



Forest social values in a Swedish rural context: The private forest owners' perspective



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ABSTRACT

The sustainability paradigm of the European Landscape Convention calls for increased involvement of all affected parties in combination with active leadership to promote social values. As a result, the Swedish Forest Agency (SFA) has requested further development of methods for broad consultation and active participation in order to strengthen the social values of forests. This paper aims to identify in particular the private forest owners' perceived need for collaboration and dialog regarding the social values of forests. The study's primary empirical data was derived from interviews with 40 private forest owners. A framework developed by Emerson et al. (2012) was applied to facilitate analysis of the forest owners' perceptions of procedural and institutional arrangements, existing leadership, the current level of knowledge and access to different types of resources. The paper identifies a need for the SFA to become more proactive and assume more of a leading role. The level of knowledge regarding social values was found to be quite low among the majority of the private forest owners. They wanted more information; they asked for increased support and advice, and they wanted to see improved coordination rather than collaboration on social values.

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1. Introduction

The European Landscape Convention (ELC) is an important tool for promoting social values in collaboration with various stakeholders (Council of Europe, 2000). The ELC promotes improved protection, management and planning of European landscapes. In addition to promoting cooperation on landscape issues, it aims to enhance private forest owner participation as well as public and community involvement (Agnoletti, 2014; De Montis, 2014; Jones and Stenseke, 2011). Therefore in recent years local collaboration and dialog have become an important basis for implementing natural resource management in all EU member states, including Sweden. The Dialog for Nature Conservation and the Comet Program are two examples of government initiated schemes protecting biodiversity in forests (Widman, 2015). However, such dialog and collaboration regarding the *social values* of forests are less well developed within Sweden.

It is only recently that social values have received attention in the media, among politicians, and in the forest sector in Sweden (Swedish Forest Agency, 2015, 2013a; Swedish Forest Industries, 2014; Zaremba, 2012). This newly awakened interest is expressed in the most recent forest policy formulations and decisions. For example, the Swedish Forest Agency (SFA) has developed a definition of forest social

values: “*forest's social values are the values created by human experiences of the forest*”, and provided examples of such values; including leisure, recreation and tourism; esthetics; health, wellbeing and a good living environment; identity and heritage (Swedish Forest Agency, 2013a: 6). It has also recently become possible for the state and local governments to make voluntary agreements with landowners regarding the management of forests with high biodiversity and/or recreational values (Swedish Forest Agency, 2014, 2013b).

International and national research on forest social values has so far been mainly focused on outdoor recreation in urban forests (Kaplan, 2001; Tyrväinen et al., 2007), while more rural contexts are less well studied (Carlsson, 2012 is one exception). However, rural studies of ecosystem services, not least cultural ecosystem services, including the social values of forests, are becoming increasingly important (Bryan et al., 2010; Fisher et al., 2009; Johnson and Lundqvist, 2014; Nordanstig, 2004; SOU 2013:68). Therefore in this explorative pilot study we focused on private forest owners in a rural rather than an urban context. There are several studies (both qualitative and quantitative) carried out to identify private forest owner' attitudes and management behavior, motives and characteristics both across Europe and in Sweden (e.g. Carlén, 1990; Ingemarsson, 2004; Ingemarsson et al., 2006; Lidestav and Nordfjell, 2006; Lönnstedt, 1997; Törnqvist, 1995; Uliczka et al., 2004; Wiersum et al., 2005). From this we know that the motives differ between the private forest owners, as also mirrored in their management behavior (Novais and Canadas, 2010; Pöllumäe et al., 2014). In many

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cases both monetary and non-monetary values (i.e. some of the social aspects) are valued (Primmer et al., 2014). We also know that views of the general public, private forest owners and forest officers do not always coincide (Eriksson, 2012; Kindstrand et al., 2008; Primmer and Karppinen, 2010). Still, there are no studies that address private forest owners and their perceptions of forest social values in a rural context, nor on if and how private forest owners want to collaborate on and manage the social values.

Previous research has shown that non-state actor participation in decision-making, implementation, and management processes in particular, can help create a shared problem perception, and generate alternative solutions to a given problem (Bäckstrand et al., 2010; Sandström, 2009; Zachrisson, 2009). Participation can thus foster greater consensus between authorities and citizens, and between different interest groups, leading to increased collective knowledge. The need for more collaboration, appropriate methods for consultation and participation processes, and clearer accountability measures, in order to strengthen the social values of forests, are highlighted by the SFA (Swedish Forest Agency, 2015, 2013a; see also Berg, 2013). However, the SFA applies an urban biased conception, and the collaboration is initiated from above. By studying the private forest owners' views and needs concerning collaboration and dialog on social values in a rural context, this pilot study provides an approach that is complementary to the SFA's perspective (Swedish Forest Agency, 2013a), making it possible to examine the preconditions necessary for further development (i.e. establishment of an collaborative governance regime regarding forest social values).

More precisely, the aim of this paper is to identify private forest owners' perceived need for collaboration and dialog on the social values of forests, and what roles and responsibilities these owners consider themselves to have. From this we analyze the preconditions necessary for fruitful collaboration and dialog on social values in a rural context. The results of the study will be applicable to other European and Nordic countries that have a large proportion of non-industrial/small-scale private forest owners.

2. Theoretical framework

The theoretical basis for this paper is taken from collaborative governance, which is a term used increasingly in the literature concerning public administration, particularly natural resource management (Ansell and Gash, 2008; Emerson et al., 2012; Yaffee and Wondolleck, 2000). The term is used in a variety of contexts and includes a range of “new” forms of public governance, from public-private partnerships to co-management and network governance, all of which aim to achieve more legitimate and effective policy outcomes through increased participation of various non-state actors (Bäckstrand et al., 2010). The advantage of collaborative governance is that it includes contextual (socio-economic, ecological and civil society relationships, and institutional arrangements) and process (characteristics of emerging institutional arrangements) variables, while seeking to explain the outcomes or results of these interactions. A theoretical framework was applied to analyze the data, specifically focusing on collaboration and participation (Emerson et al., 2012). Since there is no developed collaboration on the social values of forests currently, we focus on examining the prerequisites for such developments in the future. Thus this pilot study focuses on the system context and the drivers that are supposed to affect the establishment of a collaborative governance regime (CGR), rather than on the interactive components that constitute the collaborative dynamic which together shape the overall quality and extent to which a CGR is effective once established (Emerson et al., 2012).

The system context refers to the legal policy framework, prior failures, levels of conflict/trust, socio-economic factors, and available resources, all of which are factors that we consider relevant to how private forest owners perceive the social values of forests (Ansell and Gash, 2008). This is reflected mainly through the expressed priorities and experiences of the owners. We also examine the drivers that are

presumed to be necessary for a CGR to begin, i.e. leadership, consequential incentives, uncertainty and interdependence (Emerson et al., 2012: 9–10). These factors is discussed in connection to the private forest owners' needs and requests. Regarding the driver of *leadership*, the presence of an identified leader is important, who has the potential to handle the transaction costs for initiating a collaborative effort, for example by providing staffing, technology, and other resources that may help reinforce the endeavor (Emerson et al., 2012:9). *Consequential incentives* are also regarded as an important driver, referring to both internal (problems, resource needs, interests, or opportunities) and external (situational or institutional crises, threats, or opportunities) catalysts for collaborative action. The driver of *uncertainty* is primarily the challenge of managing “wicked” societal problems. Uncertainty that cannot be resolved internally can drive groups to collaborate in order to reduce, diffuse, and share risk (Emerson et al., 2012). Another broadly recognized precondition for collaboration is *interdependence*, implying a situation where individuals and organizations are unable to accomplish something on their own (Ansell and Gash, 2008).

According to Emerson et al. (2012), one or more of the drivers of leadership, consequential incentives, uncertainty, or interdependence are necessary for a CGR to emerge. The more drivers that are present and recognized by participants, the more likely a CGR will be initiated. This is examined critically in our study, when we analyze the preconditions for collaboration and dialog regarding the social values of forest from the perspective of private forest owners in a rural context.

3. Method

3.1. Case selection and sample

This pilot study focused on private forest owners with land in any of four forest counties (Västerbotten, Jämtland, Dalarna and Värmland, see Fig. 1) in the north and middle of Sweden. All four counties are sparsely populated rural areas but they differ regarding the landownership structure (larger forest companies are more common in the north and non-industrial/small-scale private forest owners dominate in the south) and forest cover (see Fig. 1).

As the perception of the social values of forests is assumed to be context-dependent and place-specific (Bryan et al., 2010; Kangas et al., 2008), interviews were conducted with both resident and non-resident private forest owners. Based on previous research, we know that there are differences between forest owners depending on where they live (on the property or not), their gender and age, in their views on the social values of forests (Berlin et al., 2006; Eriksson et al., 2013; Lidestav and Ekström, 2000; Nordlund and Westin, 2011). These socio-demographic differences and specific characteristics informed our sampling of forest owners to make the data as representative as possible. A random sample of private forest owners was ordered from Skogsägarförteckningen, a complete database of all Swedish forest owners (<http://www.skogsagare.se>). The forest owners were divided into two categories: “residents”, living adjacent to their forest, i.e. in the same municipality (five for each county), and “non-residents”, living in the same county but not in the same municipality as their forest holding (two for each county), or living in another county (three for each county). This provided a total of 40 private forest owners, 10 in each of the four counties studied (see Appendix A for an overview).

3.2. Interviews

The empirical data was derived from semi-structured interviews conducted mainly by telephone (Kvale, 1996; Miller, 1995). In total, we tried to contact 69 private forest owners and succeeded to conduct 40 interviews in the early spring of 2015. To maximize the number of respondents, we offered to conduct the interviews also in the evenings and at weekends. The participation rate (29 owners did not respond) was not evenly distributed among the counties (most came from

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