



Creating alternative spaces and articulating needs: Challenging gendered notions of forestry and forest ownership through women's networks



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ABSTRACT

The forest industry continues to be men dominated, dependent on forest owners' supply of raw material and of significant importance to the national and local economy and economic development in Sweden. The interconnection between masculinity and the work, knowledge, forest owners and professionals in the sector contributes to exclusion of women. In response to this, women forest owners have formed networks in different local areas. Through focus group interviews, this study examined the strategies, functions and positions of these networks, both in their individual locations and the overall policy processes of gender mainstreaming of the sector, to scrutinise the reproduction of gender inequities and the gendered notion of forestry. The results show how the networks are acting to expand the discursive space, establish alternative publics and empower their members by inventing and circulating counterdiscourses. The different strategies adopted by the networks appear to have emerged in response to contemporary political processes. The conclusion is that one single public sphere cannot encompass the diversity of the contemporary forestry sector, indicating a need to contain a multiplicity of publics, both to challenge the modes of deliberation that mask domination and to facilitate transformative processes.

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1. Introduction

The majority of the Swedish landscape is covered by forest, 51% of which is owned by 328,000 non-industrial private forest owners within small-scale or family forestry. A further 37% is in the hands of large-scale forestry, i.e. private and state-owned companies, and the remaining 9% is held by other private owners, state authorities or other public owners (SFA, 2014). This mix of ownership and actors forms the "Swedish forestry model" of shared interests and practices, thereby providing the basic conditions for the Swedish forest industry to act as a prime mover towards creating a modern society (Appelstrand, 2007; Törnqvist, 1995). The forestry industry is also of significant importance as regards export value and national and regional development. Continuous supply and procurement of timber from family forestry is essential to the forest industry and the national economy, and over the years the "Swedish forestry model" has proven to be successful in achieving overall policy goals (Alarcón Ferrari, 2015; Holmgren, 2015; Törnqvist, 1995). By offering reasonable prices for timber and supplying services for harvesting and silviculture, the forest industry and the Swedish Forest Agency have been able to maintain high activity in family forestry. The physically demanding and risky logging operations were previously usually performed by the forest owners themselves, using chain-saws and farm tractors, but they have mainly been replaced by harvesters

and forwarders operated by professional logging teams. Efficient harvesting operations and logistics, together with the management practices of thinning and final felling, characterise current practice in both large-scale and small-scale forestry (Häggström et al., 2013). However, involvement in planting, clearing and minor harvesting operations is still significant for maintaining the identity of forest owner (Lindroos et al., 2005). In such activities, forest media, forest days, forest fairs, study campaigns and other public training activities are regarded as vital for impressing norms regarding good management and forest practices (Appelstrand, 2007; Häggqvist et al., 2014; Häggqvist et al., 2010; Törnqvist, 1995).

However, the forest sector is largely men dominated and associated with a traditional understanding of masculinity (Johansson, 1994). This is one of the main reasons why women find it difficult to identify with the forest industry and the role of forest owner (Lidestav, 2001; Lidestav, 2010; Lidestav and Sjölander, 2007). The notion of manual forestry work and physical strength, combined with technological intensification, constitute the symbols that reproduce the man as the knowledgeable voice on forest, thereby excluding women from forestry (Brandth and Haugen, 2005; Häggqvist et al., 2014; Häggqvist et al., 2010; Johansson, 2015; Lidestav et al., 2000; Lidestav and Sjölander, 2007; Reed, 2003). It also contributes to gendering of forest organisations (cf. Storch, 2011). This is despite the fact that 38% of forest owners are women (SFA, 2014). Research within other men dominated industries has exposed the limitations and obstacles that the gender imbalance imposes on women. Informal formation of groups, jargon

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and usage are some of the excluding practices employed in these contexts (Abrahamsson, 2000; Lindgren, 1996; Pettersson, 1996; Wahl et al., 1998).

Formal and informal networks have been shown to have an important influence on the social and professional development of individuals and groups (e.g. Arora-Jonsson, 2005; Lann, 1996; Larmén, 1994; Lundkvist and Swärdh, 2001; Vennesland, 2004). Although research is limited, forestry is no exception. Women's restricted access to various forms of networks has been acknowledged as a contributing factor to the slow progress of gender equality within the forestry sector (SweGov, 2004). However, the formation of women's networks has become a strategy for women to gain access to the sector (Arora-Jonsson, 2005; Arvidsson et al., 2007; Brandth et al., 2004; Brandth and Haugen, 1998; FAO, 2006; Lidestav and Wästerlund, 1999; SweGov, 2004). Not being based on traditional hierarchies, this alternative form of organisation offers opportunities for higher degrees of participation based on individuals and resources. The level of formalisation depends on the network's purpose and proposition. Networks can be found both within and outside companies and other organisations (e.g. Gustafsson-Larsson, 2007; Lann, 1996; Larmén, 1994; Ljung, 1995; Lundkvist and Swärdh, 2001; Ståhl, 1993). Women's networks in the Swedish forestry sector have received some attention in official reports (FAO, 2006; SweGov, 2004), but research on their role, strategies and actions is lacking. Having separate organisations and collective actions for women, without men, challenges societal norms and thereby constitutes a transformative agent (Eduards, 2002) and alternative publics (Fraser, 1997). In Sweden, there are currently six main women's networks within forestry. Five of these are networks of individual forest owners and the sixth is a network for women within the four main forest owners' associations (FOA). Besides these, there are internal and professional women's networks within some of the larger forestry companies in the industry.

In recent decades, the topic of gender equality has gained a place on the agenda of the forest industry, which has the ambition of speeding up the process of implementing gender equality in Sweden (SweGov, 1994, 2004). In early 2011, the Swedish Ministry of Rural Affairs launched a strategy for gender equality in the forestry industry entitled *Competitiveness requires gender equality* (SweGov, 2011), where the goals are interwoven with gender mainstreaming (SweGov, 2005).

The implementation of gender mainstreaming balances on the tension between “expertise” and “democracy” (Walby, 2005; Verloo, 2005), where the idea of gender equality policy is articulated as a political process of democratisation in which women's voices are included instead of separate (Walby, 2005). However, as in other cases of gender mainstreaming (cf. Rönnblom, 2008; Squires, 1999, 2007), the gender equality policy for Swedish forestry is mainly organised as a technical process carried out by individual policy actors, e.g. forest companies and experts, outside the public sphere, running the risk of depoliticising the issue of gender equality (Andersson et al., 2015). In this “post-bureaucratic” regime (Barzelay, 1992, p. 199) and “self-managed model of governance” (Bacchi and Eveline, 2003, p. 103f), the political framing of the networks is reshaped within the process of gender mainstreaming and neoliberal ideology. This has led to separate organisations based on gender being perceived as discrimination and therefore difficult to tolerate within the equal opportunity discourse (Bacchi, 2009; Young, 1990). In the implementation of gender mainstreaming in the Swedish forestry sector, organisations have therefore discontinued their women's networks.

The women's networks included in this study were identified as stakeholders and as participating in the production of the gender equality policy for Swedish forestry, together with other stakeholders from the public, private, non-profit and academic sectors. However, in creating the strategy, no direct political attention was given to the networks and their activities. This underlines the political implications of the network-designed policy process (Heywood, 2002) and the transformation from ‘government’ to ‘governance’ (Appelstrand, 2007;

Pierre and Peters, 2000; Rose and Miller, 1992) in which the women's forestry networks operate and are understood.

In this study, we therefore explore how the separate organisation of women in Swedish forestry relates to the concepts of gender and gender equality (cf. Arora-Jonsson, 2005; Brandth et al., 2004). The role and function of the networks was analysed to obtain important input in scrutinising the reproduction of gender inequities and the gendered notion of forestry (cf. Brandth and Haugen, 1998; Coutinho-Sledge, 2015; Lidestav and Sjölander, 2007; Storch, 2011). A further objective was to situate the results and discuss them in relation to contemporary political change and the process of gender mainstreaming in the industry.

2. Theory

In the contemporary neoliberal policy regime, the dichotomy of equality and difference constitutes both the basis and a potential contested issue (Billig et al., 1988; Goot and Rowse, 2007; Young, 1990). Organisation and treatment based on gender, e.g. a women's network, is perceived to be discrimination and therefore difficult to tolerate within the equal opportunity discourse (Bacchi, 2009). Depending on how they are designed, these types of actions run the risk of stigmatising the group of ‘disadvantaged’ and reinforcing the political and social status quo. This representation affects both the individual self-perception of members of these discriminated groups and their ability and choice to identify with the group (Bacchi, 2004, 2005). Attributing ‘difference’ is almost inevitably a process of ‘othering’ or stigmatising, while claiming difference is often a form of resistance (Bacchi and Eveline, 2009; Brown, 2006; Minow, 1990) – a duality that constitutes the reality of the women's forest networks in Sweden.

As Magnusson et al. (2008) point out, gender equality is an ‘empty signifier’ filled with different meaning depending on the ideological context. Different gender equality strategies reflect different notions on gender. Squires (2005, p. 366) frames gender equality strategies in three different ways: *inclusion*, *reversal* and *displacement*. *Inclusion* strategies strive for ‘gender neutrality’ in terms of equal opportunities and equal treatment of women and men, whereas *reversal* strategies strive to acknowledge biological and/or social differences between men and women, complementarity and upgrading of what is traditionally regarded as ‘feminine’. Thus inclusion as a strategy risks implementing a masculine norm, while reversal as a strategy risks biological essentialism and lacks a power perspective. Eduards (2002, p. 11) emphasises this risk by stating that “when women act as a group, they risk consolidating the gender categories they want to be emancipated from”. *Displacement* strategies avoid these pitfalls by aiming to deconstruct norms and make them visible. Displacement as a strategy means viewing gender as ‘being done’ rather than simply ‘being’ and therefore aims to deconstruct operating gendering regimes. This strategy helps to facilitate acknowledgement of power and conflict relations within gender equality interventions and thereby aid an extensive transformation. This perception of equality is based on an understanding of power and conflict as crucial components of politics and as a collective agency (Mouffe, 2005).

Verloo (2005) questions whether the strategy of displacement alone is sufficient for transformative gender mainstreaming. She points out that in order to be transformative, there is a need to combine this with a “strategy of empowerment by organizing space for non-hegemonic actors to struggle about” the agenda for gender equality (2005, p. 348). Fraser's (1997) concept of the subaltern or non-hegemonic counterpublic, with origins in Spivak (1988) and Felski (1989), offers another perspective on actors and struggles in contemporary political processes. The subaltern is not a person or a societal group – it “is a shifting place of silence and abjection constituted by the operations of the hegemonic” (Honkanen, 2008, p. 209). Under conditions of inequality, little space is available for the subaltern to think properly and articulate its interests. The processes tend to serve dominant groups and are

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