



Shared responsibility for forest protection?

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ABSTRACT

Worldwide, there is growing reliance in forest politics on *public–private partnerships (PPPs)* as a means for forest–environmental protection. In Sweden, such partnership characterizes the approach in nature conservation agreements (NCAs) in the forest policy from 1993 and onwards. NCAs are negotiated between the County Administrative Board/the Forest Agency and a landowner, where the landowner agrees to, with some compensation, provide a public service in terms of protecting biodiversity. However, assessments of the implementation of NCAs show rather inefficient implementation of set goals in general, even if there are great regional variations. This paper explores factors affecting the establishment of PPPs in two neighboring counties distinguished by high and low level of goal achievement of NCAs respectively. The analysis focuses on the process among the landowners and responsible authorities, their incentives for collaboration, and the potential for developing shared motives. The results suggest that in particular the discretionary power of authorities influences not only the willingness to participate, but also the institutional ability to develop sustainable relationships which largely explains why landowners in some counties are keener to engage in NCAs.

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1. Introduction

The international Nagoya agreement states that at least 17% of land and freshwater areas, along with at least 10% of coastal and marine areas, should be protected by 2020. Despite a rapid increase in the number of protected areas in Sweden, only approximately 6% of the 22.5 million ha of productive forest land is protected (SFA, 2013a, b). One reason for the difficulties in achieving international and national commitments is that, as elsewhere (Mäntymaa et al., 2009; Wiersum et al., 2005), much of the forest is privately owned. In Sweden, 50% of productive forest land is owned by individuals, 25% by private companies and only 17% by the state (SFA, 2013a,b). The government is thus dependent on approximately 320 000 landowners and 5200 privately owned forest companies (SFA, 2013a,b) to protect forest land when delivering these commitments.

Forest conservation in Sweden is delivered largely top-down by responsible authorities where the government either acquires the land or restricts the owners' access (Nature Conservation Agreement report, 2010). This approach has often led to poor results, creating conflicts and lack of trust between the authorities and landowners (Sandström et al., 2010). To overcome these problems, top-down policy instruments have been complemented with voluntary instruments such as public–private partnerships (PPPs). In Sweden, nature conservation agreements (NCAs) were introduced in 1993 as a partnership between governmental authorities and landowners in order to achieve overarching biodiversity objectives. In NCAs, which are used worldwide, for example, in Australia

and the Netherlands (Moon and Cocklin, 2011; Bennett and Ligthart, 2001) the landowner agrees to deliver biodiversity protection in return for economic compensation.

Partnerships for sustainable development were promoted at the Johannesburg World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002. However, the efficacy of these partnerships has been contested. While some see PPPs as an innovative form of governance (Glasbergen, 2011) others argue that the partnerships lack accountability and legitimacy (Meadowcraft, 2007) and are possible undemocratic.

In practice, NCAs have proven a rather inefficient tool to attain environmental objectives (Swedish Government Bill, 2008/09:214), although there are differences between counties (Fig. 1). Goal achievement is measured in relative terms: the proportion of implemented NCAs per county between 1993 and 2011 in relation to the objectives of each county defined by the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency.

Most studies of NCAs focus on the outcome in terms of protected forest while few consider aspects related to the process of establishing and implementing partnerships (Critchley et al., 2004; Mäntymaa et al., 2009; Sierra and Russman, 2006). The aim of this study is to remedy this and determine what factors affect the process of establishing PPPs and how these are perceived among the actors.

The analysis, inspired by Glasbergen (2011) focuses on particular on the interactive process between the landowners and responsible authorities, asking: i) What political, legal and ecological factors affect the conditions to implement NCAs? ii) Which attitudes and motivations promote shared understanding? iii) What process elements promote partnering? and iv) What factors promote the constitution of a joint rule system in a partnership?

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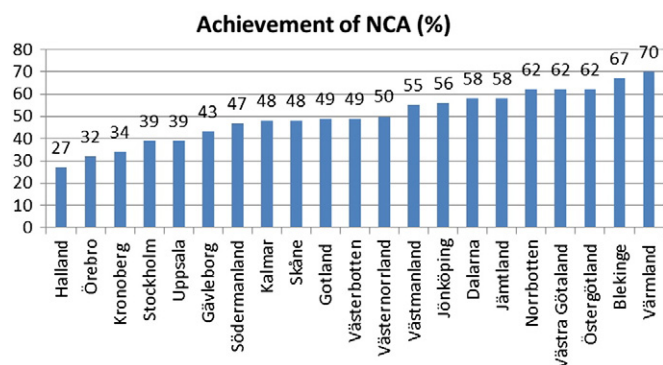


Fig. 1. Goal achievement of NCA (%) per county (SFA, 2011).

The studied counties, Örebro and Västra Götaland, are neighbors in southern Sweden and appear at the top and bottom respectively of the ranking list both in relative terms and absolute numbers with respect to the implementation of NCAs (see Fig. 1). They share similar natural characteristics but provide a contrasting picture as to the achievement of partnerships, perhaps revealing the reason for this variation.

2. Background: Swedish nature conservation policy

Historically, Swedish nature conservation policy has been characterized by a top-down approach (Zachrisson, 2009a). In Sweden, as in many countries, a shift occurred during the 1990s, from regulative control to control with government objectives (Beland Lindahl, 2008). Thus, the political and legal preconditions for nature conservation changed, offering opportunities for interactive processes such as partnering. As part of this change, NCAs were assumed to have a prominent role in reaching the interim target set in *Long-term protection of forest land* (Swedish Government Bill, 2008/09:214).

In Sweden, national parks and nature reserves are generally large areas (Table 1), while woodland habitats and NCAs are considered relatively small areas. The main difference between the different types of protection is that NCAs are not permanent but a civil law partnership lasting at a maximum of 50 years (Swedish Government Bill, 1992/93:226). All these types of protection form the basis of the formal protection in Sweden (SEPA and SFA, 2005).

The current form of NCAs was established in 2010, and has been developed following the government's *A sustainable nature conservation policy* (2008/09:214). Since 2010, the compensation levels have increased. However, compensation for NCAs is taxable, being taxed in the year the agreement is signed (Nature Conservation Agreement report, 2010).

3. Theoretical framework

In this paper, public–private partnerships are defined as “the processes and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people constructively across the boundaries of public

agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres in order to carry out a public purpose that could not otherwise be accomplished” (Emerson et al., 2011, 2). The theoretical framework used to analyze the partnering process is inspired by Glasbergen (2011), stating that the development of partnering is a successive process, which through different stages, brings together actors from several sectors of society and builds new relationships to develop sustainable management practices.

We assume that both societal and individual factors affect the partnering process where a) the context i.e. the political, legal, socioeconomic resources and ecological factors set the framework for the partnering process, b) shared motivation but also mutual understanding between the actors contribute to the establishment of trust, and c) the process itself may create collaborative advantages that may lead to d) the constitution of a common rule system (institutional arrangements, leadership and resources).

3.1. The context

Several contextual factors, such as ecological factors characterizing the forests, the national policy for formal protection of forest together with the strategies of the responsible authorities, may affect the establishment of PPPs.

Most of the protected areas in Sweden are located in the north where mountain forests dominate (Angelstam et al., 2011). Southern Sweden, where our case study areas are, contains the majority of the small-scale landowners; the properties are smaller with greater biological diversity than those in the north (Ingemarsson et al., 2006). Thus, there is a need to extend the conservation network to the southern part of the country (Angelstam et al., 2011), through voluntary instruments where landowners can engage in the required management (Nature Conservation Agreement report, 2010).

The urgent need for the Swedish government to protect biodiversity to fulfill international commitments has influenced policies and the legal framework, and opened up the establishment of interdependent relationships between the authorities and landowners (Swedish Government Bill, 2008/09:214). In line with Glasbergen (2012), the new policies and legal frameworks contain enabling support, including democratic norms, economic compensation and a policy framework giving the partnerships a logical place in biodiversity policy. However, authoritative methods of steering in the past, which have created conflicts (Zachrisson, 2009a), may continue to have a negative impact on the relationships between the actors. Previous research in Finland has shown that the level of economic compensation is a source of conflict in these types of partnerships since the landowners want adequate compensation, while the government wants to minimize costs (Mäntymaa et al., 2009).

The individual strategies of the authorities to protect forests are also relevant, particularly in Sweden with its independent authorities with discretionary powers (Cinque, 2011) to define regional objectives and guidelines. Discretionary power is defined as “the notion of choice and power within a structure of rules” (Cinque, 2011, 604). Despite the promotion of national and synchronized policy guidelines regarding NCAs

Table 1
Types of formal protection of forest land in Sweden.

Criteria	National park	Nature reserve	Woodland habitat	Nature conservation agreements (NCA)
Year of establishment	1909	1967	1993	1993
Ownership	State	State/municipalities	State	Private
Size	Large	Large	Small (approx. 20 ha)	Small
Protection	Permanent	Permanent	Permanent	Up until 50 years
Restrictions	Ownership and hunting rights restricted	Ownership and hunting rights restricted	Ownership and hunting rights not restricted	Ownership and hunting rights not restricted
Compensation	Reduction in market value with a supplement of 25% or the government buys the land	Reduction in market-value with a supplement of 25% or the government buys the land	Reduction in market-value with a supplement of 25% or the government buys the land	For a contract on 50 years, compensation payment is maximized to 60% of the market value of the land set aside.

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