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Forest social values: the case of Dalasjö, Sweden

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ABSTRACT

Forest social values has been put forward as an umbrella term for a new and less material relationship between people and the forested landscape, a relationship that more recently has become a policy issue. In this case study we explore how forest-related values are conceptualised in the case of Dalasjö, in Vilhelmina, Sweden, where a recent process involving determining protection for social values took place in relation to, and simultaneous with, governmental considerations regarding the application of a social values concept. By means of focus group and key informant interviews, the study demonstrates that forest social values are not only about forest per se, or even the physical and user values per se. Further, the diverse but still general understanding of forest social values on a policy level is demonstrated. This stands in contrast to the specific and place-based understanding of the local community, emanating from both individual and collective experiences. Thus, it is concluded that a policy use of social values terms, which may be difficult to identify from the outside, makes the definition of values in specific land use conflicts more complex rather than offering a possibility to immediately provide clear basis for planning tools.

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Introduction

The socio-economic development in the last century has brought about new and different relationships between people and forests (Koch and Kennedy 1991; Fritzbogger and Sondergaard 1995; Kardell 2003). While Nordic forests have always been used for multiple purposes, the contemporary multiple use forms are different. Historically, rural people have depended on the surrounding forests for a range of products essential to their livelihoods: either directly in the form of timber for heating and construction, berries, mushrooms, and game meat for food; or indirectly as an integral component of traditional animal husbandry and agricultural systems. However, with the introduction of industrialised forestry the forest became primarily a producer of timber for the forest industry, managed and extracted by employed or contracted forest professionals (Koch and Kennedy 1991; Fritzbogger and Sondergaard 1995; Kardell 2003). Others, rural as well as urban residents without forestland, are generally disconnected from the material side of forest utilisation and management. It has been argued that forests are turning from a production into a consumption landscape, but also that more diverse functions and values are attached to the forested landscape (Karppinen 1998; Mather 2001; Elands and Praestholm 2008). This calls for a “renewed contract with nature”, according to Fritzbogger and Sondergaard (1995, p. 11).

An umbrella term for this “new” relationship, put forward in research (e.g. Kangas et al. 2008; Bjärstig and Kvastegård 2016; Sténs et al. 2016) and at policy level (e.g. Rydberg 2001; Birkne

et al. 2013), is *forest social values*. The meaning of the term varies between authors, and is usually broad and rather unspecific. A broad definition used by Koch and Kennedy (1991, p. 332) suggests that social values in forests are “those goods, services, or ideals that large groups of people will make sacrifices to achieve, e.g. recreation, wildlife, wood products, scenery etc.” These values are present at the interface of the natural resource system, the social system, the economic system, and the political system. Yet, while they originate from human interaction with natural resources in the social system, according to Koch and Kennedy (1991) they are communicated by the economic, social, and political systems. This view corresponds to what is now commonly referred to as the socio-ecological system (SES), a concept that since its introduction in the late 1990s has become a mainstream field of research (Berkes and Folke 1998; Fischer et al. 2015).

However, the type and extent of forest value communication differ significantly. While the economic system communicates forest values in terms of sales, prices, profit on wood products, and forested land, the social system communication of forest values is usually related through questionnaire responses, by visitors to recreational areas, and in newspaper debate (e.g. Eriksson 2012). Depending on the political system, communication takes place through legislation and other types of policy incentives, which also have to balance diverging and conflicting interests connected to forest social values as communicated through the economic and social systems (cf. Appelstrand 2007).

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The process of the broadening and changing values associated with forests is likely to cause tensions between various interest groups (Nordlund and Westin 2011; Sandström et al. 2011); for instance, social values are one potentially contentious issue between forest owners and the general public (Eriksson 2012; Haugen 2015). Also, differences between rural and urban populations have been demonstrated regarding social values. People in urban areas value the forest, especially the urban fringe forest (Olsson 2014), mainly for aesthetic experiences and recreational purposes. Recreational functions can be defined as follows:

Any activity that refreshes the mental attitude of an individual can be regarded as recreation. Recreation is a wholesome activity that is engaged in for pleasure, which includes among other things, exercise, relaxation, social contacts, natural studies, and aesthetic pleasure. (Douglas 1982: in Rydberg 2001, p. 2)

In contrast, it has been demonstrated that inhabitants of rural areas, with easy access to nature and plenty of forest, value the forest more for the benefits of picking berries and mushrooms, hunting, and fishing (Kangas et al. 2008). It has also been suggested that forest social values can be highly specific in terms of the particular location or place of the forest; i.e. they may be context-dependent and place-specific values (Kangas et al. 2008; McIntyre et al. 2008; Nordström et al. 2011). When one takes into account the location or the place, it becomes possible to acknowledge and understand the relationship between people of certain communities and specific geographic localities of forests within the social system. By considering place as a relevant feature in the social values concept, it may also be possible to explain why conflicts over the management of natural resources in specific places can become contentious and cause conflicts, and why it may also be critical in management and planning processes to consider the meanings of the place to those who live in or use it (Brandenburg et al. 1995; Cheng et al. 2003; Yung et al. 2003; Manzo and Perkins 2006; Kruger and Williams 2007). In particular, questions about which social components, such as shared perceptions, are involved in shaping actors' values and behaviour linked to certain forests are likely to be identified (Beland Lindahl 2008).

Thus, there is a need to understand differences related to forest values (Raitio 2008; Nordlund and Westin 2011; Sandström et al. 2011; Eriksson 2012; Eriksson et al. 2013; Olsson 2014) in order to manage and possibly prevent conflicts through the use of different governance and planning instruments (Appelstrand 2007; Carlsson et al. 2017). This would require governance and planning processes which recognise and balance these values and interests within the existing policy framework. Further, to enable implementation, the policy has to be not only rooted in the social and economic systems, but also precise enough to be operationalised at the local level. In the Swedish context, where this study takes place, it involves the municipal comprehensive planning (Thellbro 2017) and, more specifically, the planning for the forest management of the actual forest.

Departing from values as a core concept we apply a social science perspective following Reser and Bentrupperbäumer's (2005, p. 141) description of environmental values as

"individual and shared community or societal beliefs about the significance importance, and well-being of the natural environment, and how the natural world should be viewed and treated by humans." Further, in the current context of forest resource governance and management, we find the typology developed by Kellert, cited by Jones et al (2016) to be a useful framework for the identification and structuralisation of people's multifaceted relationship with a forest environment both in general and concerning a particular forest. Based on the biophilia hypothesis, the typology with its ten types of values¹, recognises the multiple interdependence between human well-being and ecological condition and function, and according to Jones et al. (2016, p. 15) "particularly useful for understanding coupling in SESs." (cf. Anderson et al. 2018; Artelle et al. 2018; Rawluk et al. 2019).

With this in mind, we aim to explore how forest-related values are conceptualised in the case of Dalasjö. Here a recent process involving determining protection for social values in the village of Dalasjö took place in relation to the municipality of Vilhelmina, and simultaneous with ongoing governmental considerations regarding the application of a social values concept. The study thereby serves to illustrate the complexity of "forest social values" as a concept, and the multiple complications that can result from considerations at different levels associated with defining the multiple values that can be placed on forest.

Case study and method

In Sweden, there has since about 2004 when this process in a first stage achieved application in the local case Dalasjö, there have been attempts to define forest social values in government policy. However, due to the emphasis on production values (i.e. the utilitarian and dominionistic values) of Swedish forest, and since the context of forest social values depends on existing forest policies and values among specific groups in each society, the results should not be considered typical of or directly applicable to cases elsewhere. Instead, as a case, Sweden constitutes an example of potential considerations around the multifaceted nature of determining social values.

The specific case study reported here targets the rural community of Dalasjö in northwest Sweden, where an explicit discussion of social values and the process of its implementation at the local level (i.e. village and municipality) has taken place in conjunction with and inspired by national processes.

The Dalasjö village is situated 15 km east of Vilhelmina, the principle town of the municipality with the same name. As Vilhelmina municipality is also recognised as a Model Forest following the framework of the International Model Forests Network, it has access to a broad network of forest stakeholders in the area, including not only forestry but for instance reindeer husbandry, conservation, and recreation (Svensson et al. 2012). Vilhelmina municipality could thereby be presumed to have a stronger development of forest issues and potentially forest social values than many other areas. Dalasjö has approximately 110 inhabitants and about 6,000 hectares of forestland, including a close-to-village area of

some 200 hectares with trails for walking, jogging, skiing, and biking. This land is owned by the municipality, a few private forest owners, and the forestry company the Swedish Cellulosa Aktiebolag (SCA). In the Municipal Comprehensive Plan from 2000, this close-to-village area is pointed out as an area with high recreational values (Vilhelmina kommun 2000), and the concept of social values has been explicitly raised by some of the parties in the conflict that has arisen due to the management plans of one of the landowners, the forest company SCA, to carry out final felling in part of the village's nearby forest (approximately 19 ha) (See map of Dalasjö village in Figure 1). Thus, specific considerations are to be made in this area, particularly with regard to forestry activities.

The specific process surrounding the attempts to make specific considerations based on local use and value of the area was followed and studied in this case, to this extent also serving as reviews of the extent which the local process is linked to larger ongoing processes on forest social value in Sweden. The process was followed by an investigation of the process through documents and informant interviews with actors involved in the process. Thus, one of the authors participated in early information meetings with the municipality and the Swedish Forest Agency involving the identification of forest social values and gathered material (personal observation, 14 April 2008; invitation to meeting and background information April 7 2008). Informant interviews were

conducted in 2013 with representatives from the municipality, the Swedish Forest Society Foundation management contractor of the Vilhelmina municipal forest, a forest ranger of the forest owning company in the recreation area, local and national representatives of the Swedish Forest Agency, and the County Administrative Board (the last of these being the authority responsible for environmental protection aims in the area). These five informant interviews served to provide specific information to contextualise the case to the authors, and are referred to in the text when this specific information is referred to. Relevant literature and regulation have also been reviewed with the aim to provide a context to the case, and personal communication with Vilhelmina Model Forest representatives and the County Administrative Board was used in the end phase to follow up the case up until spring 2019.

To further research the ways in which broad arrays of "forest social values" may be defined in this case, two focus group interviews and a consecutive open meeting with villagers in Dalasjö were conducted (12 and 13 December 2013 and 25 March 2014, respectively). Focus group interviews are a form of qualitative research, whereby data are generated through interaction between group participants in the interview situation (Finch and Lewis 2003). To gather participants for the focus groups, persons from the thematic group on forest social values in the Vilhelmina Model Forest (the local information and network organisation regarding forest

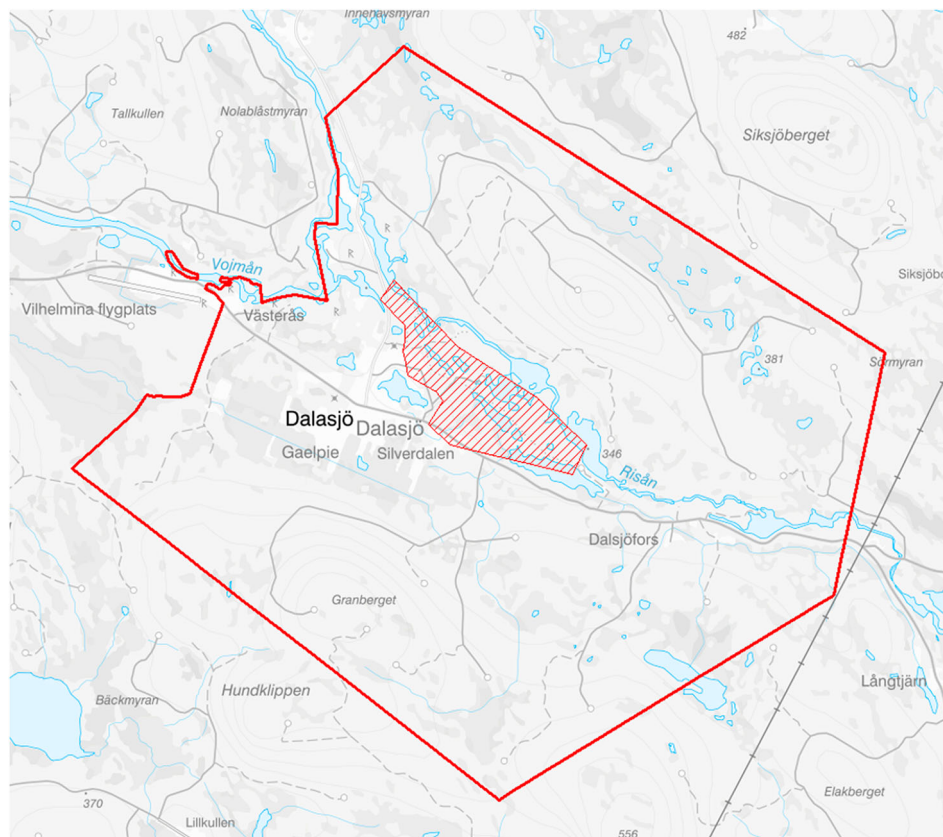


Figure 1. Map of Dalasjö village land with social values in forested places. The area marked in is the area contains jogging/skiing/biking tracks, also referred to as "the recreational area" in this study, while the outer red line represents the boarder of the village land. The forest area referred to in this study is part of the redstriped area, "the recreational area" of the village. Illustration: Stefan Sandström ©Lantmäteriet.

issues in Vilhelmina municipality) were asked to propose people who lived permanently in the village and who they anticipated might be interested in participating in a focus group interview. Thus, a strategic rather than representative selection was applied, which could potentially resemble a selection of those who might participate in public activity with regard to social values. As a result, 14 people were invited by letter to take part in the focus group discussions. To facilitate as broad participation as possible, one of the focus group interviews took place in the evening and the other during the day at two different facilities in the middle of the village. Ultimately, a total of eight people were able to take part in the focus group interviews, with three in one group and five in the other. An equal number of women and men participated, aged approximately 40–75 years. Three of the participants were originally from and lived in the village while five had moved there between six and 50 years ago. The thematic areas covered in the focus groups concerned the participants' own general understanding of the social values of forests, the social values they themselves identified with the forest area next to Dalasjö, and any conflicts of interest linked to the forest. The group context is important and can trigger thoughts and discussions, which further facilitate deeper and more refined discussions; this is what occurred during the focus group interviews conducted in this study. Potential limitations involved with conducting place-based focus group interviews include the fact that all participants are likely known to each other, which can result in peer pressure and participants not wanting to appear overly controversial (Cameron 2010). It was difficult for the research team to sense any peer pressure during the focus group discussions in Dalasjö, however; it rather appeared to us that the participants were able, in a "safe" discussion environment, were able to discuss their views and thoughts quite freely. Given that focus groups are regularly seen as providing possibilities to gain group perceptions of an issue (here, values placed on forest), it is also notable that the variation across values was so great (as found in the results). It is thereby likely, even if it is not possible to conclude any general applicability from the data, that the data would have been even more varied if there had been a larger scope of interviewees or additional focus groups had been held. By itself, then, the fact that the limited data expressed such great variation can thereby be seen underscoring the great potential variation in social values placed on forest (as highlighted further in studies of place, e.g. Bergstén and Keskitalo 2019).

The focus group interviews, one lasting respectively an hour and a half the other two hours, were recorded, transcribed, and coded into themes, including forest social values related to recreational use and activities, proximity to the forest, participants daily lives, history/traditions/memories, aesthetics, collective involvement, social values at risk/conflicts of interest, and management of the forest. For ethical reasons, the identities of the participants in the group interviews are protected in the *Results* section. Once the material was compiled and analysed, all villagers were invited to an open public meeting where they could give additional information, make comments, and discuss the

results from the focus group discussion. Eight villagers attended this meeting, some of whom some of which had also taken part in the focus group discussions. The open meeting confirmed the great variety of understandings of social values in the case, thus making it likely that the actual variation in types of social values is even greater than in the scope identified here, with important implications for the possibilities to determine the role and types of social values in forest.

Results

Background

The social values of forest are undoubtedly crucial for what was historically a rural population. However, they have perhaps been taken for granted rather than being clearly protected and possible to assess regarding their multiple value in legislation. Thus, the Swedish Forestry Act recognises mainly the production and protection aims of forest, the Swedish Forest Agency, which has the overall responsibility for implementing and monitoring the national forestry policy, was asked first in 2004 and again in 2007 to develop and specify how the social dimensions of sustainable forest use could be implemented in a Swedish context (Skogsstyrelsen 2004; Skogsstyrelsen 2007a); as a result, an identification of forests with high social values throughout the country was initiated. In this work, forest social values were seen as "the values that are created by people's experiences of the forest" (Birkne et al. 2013, p.6, our translation), including for instance health, well-being, and a good living environment; leisure time experiences, recreation and tourism; experiences and nature qualities; aesthetic values; education on and knowledge of the forest and environment; play, interaction and social relationships; intellectual and spiritual inspiration; and identity and heritage (Birkne et al. 2013, p. 6, our translation).

In the process of identifying forest with high social values at the local level, the local Swedish Forest Agency district office in Vilhelmina invited Vilhelmina municipality representatives to a meeting (28 April 2008) and a questionnaire was furthermore sent out to villages in the area inquiring about which nearby forests were used for different social purposes (Skogsstyrelsen 2007b). Dalasjö recreational forests was one of the forest identified. The national process thus to some extent led to an increasing focus on social values at the local level in Dalasjö. In 2013, Vilhelmina Model Forest (VMF), which encompasses the Dalasjö area and constitutes a cooperation basis for multiple forest interests, established one thematic focus working party on social values of forest, and the Dalasjö recreational forest became a priority case. Furthermore, there is also a clear linkage between the VMF and the Swedish Forest Agency processes, as the agency substantially contributed to the secretariat for the VMF through the assignment of two of the three officeholders. The third officeholder was employed by Vilhelmina municipality, which was the lead partner for the Model Forest. Persons from the Vilhelmina Swedish Forest Agency office were thereby also involved in later work on the Dalasjö case.

When the national multiple-basis identification of forests with high social values was halted in 2012, as a result of dialogue between the Swedish Forest Agency and the forestry sector (Swedish Forest Agency, informant interview), it was replaced by a dialogue process between these actors with the aim of clarifying the forestry sector's responsibility for environmental consideration. This process resulted in recommendations that forestry consider the use of local and recreational forests, paths and the like (Skogsstyrelsen 2013), later also expressed in targets for good environmental considerations (Skogsstyrelsen 2016); Målbilder för god miljöhänsyn (<https://www.skogsstyrelsen.se/mer-om-skog/malbilder-for-god-miljohansyn/>). There were also contradictory conclusions regarding how the concept should be applied in different processes. The broader commission on environmental goals in Sweden, operating simultaneously with these processes on social values in forestry, suggested in their conclusions that social values be included in the consideration paragraph of the Forest Act (§30), covering environmental and social consideration in production forest (SOU 2013). However, a report from the Swedish Forest Agency (Skogsstyrelsen 2013) at the same time established that there is no requirement to include the term "social values" in the Forestry Act. The reason for this was seen to be that the wording at the time the law was amended in 1992, "nature conservation", had a broad meaning that also incorporated cultural and social values linked to nature, which was instead clarified (Swedish Forest Agency, informant interview; see also SFS 1979:429. This was similar to considerations in the Environmental Code, SFS 1998: 808).

An attempt was made to resolve the situation with the appointment of a 2018 governmental commission of inquiry (Swedish SOU) led by the Swedish Forest Agency. In this report, the Agency defined "forest social values as those values that are created by human experiences of the forest" (Birkne et al. 2013, p. 6, our translation; Swedish Forest Agency 2018, p. 12). However, the report further concluded that there were multiple and unclear uses and potential applications of the term "forest social values", recommending continued investigation into how this term should best be applied for guidance, particularly at the municipal and regional levels (Skogsstyrelsen 2018).

Social values in Dalasjö recreational forest

Concurrent with this process at the national level, and partly taking up the possibility that the work on social values nationally would be able to support the protection of social values locally, the Dalasjö case played out. The application of the concept of forest social values mainly took place in a process in which there are conflicting interests concerning a 19-hectare (out of 200 hectares in total) "recreational area", where the forest owner SCA had planned final felling. As the forest owner is certified according to the Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) standard – a market-based standard that places both environmental and social requirements on forestry – consultation with local stakeholders was required. As an outcome of this consultation, the issue was raised regarding an exchange of forestland in the recreational area with the

municipality. As there presently exists no specific, clear instrument to protect these types of social values in relation to logging – the very case the social values concept was intended to address – several different options were reviewed.

The formal proposal, seen as the closest to what was intended to be protected, was to form a municipal nature reserve. This follows the praxis that a municipal nature reserve, whilst focused on protection, may include both recreation and nature values. The initial suggestion was thus to discuss the protection and management of the area based on an investigation of "environmental and recreation values" (LONA rules; see SFS 1998:808; Naturvårdsverket 2010), which, if successful, could mean a land exchange between the municipality and SCA for the protection of the forest social values related to the Dalasjö "recreational forest".

There are, however, different views as to whether this kind of protection should be enforced, mainly relating to the fact that the establishment of a nature reserve may limit certain uses (and, with regard to forest owner interests, limit the possibility to undertake any forest management activities in the area). The forest service and management provider Swedish Forest Society Foundation (the management contractor for the Vilhelmina municipal forest) notes that SCA would be able to retain recreation values during the logging process, e.g. through selective cutting (Swedish Forest Society Foundation, informant interview). Such a way of undertaking increased consideration of forest social values has been discussed explicitly by the VMF thematic group (Vilhelmina Model Forest 2013). This group has also highlighted several other different ways of managing the area, which may speak to certain other interests more than to forestry. Beyond careful logging/selective cutting and management by SCA, they have also suggested that the proposal for replacement with a municipal forest area, and thereby the establishment of a municipal nature reserve, is relevant.

Thirdly, the VMF has also suggested that a nature reserve could be formed by the County Administration Board (Vilhelmina Model Forest 2013). However, developing this last option of setting up a County Administrative Board nature reserve may fall somewhat outside the established praxis that municipal nature reserves may consider both recreation and nature value, as the County Administrative Board assessments regularly focus on nature (biodiversity) values (Naturvårdsverket 2010). A County Administrative Board nature reserve may thereby be more difficult to implement as an option, as it might further exclude use interests.

The focus group discussions (including the open follow-up meeting) with villagers were undertaken at this point in the process as part of the research project. When asked about their understanding of forest social values during the group discussions, the villagers referred in general to how they perceived and experienced social values as something that contributes to people's welfare in broad terms:

It's a positive word, I think – forest social values – one thinks about both the benefits and pleasures in nature.

It's about what the forest means to people, such as well-being. The forest is very important.

Relating to the forest area near the village and forest social values, the villagers expressed a range of values, meanings and qualities. It was evident that the participants did not limit their discussions on social values to the 200-hectare recreational area proximate to the village, or specifically to the contested 19-hectare part of this area. Often, the surrounding natural and cultural landscape such as lakes and buildings near the village was also considered in the conversations, and it was clear that the villagers valued the whole area for its high natural and subjectively experienced qualities.

Through various activities, the interviewees experienced and consumed well-being in the forest area. In the summer, the trails were used for walking, running, mountain biking and riding, and in the winter for cross-country skiing and walking. Fishing and hunting were mentioned in relation to the forest environment, and the recreational forest was described as a place used for picking berries and mushrooms, and a place where the children of the village's daycare normally roam. The proximity of the recreational forest to their homes and its easy accessibility – “in our immediate vicinity” – was highlighted by all participants. Its paths and trails were seen to facilitate access for all kinds of people, independent of age or ability to get to the forest, and many participants stressed that they themselves often visited the area. “Although not all villagers have an interest in nature”, an interviewee expressed, he estimated that even so most people spent some time in the forest. One of the interviewees depicted the recreational forest area as a forest part of the inhabitants' chronicles from young to old, in that it “will follow your whole life”:

This forest can also be used by those who have difficulty walking, they can bring their walker ... and we've walked a lot with our prams as well.

Thus, the forest was emphasised as an integral part of the villagers' daily lives. Some of the interviewees also identified the history of the place as being influential to them, and said that through having grown up locally they had developed memories of the forest from childhood through to the present. They described their appreciation of a nearby small lake for skating on in the winter and swimming in during the summer, and places for picnics or shorter excursions. For example, a wooden chalet was pointed out as part of a traditional outing on Christmas Eve morning for the villagers. Several also mentioned the historical remains in the forest surrounding the village as important features, such as trapping pits, which demonstrate that the area was populated as far back as the Stone Age.

The aesthetic qualities of the nature next to the village, with its special characteristics of the eskers with pine trees and the surrounding lakes, were another aspect stressed during the focus group interviews. This physical environment contributed to what was described as the “fantastic terrain” of the area, and attracted people from other places, particularly the nearby principle town of Vilhelmina but also farther afield:

This is a recreational area for the whole municipality, and not only for Vilhelmina but also for Västerbotten [the county where Vilhelmina municipality is situated] ... we've had many cross-country

competitions here, and everyone who has been here to run has said that this is absolutely the best terrain in the whole of Västerbotten.

The villagers stated that they were proud of the area, and said “we're happy that people want to come here”.

The participants also emphasised that they considered some of the qualities of the forest area to be important not only because of their material presence, but also because they were the result of social collective efforts, involvement, and investments. The villagers themselves and their associations and clubs in the village had together developed the forest's running and skiing trails, as well as the shooting ranges, and most recently the mountain bike trails. Some of these had been prepared without external or municipal funding and entirely at the initiative of the local inhabitants, and the interviewees voiced feelings of responsibility for and care about the constructed infrastructure in the forest. One of them explained the local community's joint endeavours in the recreational forest, stating, “we have a tradition of getting together and doing things”.

Although much of the focus in the discussions was on the diverse use or activities the forest area made possible, the importance of the forest as a place for more intangible values, such as relaxation, meditation, and mental health, was also stressed:

It's there you get your balance, I think ... without the forest you wouldn't not feel so well, so it's really important.

The interviewees' feelings related to the forest became the most apparent during discussions about the contentious 19 hectares planned for clear-cut felling by the owner. Most of the villagers expressed concerns that the forest's high social value would be at risk if it were logged, for instance:

Much of the value of this area is the feeling of being there; it's not like walking in a normal forest – particularly with the high pine trees around, it's special.

It wouldn't be the same feeling if there were a final felling, especially that close to the village.

It would be sad if it weren't preserved.

Several noted that nearby logging 15 years ago had removed important social values; for instance, there was a perception that trees had been planted on some of the paths after the final felling. They pointed out that the logging had taken place without consultation with the local users, and in connection to this issue a villager commented that “we've fought for a long time to preserve the nature here”. Related to changes of the natural and cultural landscape, participants also noted that an earlier removal of gravel near the village had negatively impacted upon historical cultural sites, including Stone Age settlements. Because of their local knowledge, some of the villagers expressed a wish to take part in planning processes concerning their nearby environment.

In connection to the forest social values, some remarked that the autumn storms had caused them as residents close to the forest, much distress. One of the interviewees explained:

We had a horrific night when the trees fell around the houses. This is something you can't do anything about or prevent. Although it's humans who destroy, we [the villagers] can't prevent it. The trees probably fell because of thinning performed in the forest.

With regard to how the presently disputed area should be managed, however, disparate views were expressed. Most argued that the forest had to be managed e.g. by careful thinning, in order to retain its social values. Discussions concerned where the cuts should be restricted to, and the point that the forest should not be managed too intensively because of the long time span (from newly planted to full-grown trees) "to retain the same feeling". The participants noted the long process of forests growing back, one of them stressing:

It would take 50 years before it wasn't that bad if it was cut, so I feel that at least the trails should be protected.

However, there were also participants who disagreed about the long process required to move from a final felling environment to a forest that includes social values; these participants maintained that the pine tree plantation (where the forest had been cut 15 years ago, as discussed above) is "nice to walk in".

In addition, some noted that the establishment of a reserve for nature conservation may not be the best solution as it may have a negative impact by restricting local use, such as potentially preventing nearby local landowners from logging activities on their own land.

The considerations amongst villagers regarding the management and protection of the social values in their neighbouring forest area could thereby be seen to vary across the full scope that was also considered in the discussions at the Vilhelmina level (in this case, both VMF and the municipality) regarding how to manage the land, and without being conclusive regarding any one direction. In an analysis of the statements and reflections from the group interviews in relation to the nature-related values typology by Kellert (Jones et al. 2016), all values but "Moralistic" were found (Table 1).

In spring 2018, a municipality reserve was proposed and negotiations were initiated with SCA regarding the exchange of land, together with the establishment of a management plan for the area (pers. comm). This was thus at the same point that the national level commission of inquiry finally decided that social values concepts could not be taken into account without further assessment, which meant that the conceptualisation could not be used to clarify protection grounds for the situation in Dalasjö.

With respect to the management plan for the specific area, the VMF, including representatives from the Swedish Forest Agency, reviewed the initial plan and found it to be focused too much on nature conservation and too little on forest social values. The understanding was thus that the focus on social values as a broader consideration for a specific, not necessarily nature conservation based only, type of value was not targeted. A revision of the management plan was initialised, to be presented and discussed in the fall of 2018. If agreed on, and the land exchange was completed during the fall of 2018, according to these plans, the municipal reserve would be inaugurated in 2019 (pers. comm). However, after the September 2018 election the political

Table 1. Summary of forest social values expressed across the focus groups by the nature-related value framework according to Kellert (Jones et al. 2016).

Value and definition	Social values identified in Dalasjö recreational forest by locals expressed as ...
<i>Aesthetic.</i> Appreciation of the physical appeal and beauty of nature	"fantastic terrain", eskers with pine trees and the surrounding lakes
<i>Dominionistic.</i> Mastery, physical control, dominance of nature	a result of social collective efforts, involvement, and investments.
<i>Ecological-scientific.</i> Appreciation of structure, function and relationships in nature	a place where the children of the village's daycare normally roam.
<i>Humanistic.</i> Strong emotional attachment and "love" for aspects of nature	Much of the value of this area is the feeling of being there; it's not like walking in a normal forest – particularly with the high pine trees around, it's special.
<i>Moralistic.</i> Ethical concern for nature	–
<i>Naturalistic.</i> Enjoyment of immersion of nature	the interviewees voiced feelings of responsibility for and care about the constructed infrastructure in the forest
<i>Negativistic.</i> Fear, aversion, alienation from nature	We had a horror night when the trees fell around the houses. –
<i>Spiritual.</i> Feelings of transcendence, reverence for nature	It's there you get your balance, I think ... without the forest one would not feel so well, so it's really important.
<i>Symbolistic.</i> Inspiration from nature in language and thought	part of the inhabitants' chronicles from young to old, in that it "will follow your whole life"
<i>Utilitarian.</i> Benefits from the practical use and material exploitation of nature	a place for walking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, fishing, hunting picking berries and mushrooms

leadership of the municipality did change, and the new municipal board decided not to fulfil the plan for land exchange or the municipal reserve (pers. comm).

Discussion and conclusions

This paper has discussed the values placed on forest social values in the case of the Dalasjö recreational forest in Vilhelmina, northern Sweden, in light of national processes involving forest social values. The study illustrates the diverse but general understanding of forest social values (on a policy level nationally as well as locally). The focus group discussions in the local community of Dalasjö reveal the importance of the forest social values linked to the proximate recreational forest area and the villagers' close relationship with this particular rural location. The findings demonstrate the existence of multiple forest social values, including those associated with recreational activities and values, which, according to previous studies, have previously been associated primarily with urban fringe forests (Olsson 2014). Questions may therefore be raised concerning the extent to which these changing and wide-ranging forest social values may in fact differ between rural and urban geographical settings. By extending the analysis from the point of generic forest social values to include an understanding of social values involved in a particular location, the case study of Dalasjö highlights the interviewees' context-dependent and place-specific social values (cf. Kangas et al. 2008; Nordström et al. 2011). The social values of this specific forest environment and village context derived from the interviewees' interpretations of a forest they live near to, that they use and value. It is significant that the forest area was found to be appreciated not only for

its natural qualities and use value, but also as an integral part of the interviewees' individual as well as communal life and history. Several of the villagers expressed both individual and shared care, concern and responsibility regarding the forest and the social values it was associated with (cf. Beland-Lindahl 2014). In particular, the villagers' collective involvement in the construction of the trails and other infrastructure in the recreational forest area demonstrated that, through social interactions and active engagement, they have been part of developing key forest social values while simultaneously creating some socially shared understandings about the meanings of the place (cf. Stokowski 2008). The planned final felling of part of this forest also revealed also shared concerns that the social values as currently experienced would be changed or lost. However, alternative perceptions were also expressed, depending on people's interests and subjective experiences. In addition, the fact that the previous concerns of some villagers regarding the social values in a nearby forest area had been discounted may demonstrate that the nature of forest social values in general, and those related to meanings of a place in particular, are often considered intangible and may therefore be easily disregarded in management and planning (cf. Kruger and Williams 2007). Thus, from this case study, we can conclude that taking into account the location, or the term "place", in the consideration of social values may explain not only the place-specific social values but also why tensions between different stakeholders or actors related to social values may arise in a particular locality (cf. Kruger and Williams 2007).

Thus, the study demonstrates that forest social values are not only about forest per se, or even the physical and user values per se (cf. Anderson et al. 2018; Bergstén and Keskitalo 2019; Rawluk et al. 2019). Thereby, the typology by Kellert (c.f. Table 1) can apparently serve as an appropriate framework in the identification and communication. Forests, and peoples' appreciation of or connection to them, are not alike; not only because of the forests themselves but also because of the individuals or the groups using them and their relationship with them. As a result, external influences and larger-scale processes, such as the halted initiative by the Swedish Forest Agency, to identify forests with high social values may be not only highly complex but also only indicative and potentially not corresponding to local understandings. Forest social values may be difficult for external stakeholders to identify and understand, and efforts to bridge this gap may require processes for the assessment and trade-off of social values in relation to other values (cf. Appelstrand 2007). Also, although the importance of incorporating and reflecting different values and meanings of places in land-use planning through dialogues has been emphasised (cf. McIntyre et al. 2008), it may be challenging to consider and implement multiple and sometimes conflicting meanings related to the use and management of forests. However, by taking into account the context-dependent and place-specific forest social values in planning and managing, it may be possible to shed some light on the diverse components involved, such as shared or contested values, and provide insight into how these aspects may be addressed (cf. Cheng et al. 2003; Yung et al. 2003; Kruger and Williams 2007).

With regard to the consequences of applying the concept of social values and whether it in effect can provide a competing basis for assessment, as was attempted in the Swedish case, the jury is still out. While the concept of forest social values is highly overarching and can be used to identify a large number of areas, it is also very shallow in terms of requirement: there is presently very little that can be done on the basis of having identified these values. This means that the characteristics of the concept of forest social values have to be clarified in such a way that it has a general validity while it can also be meaningfully applied in a particular forested area or landscape by those people who value that particular forest.

Note

1. The ten types of values are: Aesthetic, Dominionistic, Ecologicistic-scientific, Humanistic, Moralistic, Naturalistic, Negativistic, Spiritual, Symbolic, and Utilitarian.

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