inspiration from the method of text analysis, which is a practical and rewarding method for analysing and examining social phenomena (Bergström & Boreus 2012). Language can be used to set normative boundaries for thoughts and actions, thereby influencing the outer frames for discourses. Therefore, I found it relevant to investigate how the organizations express themselves in print regarding aspects related to nature and the issue of biodiversity loss.

2.3 The difference between organizations and agencies

There is an important difference between organizations and agencies when it comes to their autonomy. In this study, this entails that they have to be analyzed in different ways. Organizations can shape their operations and activities according to their purpose and ambitions. Therefore, it becomes meaningful to investigate how the view on nature within an organization can have a correlation to how they choose to work for biodiversity.

Agencies are institutions with the assignment of implementing decisions made by the government (Regeringskansliet 2023). They are organizationally independent but are governed and controlled by the State. Appropriation directions and laws from the government set the framework for practical work within the agencies and the goals are already politically determined. (ibid). This puts agencies in a special position in my study as the agencies themselves cannot freely determine how they wish to work for biodiversity. This entails that the view on nature held by the

employees cannot affect their practical work. Therefore, the analysis around agencies will be centered around what views on nature can be found in how the agencies' assignments are formulated, which also shed a light on governmental priorities. A discussion about if the view on nature held by employees always correlates with this can also take place.

3. Literature and theoretical review

To understand how we can interpret and understand different views on nature I will use three different theoretical frameworks to capture several aspects of the subject. The theories that will be used are: *environmental ethics*, *nature-culture dualism* and Hillevi Helmfrid's categorizations. The first two are extensively used and referred to, where the first has its main focus on intrinsic value and the second on human's relationship to nature. The third one brings a more philosophical and spiritual aspect which is why I think these can complement each other nicely and highlight different theoretical aspects. In the section below, a more in-depth description of these theories will take place.

3.1 Environmental ethics

Environmental ethics is a subfield to philosophy which developed in the 1970s where the most central question is which parts of nature have intrinsic value (Palmer et al. 2014). To which extent different aspects of nature should be preserved is a moral question which is why *environmental ethics* is an appropriate framework for analysing biodiversity protection (Washington et al. 2017). This theory assumes three different categories on a spectrum of how we view nature; *anthropocentrism*, *biocentrism* and *ecocentrism*. In this study, the category of *biocentrism* will not be pronounced for the reason that it did not fill a function in the investigation.

3.1.1 Anthropocentrism

Within the anthropocentric view, human needs are put front and centre (Washington et al. 2017). Nature, ecosystems and other lifeforms are valued to the degree in which they can be utilized by us to satisfy our needs and interests. In other words, everything else gets its value from its relation to humans. Humanity is seen as both separated from and superior to nature and other lifeforms. According to *anthropocentrism*, human beings are the only ones possessing intrinsic value. From this viewpoint, the non-human environment merely has an instrumental value with the main purpose of serving humanity (Palmer et al. 2014). For example, the

concept of ecosystem services has been criticised for its anthropocentric traits in the assumption that nature exists in order to provide humans with services and benefits (Washington et al. 2017).

3.1.2 Ecocentrism

The ecocentric viewpoint lies on the opposite side of the spectrum to anthropocentrism. *Ecocentrism* recognize the intrinsic value in all of nature. This includes lifeforms such as other species but also non-living parts of ecosystems like rivers and mountains (Washington et al. 2017). This perspective emphasizes the interdependence between every component within nature and its ecosystems. *Ecocentrism* is characterized by its ethical holism, where it's not only the parts but rather the entirety that is seen as valuable (Stenmark 2000). From this perspective, the value of nature goes beyond providing humans with resources. *Ecocentrism* thereby denies the perception that the environment exists merely for us or that human life is more valuable than other type of lives (Palmer et al. 2014).

As an example of earlier research within the field of environmental ethics, I found an article that examined biodiversity protection by Environmental Impact Assessment in relations to environmental ethics (Bond et al. 2021). The results of their research showed that a deep ecologic perspective seems to be the most effective perspective to base the work on if the goal is to protect biodiversity as much as possible. They also found that the anthropocentric view seems to be the prevailing perspective within political decision-making. They conclude that the level of biodiversity protection seems to increase alongside the spectrum of *environmental ethics*, from *anthropocentrism* to *ecocentrism* (ibid.).

3.2 Nature-culture dualism

The theory of *nature-culture dualism* can be used to explain how we perceive the separation between the humans and the environment. Especially in today's Western society, the view of human's place in nature is often characterized by a dualistic opposition between the concepts of the cultural sphere and the natural sphere (Haila 2000). This generally prevailing mindset is the result of historical processes connected to production, both cognitive and practical, where nature has become externalized. The production society has created a subject-object relationship between humans and nature where humans have been given the role as active decision makers while nature has become recognized as an object to be used. Within this view there is a totalizing distinction between us and the environment and this

dualism is constantly being reproduced by cultural processes. The formation of the human historical identity has taken place within the cultural sphere and nature has become the “other” in relation to this cultural identity. This perspective withholds a series of dichotomies, for example humanity is seen as dominant and nature as submissive (ibid).

3.3 Helmfrid’s approach to views of nature

Hillevi Helmfrid is a Swedish consultant within the field of sustainable development. She has composed a report (Helmfrid 2007) where she dives into the subject of how we view nature. According to Helmfrid, views of nature can be identified in what we think nature is, how we think it is and who we humans are in relation to it. Our fundamental assumptions about this are not often referred to in explicit forms, neither are we always conscious about them ourselves. Therefore, they are often a source for conflict between actors who try to cooperate within practical work for sustainability. Helmfrid proposes three different categories of how we view nature: *the infinite source*⁶, *the fragile eternity machine*⁷ and *the common body*⁸ (ibid).

3.3.1 The infinite source

From the viewpoint of *the infinite source*, nature is seen as something that exists “out there” and is recognized as belonging to a separate sphere compared to humans. Humans are described as being rational and sensible while nature is categorized as irrational and wild. From this, the idea has emerged that humans have inherited the task of taming and refine nature, making humans superior to other species and nature as such. This justifies that people can decide which parts of nature that are valuable as only humans can make moral stances according to this perspective. From this angle, nature is assumed to be strong, durable and robust, the infinite source therefore results in a mindset that nature is in no need of any special care.

Nature, from this perspective, is primarily a source for raw materials and recreation for human satisfaction. Nature is seen as an infinite source to take from and which we should make as efficient as possible. Natural resources are seen to have a subordinate role in relation to production factors like capital and knowledge. There

⁶ Den ousinliga källan

⁷ Den sköra evighetsmaskinen

⁸ Den gemensamma kroppen

is a huge trust in human creativity and technology here with arguments that we always can find substitutes if a certain resource run out. This perspective reflects the ideas of the neoclassical economy where technology and economy are seen as the primary sources for human satisfaction. This utility perspective is reflected in our language with words like natural recourses, ecosystem services and natural capital. This is a mechanical way of viewing nature. According to Helmfrid, this perspective strips nature of any spiritual or mysterious values.

3.3.2 The fragile eternity machine

The view on nature in *the fragile eternity machine* has grown with the emergence of the concept sustainable development. This perspective recognizes our interconnection with and dependence on nature. According to this view, ecosystems can buffer environmental impact to a certain degree but if these levels are exceeded than robust ecosystems becomes fragile and collapse. Within this perspective, nature is viewed as more fragile and complex. Thus, we need to treat nature with care and respect, humans are here seen as guardians to the nature. By respecting nature at its absolute boundaries, we can have a long term carrying capacity. The environmental issues of today have emerged from exceeding the limits of what ecosystems can handle in the long run.

Proponents of this view argue that our economy needs to be based on the conditions laid out by nature. Here, it's seen as problematic that the economy does not incorporate values of nature or environmental damages as we must understand the long-term cost of ruining natural cycles. From this viewpoint, we need to adapt the amount of resource extortion after natures ability to use the residual products in biological production. This perspective sees the need of cherishing space for biodiversity and green areas. We need change within technique, economy and lifestyle all at once as humans must adapt to the cycles of nature. Here it's stated that humans should focus on our real needs and not eternal wishes created by commercials and media, otherwise we will never achieve global justice.

3.3.3 The common body

According to the view of *the common body*, humans have never been separated from nature as we are one of the same. This is a more philosophical perspective where humans are seen to be woven into the web of nature. Therefore, everything we do will have an impact on other creatures, which will have an affect on us back. This approach has its historical roots in indigenous populations with nature-close cultures. This view includes a deep-rooted respect for non-human life as all types

of life is recognised to inherit the right to realize its own potential. *The common body* sees the creation of the universe as a mystery and argues that it's insufficient to describe nature like a machine, nature is more than just the sum of its parts. From this perspective, it's seen as problematic that people in the Western world sees themselves as autonomous from both each other and from nature.

In the web of nature everyone is equal, therefore there is no natural right for humans to put themselves above or manipulate the rest for our own utility. According to this view, the only chance to turn our environmental problems around is if we have a pervasive change in our approach to ourselves, nature and life. We need to view nature with respect, sacredness and love.

In her report, Helmfrid mentions that the connection between view on nature and political recommendations is neither simple nor predictable. What she does say though is that *the fragile eternity machine* is more connected to exploitation interests while the second two are more connected to environmental interests. (Helmfrid 2007).

3.4 Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework

Here the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework will be presented to illustrate the internationally agreed goals Sweden has committed to. Later on, it will also be put in relation to the work and ambitions for biodiversity pronounced by the organizations and agencies to get an insight in the levels of the framework's adaptation.

At the 2022 COP-15 conference in Montréal for the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the United Nations adopted a new global framework for biodiversity with the name Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (Regeringskansliet 2022). The explanatory statement for the development of this framework was the need of reversing the negative trends for biodiversity and putting a stop to the escalating rate of extinction of animals and plants. The framework consists of 23 target goals for the year 2030 and four long-term goals for 2050. There are two main commitments for 2030. The first is that 30% of all land, water and sea area shall be protected by effective conservation. This entails that sustainable usage of ecosystems within this area is only allowed if this is fully consistent with conservation outcomes. The second commitment is that by 2030, 30% of all degraded ecosystems shall be restored (ibid.)

The long-term goals for 2050 targets the integrity and resilience of *all* ecosystems and state that it's necessary that these are enhanced and restored. Its also articulated

that the area of natural ecosystems must increase (Convention on Biological Diversity 2022). They also declare the need for a halt to human induced extinction of threatened species. The goal is that the extinction rate shall be reduced to 10% of the rate we see today. We need to reach resilient levels for populations of wild and native species where the maintenance of genetic diversity within these populations is secured (ibid.). In the interview with Torbjörn, he explains that the convention stands on three legs: nature management with conservation of biodiversity in focus, sustainable usage of nature that should not cause negative trends for biodiversity and lastly, that the utility from genetic resources is fairly distributed and not only benefiting certain nations or people. This utility also needs to benefit both present and future generations (Convention on Biological Diversity 2022).

Another aspect that is brought forward in the framework is that functions and services that we get from ecosystems should be rightfully valued and maintained. The framework also states the importance of ensuring that traditional knowledge associated to genetic resources is protected as it can contribute to a more sustainable use of biodiversity (Convention on Biological Diversity 2022.). The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) is an intergovernmental body that was created in 2012 under the United Nations Environmental Program. In this panel, independent researchers construct reports and knowledge about how the work with the CBD is going (IPBES n.d.).

4. Results and analysis

In this section, the results from the text analysis and interviews from the organizations and agencies will be presented and integrated with a discussion of how they relate to different views on nature in order to be able to answer the questions *What different views on nature can be found in actors within environmental work for biodiversity?* and *What correlations can be found between the actors' view on nature and how they present their work for biodiversity?*

4.1 The Swedish Forestry Agency

SFA is a state authority with the assignment of operating for the Swedish forest. They have the responsibility of both managing the forest to produce long-term returns and to work with forest protection which includes conservation of biodiversity (Regeringskansliet, n.d.). SFA reports to the government which means that they themselves cannot shape their activities. Their work rather shed light on governmental practices, policies and priorities. The national environmental goal *Living Forests* is the overall objective for SFA's work. In a report on the evaluation of this goal (Skogsstyrelsen 2023), SFA states that biodiversity is a "supporting ecosystem service" and that there are multiple reasons as to why biodiversity is important. It's highlighted that biodiversity is important for human health and that it supports the production of services like biomass. It's further described that the loss of biodiversity limits nature's ability to deliver products and services, that biodiversity increases resilience and that it secures the possibilities of using animals, plant and ecosystems in the future (ibid.).

Almost all of these listed reasons are directly connected to human interests which speaks for an anthropocentric way of viewing biodiversity. No intrinsic value of nature or other species is being articulated and there is no argument that we should protect biodiversity because all life forms has its own right to exist. The view that nature's primary role is to provide services for humans reflects Helmfrid's category of *the infinite source* as the focus seems to lie on how we humans can use nature and biodiversity for our utility. This is also an example of the subject-object perspective we can find in the theory of *nature-culture dualism*, that humans are

portrayed as the subject who acts and nature is the object that we use how we see fit.

In the same evaluation report the following is stated: “Today, however, there is a lack of sufficient policy instruments to be able to preserve biological diversity in the forest and maintain all of the forest’s ecosystem services over time” (Skogsstyrelsen 2023). This is followed by an argument that the environmental problems within the forest is a result of market failure. SFA suggest that economic incentives for production are stronger than the economic incentives for preserving biodiversity. They write that it’s a part of their assignment to propose policy instruments for incorporating forests with high nature value into the market economy in the same way as the production forests are (ibid.). The aim of putting a monetary value on ecosystem services is to ensure that this forest gets the proper consideration in decision making and to “create a more social economic optimal production of biodiversity”. In order to do this economic valuation, SFA suggests that we can calculate the willingness to pay of users and buyers of ecosystem services, naming “different species” as one of these services (Skogsstyrelsen 2023).

To say that we need an economic value of nature in order to appropriately appreciate it could on one hand be argued for being an indirect way of saying that nature only possesses an instrumental value and not an intrinsic one. If we viewed nature as having an intrinsic value then we wouldn’t need to put a price tag on it to be able to appreciate it in an appropriate way. From this perspective, I would categorize this as an anthropocentric claim. On the other hand, this can be viewed as a proposal on how the market could be regulated in order to recognize nature’s intrinsic value within the frame of the economic system we have today. From this standpoint, this statement rather goes in line with the *fragile eternity machine*. In the report, biodiversity is referred to as a product to be produced which is a mechanical way of viewing other species as it strips them from any spiritual or soft values and leaves only a perspective of utilization. This goes in line with the train of thought found in *the infinite source*. The idea of calculating the willingness to pay for ecosystem services is capturing a clear example of the object-subject relation presented in the theory of *nature-culture dualism*. Humans are seen as the subject who will decide what value we should put in nature while other species are being portrayed as a service to be valued.

In the report, it’s also mentioned that clear cutting forestry is the dominant way of managing the forest today but that this method generates disadvantages for many species (Skogsstyrelsen 2023). SFA describes that selective forestry would be more benefiting for a lot of ecosystem services but because it results in a lower production of timber, the method is not used to the same extent. They express that it’s a huge

challenge to preserve and strengthen biodiversity at the same time as the demand for timber is increasing. It's clear that values of production and nature are put against each other and that the production value seems to be prioritized. This priority can be connected to the priorities showed in *the infinite source*. This creates a sort of dichotomy, it's portrayed as if we have to choose either human interests or biodiversity. This resemble the train of thought in the theory of *nature-culture dualism*. Although, SFA also puts forward that to preserve biodiversity, we need to increase the nurturing care for nature in many environments (ibid.). Here we suddenly see an aspect of *the fragile eternity machine*, that we humans should take on the role as caretakers and that we have to nurture our nature.

In an information sheet about nature care management (Skogsstyrelsen 2011), SFA compared the forest to a blooming garden that, without maintenance from humans, becomes overgrown and withers. They describe that it is a danger for biodiversity if the forest is left unclaimed. From this description, we can once again draw the connection to *the infinite source* where humans are put in the role of taming and refining a wild nature by managing it and make decisions for it.

In order to achieve a deeper insight of SFA, I interviewed an employee at the authority, Johanna, who works as an expert in territorial protection. She describes that since the authority is in charge of both managing biodiversity and the forest's production value, and because these two goals are equated, the view that nature exists for humans appears as a function of their assignment. This can be interpreted as an explicit claim that SFA holds anthropocentric viewpoints. Johanna argues that what is created by humans initially can't be defined as nature even if it can become a part of nature with time. One example of this is roadsides, created by humans, that are now one of the primary habitat for grassland species. In this way, it becomes nature but is not natural. Johanna explains that as a conservation biologist, it can be easier to see the protection value in something that has appeared on its own. It's interesting that she makes the connection between protection value and the origins of the nature, this exemplifies how our view on nature can have an effect on practical work for sustainability.

Practical work for biodiversity for Johanna as an expert in territorial protection involves detecting forest with high nature value. This forest can then become formally protected and SFA is handed the responsibility of managing it and of preserving its biological diversity. It also falls within the authority's responsibility to define what a good environmental consideration looks like. These assignments clearly put humans in the role of being caretakes for the environment which goes in line with the view in *the fragile eternity machine*.

Johanna describes that there is a constant conflict of internal priorities within the agency between territorial protection and economic compensation as these assignments share the same, very tight, budget. When the state forbids logging in an area they become liable to pay compensation for the lost profit to the landowner. Because of this, economic compensation usually gets the highest priority within the budget. Johanna articulates that it's hard to get the acknowledgement for the long-term work that biodiversity protection implies. She expresses that there is not much forest left. If we have the goal of protecting 30% of the forest and also have a goal of continuing with timber production, then every time a choice is made in either direction, it contributes to that specific goal and makes it harder to achieve the other one. This is a new situation that we haven't found ourselves in historically. Personally, Johanna finds protection of biodiversity to be the most important goal and she says that she wishes it was a higher priority.

In 2021, SFA discontinued the monitoring of biological diversity in key biotopes with the argument that biodiversity should be systematically monitored in the forest landscape as a whole instead (Skogsstyrelsen 2024). Johanna articulates that, in her personal opinion, she would like to see that SFA would get the responsibility of monitoring of biological diversity in key biotopes again. She argues that we need knowledge about where the values are in order to be able to make wise decisions.

The CBD lays the foundation for the work at SFA, but the percentage figure of protecting 30% of ecosystems feels very distant according to Johanna. The number is a good argument to discuss around but it's not being put in to concrete work. In her personal opinion, here she clarifies that she speaks outside of her professional role, she does not believe we will reach the goals of the CBD in the Swedish forest. This is partly because the low budget but mostly this is an issue of priorities on a societal level. She states the following, also here she points out that she speaks outside of her professional role:

We are reluctant to put the climate and biodiversity against each other. But if we constantly choose to talk about how we need to solve the climate, we need a shift towards renewable raw materials. Sweden has the ability to produce forest. Then the forest must solve everything. But the forest can't solve everything. What is needed is to consume less and as long as that discussion is not happening very actively on a political level I don't think we will solve this. (Johanna 2024)

This illustrates the complexity of sustainability issues and shows that sometimes the fulfillment of one goal can lower the possibilities of managing another goal. Johanna also points out that we humans can't expect nature to solve all our problems, we need to take responsibility by lowering our consumption and thereby putting nature's wellbeing before utilization from consumerism.

4.2 The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency

SEPA is another Swedish agency and is therefore also subordinate to the government. They have been given the responsibility for environmental issues (Naturvårdsverket n.d.). On the agency's website, SEPA describes why biodiversity is important. They start with listing six reasons of how biodiversity is connected to human health (Naturvårdsverket 2023). They articulate that ecosystem services give us timber, bioenergy and raw materials for medicine, that it allows for outdoor activities, that it works as a buffer for human virus outbreaks and that future generations have the right to enjoy and live on nature's resources. All these aspects are connected to human utilization. Nature is being described as possessing instrumental values to satisfy our needs which can be connected to an anthropocentric view of nature. I would also argue that this in line with the idea of *the infinite source* as nature implicitly is being described as primarily being a source for raw materials and recreation for human satisfaction. After these six arguments, SEPA present a seventh reason as following:

All species have an intrinsic value and a right to exist. Biological diversity is as mentioned the foundation for human welfare and existence, but nature has a value in itself. This applies for all individuals, regardless if it's people or individual plants or animals. This intrinsic value is independent of what we think of the species in question or if we have any utility from it. We don't have the right to destroy nature. (Naturvårdsverket 2023)

This is very interesting, first we can recognize a very anthropocentric view where nature and other species repeatedly are being presented as means for human utilization. Right after, we get an explicit claim about intrinsic value and that this is totally independent from human utilization and that we have no right to destroy nature. This claim definitely categorizes under the ecocentric view of nature and goes more in the line with *the common body* where we find the view that humans don't have any natural right to manipulate nature for our own utility. It could be argued that these statements are in direct conflict with each other.

4.3 World Wide Fund for Nature

WWF is a conservation organization with the mission of putting a stop to the degradation of the environment (Church et al. 2022). In a report, WWF express that they recognize humanity's total dependence on nature and that human societies and

economies are intricately interlinked with nature (WWF 2021). In the introduction of a guide on how business can work for biodiversity they state the following:

WWF's mission is to stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature, by conserving the world's biological diversity, ensuring that the use of renewable natural resources is sustainable, and promoting the reduction of pollution and wasteful consumption. (WWF 2021)

These statements are reminiscent of some elements in Helmfrid's idea of *the common body*. That the human sphere is intricately interlinked with nature is close to the description of the web of nature and the goal of humans living in harmony with nature also resonates at the same level. This also reflects a distancing to the idea of *nature-culture dualism*. Further, WWF puts forward that biodiversity is the foundation for the entire global economy and that we shouldn't only aim for halting ongoing depletion, we should also aim for a shift towards a nature-positive economy altogether (WWF 2022). They voice that Sweden needs to take the responsibility that is necessary for biodiversity, ecosystems and for humanity. This aim falls closely to the argument within *the fragile eternity machine* that our economy should be adapted to nature's conditions, but WWF also takes it one step further by stating this economy should be nature-positive. Within the thought of *the fragile eternity machine* there is the argument that if we respect nature at its absolute boundaries then we can have long-term sustainability, but to have a nature-positive economy is even more ambitious.

I interviewed a former expert on biological diversity at WWF, Margareta, who explained that she views humans as both separated from nature and as a part of it. She argues that we originate from nature but because of our abilities to use and transform nature, both positively and negatively, we are placed in a position that goes beyond the role of other animals which brings us a responsibility. Margareta recognizes that nature as such has an intrinsic value as well as all species who have "an absolute intrinsic value". This reflects an ecocentric view of nature as both nature as a whole and other lifeforms is given an intrinsic value.

We discuss the term ecosystem services and here Margareta mentions that the notion of ecosystem services usually refers to how nature can provide humans with something. She wants to point out that ecosystem services are also a prerequisite for a well-functioning nature and for the life of other species. She also brings up the phrase "nature's gift to people" as an alternative phrase to "ecosystem services". It's clear from her arguments that the environment as such is given an intrinsic value which speaks for a view in line with *ecocentrism* and *the common body*. Margareta articulates that she finds the problem of biodiversity loss as deeply problematic

from the perspective of the intrinsic value that are connected to species and she says that “We need the species even if we don’t need every individual species for the ecosystem to function”. Again, this approach to intrinsic value puts this statement within the ecocentric view of nature.

Margareta describes that the work at WWF has its starting point in the CBD and that they try to influence the companies they work with to do everything they can to stop contributing to loss of biodiversity. The priorities within biodiversity work depends on where we are. “In Sweden we have already destroyed a great amount of nature and therefore the focus should lie on restoration of nature and elements that we know benefit biodiversity” according to Margareta. She states that in one way it’s easier to work for the climate issue as climate work can be done from anywhere. Biodiversity is a more locally linked problem in need of local solutions. In her experience, this difference is something that companies can have a hard time to comprehend. As a final comment, Margareta reasons that most people probably don’t have a specific view of nature or haven’t really thought about it.

4.4 The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation

SSNC is the largest non-profit organization that works for the environment in Sweden (Naturskyddsföreningen n.d.). On the organization’s website, it’s stated that humanity’s overconsumption, especially in the rich parts of the world, is one of the leading factors for loss of biodiversity (Naturskyddsföreningen 2021). SSNC explain that in Sweden, some of the most prominent threats to endangered species are the intense clearcut forestry and the overgrowth of open landscapes. Today, humans and our domestic animals constitute 96% of the world’s mammals while wild mammals only constitute the last 4%. The organization articulates that we need to protect a much larger proportion of the nature in order to stop this mass extinction. They also voice that we have to put a stop to our overconsumption and shift towards a more sustainable lifestyle (ibid.). Something interesting here is that SSNC continues to refer to the problem as “mass extinction” instead of “loss of biodiversity”. This phrasing shines a light on how seriously they view this problem. They also point out the responsibility we have as humans and that we need to adapt our lifestyle to nature, this argument is in accordance with both *the fragile eternity machine* and *the common body*.

I got the chance to interview Jörgen who works as an expert on biodiversity at SSNC to achieve a deeper insight of the organization’s view on nature. In his definition, nature is everything living, even parks in the city. He argues that nature created by humans should be counted as nature because humans are part of

ecosystems. He sees that, fundamentally, humans and nature are part of the same system, even though the economic production has created a gap between the two. This seems to be in accord with the idea of *the common body*, that humans are a true part of nature's web. It also questions the idea of *nature-culture dualism*, he argues that we can't separate the human sphere from the nature as they are parts of the same, even if the production society is trying to do so.

Jürgen argues that humans have a dominant role on earth because of our impact on ecosystems and that this entails a responsibility. This can be connected to the train of thought within *the fragile eternity machine*. He explains that he has a double vision when it comes to the subject of intrinsic value. Species do have intrinsic value and so does biodiversity in itself but when it comes to invasive species this becomes tricky as they are seen as a problem. This can be viewed as a bit contradicting as an absolute intrinsic value is not connected to human utilization or our opinions about the species in question. The value of ecosystems comes both from themselves and because they set the foundation for utility for us, according to Jürgen. When we discuss ecosystem services, he mentions that the concept is important because it visualises the value of aspects that otherwise go unnoticed since they're lacking a monetary value within the economic system.

He explains that SSNC work for biodiversity by trying to have a political impact and increase the national ambition level by opinion forming, expert groups and putting pressure on decision makers. Their long-term goal with this work is to turn the trend of biodiversity loss around and have a society and economy in harmony with sustainable and robust ecosystems. The aim of achieving this harmony can be viewed as a wish to get away from the nature-culture dualism of today. Jürgen states that we need to make sure that today's generation don't prevent the welfare of future generations and that one important aspect for human welfare is healthy ecosystems. He adds that humans benefits from being surrounded by a nature that is rich in species, and not only speaking out of a utility perspective, it makes us feel good. Both these statements are centered around human welfare and wellbeing, therefore this could be argued of being an anthropocentric way of arguing for biodiversity.

Jürgen describes that one important aspect of the work for biodiversity is that the issue needs to climb up on the agenda and be equated to the climate change issue. We need the insight on a political level that biodiversity is as much, or if not more, of a planetary challenge and a global crisis on an existential level. SSNC therefore wants to see a corresponding level in the law to what climate work has which means more binding laws and national goals. He expresses a huge concern for the low ambition level of the implementation of the CBD on a national level. He argues that political decisions are necessary to create a fair playroom for sustainability work.

But if these decisions are to take place, we also need a broader acceptance for this on a societal level, Jörgen states that “We need better prerequisites for politicians to make brave decisions”. As a final reflection, Jörgen says that he doesn’t think that anyone has a fully anthropocentric or ecocentric worldview. Humans have a built-in tendency to like nature but as a species it’s also natural to validate our own needs and existence. Jörgen says that he thinks we would win a lot by having a bigger awareness about how different proposals land depending on the view on nature that is held. But with this said he also mentions that we shouldn’t get too categorical when we discuss these question.

4.5 Swedish Biodiversity Centre

SBC at the Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences was created by the government in the 90’s. I interviewed Torbjörn, research leader at SBC, who explained that the purpose of the centre is to deliver support for the national implementation of the CBD. SBC have a newspaper named *Biodiverse* in which they publish current research about biological diversity. In their most recent number it’s stated that “We in the Western world have for a long time lived in a destructive relationship with nature, even if we often like to say that our life is sustainable” (Tunón 2024). The author of the article, Tunón, brings forward criticism to the idea that the Swedish forestry model is sustainable and that protection of biodiversity is happening in both protected areas and in the production landscape. He states that this claim is untrue and that it’s difficult to balance utilization from the use of nature and the preservation of it. He describes that these two aspects are not always able to coexist and that sustainability is only possible if what we do is ecologically sustainable, independent of economic and social aspects. This could be argued to reflect more of an ecocentric viewpoint as the ecological aspect is being put in front of human aspects like the economic system or our society.

In my interview with Torbjörn, research leader at SBC, he explained to me how they work for biodiversity at the centre. He described the loss of biodiversity as our times biggest, most prominent crises and threat to humanity. The most concerning aspect regarding biodiversity is not certain tipping points, it’s the fact that we lose more and more species all the time and that this slope is continuingly becoming steeper. Torbjörn highlights that society as a whole need to be involved if we are going to reach the goals in the CBD, we especially need a change in our consumption and production patterns. Torbjörn states that we need to rebuild from the ground and up and he also refers to IPBES who has declared the need for a transformative change. We need a cultural transition into a society where economic growth, production and consumption is not our sole focus. This reflects one of the ideas

found in *the common body*, that we need to have a pervasive change in our approach to nature, life and ourselves.

Torbjörn states that SBC promotes a more holistic approach to the biodiversity problem with the argument that protection of species is highly integrated with cultural aspects of social development. This holistic approach can also be found within *ecocentrism*. He claims that diversity of species needs to be understood like the real access it is, when we think about ecosystem services in the forest we shouldn't only think about timber production. Torbjörn also views the termination of biodiversity inventory in the Swedish landscape as a grave threat towards biological diversity. He means that increased knowledge of how different species are affected by human activity is necessary if we are to achieve our environmental goals.

SBC works closely to the writing of political goals within Sweden and are also involved in international negotiations of goals connected to the CBD. Torbjörn confirms that we do have ambitious goals in Sweden but that we are lacking targets for action, so called interim targets⁹. The responsibility to design these fall on the government and today we have no interim target that is directly aimed at biodiversity. Torbjörn also argues for the need of a Nature Policy Framework as an equivalent to the Climate Policy Framework. In that way, we could have a similar long-term continuity of biodiversity goals that are established in the law and thereby being able of holding the government accountable for reporting what is actually happening to solve the issue every year. We also need to interlink national work to the work that is happening on the level of the European Union (EU). If we are going to achieve 30% restauration of depleted ecosystems, we need to understand which ecosystems within Sweden we should focus on and how this restauration should look. This is something the EU convention tried to coordinate in a proposal for restauration but Sweden voted no on this proposal, which is a shame according to Torbjörn.

Torbjörn argues that we have good potential in Sweden to achieve the goals within the CBD; we are a rich country with a population of low density and a great deal of resources and knowledge. Unfortunately, we are a long way from fulfilling that potential as there is no political will to do this. Globally, we have the money to go through with the strategy for the convention but it stands against interests of economic development.

From my interview with Torbjörn I got another perspective on how to view nature. He states that he consider humans to be part of nature, but that it's a complicated

⁹ Etappmål

question. If humans are part of nature, is everything we do then counted as “natural”, including destroying nature? If everything is nature, he argues, then the concept of nature becomes meaningless. But if nature is only what humans haven’t affected it also becomes meaningless, as we have pretty much effected everything on earth by now. Therefore, he lands in the argument that nature is something we need to self-identify, “what we experience as nature is nature”.

When I ask him about human’s relationship to nature he answers as following: “Humans have done their best to distinguish themselves from nature, we have put a lot of time and energy on trying to separate ourselves”. This seems to be an articulation of the historical production of the *nature-culture dualism*. He also questions if humans have ever lived in harmony with nature, which is the goal of the convention, or if any species ever can. He lands in the argument that humans need to be included when we talk about nature, if we do something that is good for biodiversity but has negative effects on humans than we have a real conflict of objectives. When it comes to intrinsic value, Torbjörn takes a step back and asks if an intrinsic value can exist at all. What we choose to put values on is a human practice and thereby dependent on human interpretation. “But if we define intrinsic value as unconventional values, then yes everything has a value – even ticks!”.

When it comes to ecosystem services he describes different critiques aimed at the concept. One of these is aimed at the word *services*. Torbjörn explains that this critique orients from South America where the word services is seen as deeply connected to servants, the subordinates who must serve the higher order. It exists a resistance to putting nature or ecosystems into that role description. This orients from the belief that it’s actually the other way around, that nature brings us gifts that we should show gratitude for and that we should care for nature as it’s giving us the means to live a good life.

In this way nature is put in a subject position instead of an object position which is the opposite of what we see in the *nature-culture dualism* mindset. This is also reflecting aspects of *the common body*, that everyone is equal in the web of nature and that humans don’t have the right to put themselves above nature. Torbjörn says that this mindset has made it harder to incorporate the concept of *ecosystem services* in South America. This entailed in the suggestion of switching the phrasing of the concept to *natures contribution to people*. This example illustrates that different views and interpretations of nature has an effect on which concepts can be accepted in the political debate. The words we choose to use can shed light on deep rooted assumptions of relationships to nature and how we value it.

5. Conclusion

In the conclusion of this study, the research questions will be discussed in relation to the material analysed in the section above. As previously mentioned, organizations and agencies will be analyzed individually with respect to the differences regarding their autonomy. The study will also be connected to earlier research and to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework.

5.1 What different views on nature can be found in actors within environmental work for biodiversity?

Through the conducted interviews with the informants and the analysis of documents from the organizations and agencies, multiple views on nature have been detected. The views found at the agencies SFA and SEPA can primarily be seen as reflections of governmental policies and priorities. At SFA, an anthropocentric view clearly shines through in the analyzed documents as biodiversity primarily is seen as a service for humans. It's also easy to find traces of the concept of *the infinite source* in how the agency repeatedly prioritizes monetary values from timber production over the values of biodiversity. The narrative found in *nature-culture dualism* also makes an entrance in SFA's documents in how biodiversity is portrayed as an object to be produced. The concept of *the fragile eternity machine* can also be detected within the agency, especially in the view of humans in the role of guardians and caretakers of nature. Elements from *the fragile eternity machine* was also voiced by the informant from SFA. SEPA showed an interesting contradiction between articulating anthropocentric statements in line with the infinite source and then expressing an ecocentric statement in line with the concept of *the common body*.

The view of *the common body* could be found within WWF in how they expressed the goal of humans in harmony with nature. The organization had a pervasive ecocentric view on nature and their definition of intrinsic value applied to all species and nature as a whole. Aspects from *the fragile eternity machine* could also be located at WWF in how they express that our economy needs to be adapted to

nature's conditions to a greater extent. SSNC also articulated some aspects from *the fragile eternity machine*. They also articulate the view found in *the common body* in how they formulate that nature and humans fundamentally are part of the same system. SSNC also question the approach to nature that can be found in *nature-culture dualism*. Arguments from an anthropocentric point of view were also found within SSNC. The informant from SBC expressed the wish for a social transformation where economic growth and consumerism is not our main focus. This view goes along with *the common body*, as well as its distancing from the *nature-culture dualism*. Ecocentric elements was also present at SBC where the informant placed ecological aspects of sustainability as a prerequisite for what can be viewed as sustainable.

5.2 What correlations can be found between the actors' view on nature and how they present their work for biodiversity

The views on nature held within an agency cannot really affect the agency's practical work since their assignments and goals are determined by the government. Something interesting about SFA is that my informant repeatedly expressed herself outside of her professional role to criticize some of SFA's priorities. This illustrates that the view held by the employees in an agency does not always reflect the practical work that is carried out for biodiversity. Another discrepancy I found within SFA was between how they articulate their role as caretakers of nature and how they present their work on a practical level. It appears that in practice, they put production values over the protection and care for the biodiversity in the forest by using clear cutting forestry. Here their work does not correlate with their formulated view on nature.

At WWF and SBC, I would state that the view of *the common body* can be correlated to the work for biodiversity they present and aim for. They both describe the aspiration of a pervasive change in our way of living and are working to influence policies, companies and the society in this direction. At SSNC, the views from both *the common body* and *the fragile eternity machine* correlates with the ambitions of working for a society in harmony with nature as well as the desire for higher national ambitions and more commitment for the issue of biodiversity loss.

I found it interesting how SEPA had a direct conflict between anthropocentric and ecocentric statements within the same document. This was also portrayed by the difference of SFA's view of nature captured in their documents, as compared to in

the interview. This illustrates that views on nature can be contradictory. It's not easy, and perhaps not even desirable, to categorize a whole establishment within one single view on nature since multiple and different perspectives can be prevalent in a bigger organization or agency.

To connect the conclusion to earlier research, this study confirms that antropocentrism seems to be the prevailing perspective within political decision-making as this view mainly could be found in the agencies. The actors that held an ecocentric perspective also seems to want the highest degree of biodiversity protection but as stated by Helmfrid (Helmfrid 2007) the connection between view on nature and practical work is not always predictable or obvious.

Lastly, to draw the connection to the Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework, it can be stated that the framework and the goals of protecting and restoring 30% of ecosystems was in some way articulated by several of the actors. The goals within SSNC goes in line with the CBD but they expressed a concern about the low implementation of the framework on a national level. SBC expressed that there is no political will to enforce the framework. This could be illustrated in how the informant from SFA described that the goal of 30% protection is not practically enforced. Several of the actors made the comparison to the broad acknowledgement of the need for action in relation to climate change. They voiced an aspiration of that the biodiversity issue would get corresponding laws and national frameworks to those of the climate issue.

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Appendix 1

Interview guide

Questions related to view on nature:

- How would you define what's nature and what's not?
- What is your view on human's relation to nature? Separated or a part of the same sphere?
- How do you look at the issue of who/what has an intrinsic value in nature, in the meaning that their value is unattached to human utility?
- How would you describe your view on ecosystem services?

Questions related to biological diversity

- How do you view the problem with loss of biological diversity, what about it is problematic and why?
- What policies do you have for your work with biological diversity?
- How do you work on a practical level for biodiversity?
- What goals have you set for the work with biological diversity?
- What priorities do you have in your work with biological diversity?
- According to you, why is biodiversity important?

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