

# Member, Owner, Customer, Supplier? – The Question of Perspective on Membership and Ownership in a Private Forest Owner Cooperative

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Forest owner cooperatives – Association and corporation at a market in change

In response to their exposed position on the timber market in the beginning of the last century, Swedish private forest owners started to organize themselves in forest owner cooperatives. Initially the cooperatives' only business was collecting timber from the members in order to bring larger volumes to the timber market (Andersson *et al*, 1980). Through these joint deliveries, the forest owners (members) gained an improved bargaining position and could get better pay for their timber deliveries (Glete, 1987). In the early 1940, when the cooperatives could not reach their economic goals only by trading their members' timber, some of the cooperatives bought or established new sawmills and other wood processing industries. From the board of the cooperatives the main motive put forward was that, by owning their own industry, members could achieve surplus values (Gummesson 1993). Thus, the Swedish forest owner cooperatives follows the general characteristics of a cooperative summarized by Skår (1981) such that the cooperative constitutes of an economic business with joint action between members and consists of a democratic association and an enterprise (corporation). Further, individuals are assumed to become members for social and other reasons, but their interests lie in their individual activities and benefits. However, for members who join a cooperative, dilemmas arise when members' decisions are made as joint decisions that can be very different from the individual's own decision (*ibid*). This could, according to Nilsson & Björklund (2003), cause organizational problems when the association and the enterprise are two different sides of the same coin. The analytical implications of this organizational duality and complexity of the cooperative will be developed further in the next section. In practice, the Swedish private forest owner associations has, as one way of dealing with the duality and the multiple needs of members, introduced other services to their members such as management planning, providing tax advice, undertaking silviculture on the forest owner's request, arranging forest-days and evenings for the members. Additionally, employees at the cooperative represent the private forest owners in dialogue with

authorities and advocate for good policies concerning business in the timber market and in various forest policy issues. The lobbying to the government and other authorities, is however mostly handled from The Federation of Swedish Family Forest Owners, an umbrella organization for the Swedish private forest owners' cooperatives (<http://www.lrf.se/In-English/Forestry/>).

**Norra skogsägarna**

16,000 members  
4 processing industries  
400 employees  
(<http://www.norra.se/templates/Page.aspx?id=496>)

**Skogsägarna Norrskog**

13,000 members  
6 processing industries  
300 employees  
([http://www.norrskog.se/Upload/web\\_Norrskogs\\_årsberättelse%20](http://www.norrskog.se/Upload/web_Norrskogs_årsberättelse%20))

**Mellanskog**

32,000 members  
Part owner in Setra Group AB  
200 employees  
[http://www.mellanskog.se/templates/MS\\_InfoPage.aspx?id=528](http://www.mellanskog.se/templates/MS_InfoPage.aspx?id=528)

**Södra skogsägarna**

51,000 members  
29 processing industries  
4000 employees  
(<http://www.sodra.com/sv/Om-Sodra>)

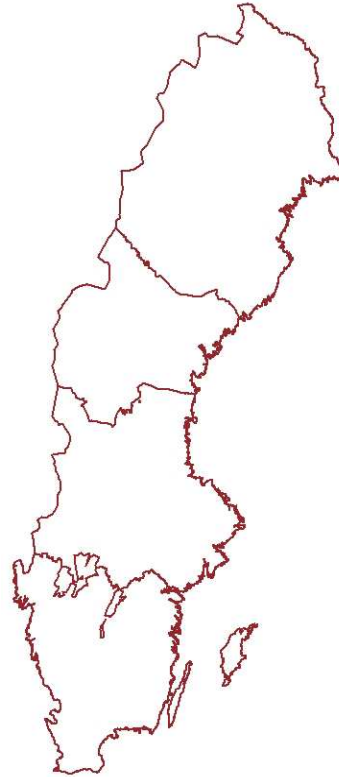


Fig. 1. The four major private forest owner cooperatives in Sweden.

With an increasing industrial demand for timber and forest fuel, there are, different to earlier situations, other actors in the forest sector who are eager to serve and start business with the private forest owners and offer comparable services as cooperatives (Törnqvist 1995). Further, due to the Swedish Competition Act, the cooperatives are not allowed to restrict or complicate member's mobility on the market. For example, a cooperative member can sell to any buyer, while the forest owner cooperative cannot refuse a delivery from one of its members, if nothing else is said (Swedish Government, 1992/93; Swedish Government, 1999/2000; Swedish Codes of Statutes 1993).

Similar to the structural changes in other parts of the society, the cooperatives have gradually merged and today there are four major cooperatives, namely Norra Skogsägarna, Norrskog, Mellanskog and Södra skogsägarna that cover the entire Sweden (Figure 1). All

together they organize 112 000 members (management units) corresponding to 53 % of private forest ownership in Sweden (Swedish Forest Agency, 2010).

## 1.2 A conceptual model of cooperative

Built on the basic assumptions of a cooperative as constructed by a democratic association of members and an economic activity (enterprise) outlined by Georges Fauquet, Skår (1981) has developed a conceptual model for the analysis of cooperatives. The economic activity is presumed to be directed by collective decisions of the members, which give rise to a number of cooperative coordinating decisions and cooperative plant(s). Between the two sides of the model; I) the Individuals/Members and II) the Economic environment, there exist three forms of relationships: A) an organizational relationship made up by the participation, information, communication and control aspects, B) the stationary or structural relationship, which refers to the activities executed in plants of members and the cooperative, and C) the functional relationship, which consists of the flow of economic activity and tangible assets from the members and the plant (Figure 1). Due to the integrative nature, members become mutually interdependent in their efforts to pursue their own individual objectives, which give rise to the cooperative dilemma mentioned previously.

According to Skår (1983) a well-functioning cooperative must have a well-developed organizational relationship. It is through this relationship the collective decision-making will be developed and processed and the operation be controlled. This requires most likely a sense of belonging or fellowship to the cooperative, such as those expressed by a common language, knowledge and education, norms etc. As the members have different ideas, needs and capacity to act, the organizational relationship may be regarded as a negotiating body. Thus, the form of decision making is of great importance in a cooperative, as those who master the forms can guide the decisions (Skår, 1981).

## 1.3 Values and benefits of forest owners

With respect to “the sense of belonging and fellowship” it is well-known that, private forest owners in Sweden as well as in Finland, Norway and USA, have become more heterogeneous, and in addition less dependent on forestry as their only income (for an overview see Fischer *et al* 2010). The same can be claimed for cooperative members (Berlin 2006). Further there are now more non-resident forest owners (Lidestav & Nordfjell 2005), which presumably undermine the feeling of fellowship (solidarity) to some extent. The increase of joint ownerships may on the other hand have the opposite effect. From earlier studies it is also known that resident forest owners in Sweden regard forestry income, residence, availability of firewood and timber for own use, outdoor life and recreation highly important, while non-residence owners regard outdoor life and recreation, maintaining contact with native locality, availability of firewood and timber for own use and keeping up a tradition in forestry as highly important. In general, residence owners regard benefits that could be considered as monetary more important whereas non-residence owners regard non-monetary benefits more important (Lidestav & Nordfjell, 2005). Looking at cooperative members specifically, Berlin *et al* (2006) has found that resident members regard housing, and timber and firewood for own use more valuable than non-resident member do. It also seems that resident members tend to place higher values on forest income, keeping in contact with native locality and preserving a forestry tradition

than non-resident members do. In accordance with Skår (1981) Berlin (2006) argues that member's perceptions, motives and values are likely to play a major role in the future of cooperative organizations. It is therefore urgent to increase knowledge about the relation (agreement or lack thereof) between the cooperative and its members. In particular, the mismatch between the defined goal of the cooperative (to optimize the economic result for its members) and the members' multiple goals is something that the forest owner cooperatives need to consider (Berlin 2006).

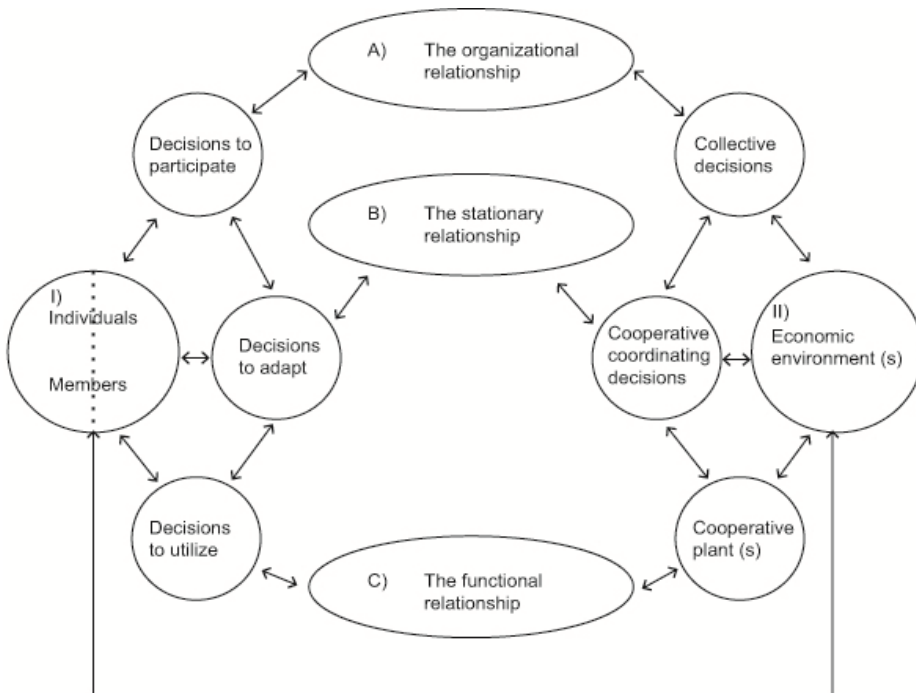


Fig. 2. The cooperative model suggested by Skår. (Figure adapted from Skår 1981:240).

The **aim** of the paper is to more thoroughly identify fields and aspects of agreement or lack thereof between how members themselves, and inspectors and managers understand the forest owner cooperative as a provider of benefits, including economic results for the members. By that, ideas on how to increase the members' comprehensive picture, the entirety, of the organization are developed. The organizational relationship, marked with A in the analytical model presented in Figure 2, will therefore be the scope of this study.

#### 1.4 Theoretical and methodological approach

To explore and understand the complexity of motives and interactions, or lack thereof between members and the cooperative (i.e. the organizational relationship) a set of theories were used and applied on empirical data gathered by qualitative methods. Focus has been set on the concept of *identity*, *benefit* and *agreement*. The forest owners' identities and benefits have been analyzed through mode of life theory, while agreement is analyzed through the

theory of new institutional organizing in organizations and the theory of meaningful communication.

It was considered necessary to investigate the identities of the private forest owners from two angles. First, according to the forest owners themselves based on their own subjectively experienced identity. Second, based on the cooperatives employees (inspectors' and the managers') perceptions of the members' identities as forest owners. This qualitative data was then analyzed through the theory of mode of life. This theory provides a way of placing people into structured categories based on the way they live their lives in the society. The theoretical structures will work as a tool for understanding how people choose their way in life, which will impact their choices and solutions in different issues (Jacobsen, 1999). It has previously been applied by Törnqvist (1995) in his comprehensive sociological study on private, non-industrial forest ownership in Sweden. According to Törnqvist, owner of private forest land, even if several categories can be distinguished, have its main structure in the independent mode of life, although there are also those with wage earner life mode and mixes in between (Törnqvist, 1995). The theory makes it possible to talk about "everyday life" in a systematic, categorized way, and it is from this individual level as the identity of the members "everyday life" can be categorized.

An organization with many decision levels tends to be organized in a classical, hierarchical way to achieve its goal. According to Nilsson & Björklund (2003) the contemporary Swedish forest owner cooperatives are organized in this way, with a superior leadership and with one goal - the best economic results for the members. However, their present members have different goals and desired benefits from the ownership of a forest property (Berlin, 2006; Lidestav & Nordfjell, 2005). In order to keep and develop the engagement of the members, Nilsson & Björklund (2003) therefore advocate a renewed membership, which better corresponds to the goals and desired benefits of the members. Equally important is a renewed perception of the cooperative from the members' viewpoint, since the way of gaining and distributing the profit has changed. Previously the business activity was purely based on trading timber. Nowadays, much of the profit appears in the cooperatives' processing industry and will be delivered to the members by three different financial instruments based on the investment capital of the individual member. To deal with this increased complexity, the members must look upon the cooperative as a whole (Nilsson & Björklund, 2003). If the organization is looked upon in a new institutional way, the wholeness will become more obvious. This theoretical perspective allows a more inclusive way of understanding a variety of benefits and goals, and also provides a better understanding of the delivery of profits to the members (Nilsson & Björklund, 2003).

The organization shall also be defined, conceptualized, and what is very important, even act in that way throughout the levels (Högvall Nordin, 2006 p. 51). Also Abrahamsson & Andersen (2000) argue through the theory of the new institutional organization, that rationality does not have the biggest impact, while the people in the organization go outside these rolls and also work for other important benefits and goals. In this organization the system is open, influenced by things around, which are allowed to be considered important.

It must also be considered important that the communication between the different levels in the organization should work satisfactory; it should result in a clear agreement between the levels. The theory of meaningful communication can give an insight and understanding in that field (Weick et al, 2005 p. 413). To be effective, the communication must be allowed to

grasp complex, creative processes where the issues can be constructed and understood through interaction between individuals in the whole organization, through all levels. Evidently, individuals have to share a common understanding of norms, symbols, concepts and “words” (c.f Skår 1981). Here the theory of structuralism, with emphasis on the impact of language, can be useful e.g. when investigating how members are addressed; what words are used to refer to the members, and what definition corresponds to the specific words. It should also be asked what the words imply, as meanings, in the mind, and ultimately the social world, in which people as well as other aspects more or less are shaped by the structure of the language (Ritzer, 2000). When people shall shape their surroundings, this is important because out of the definition, steps are taken to treat that person in a certain way where the language more or less gives the perspective of individuals (Ritzer, 2000). These different perspectives are used as communication for interaction between the actors in the different levels in the organization.

## 2. Design of the study

The host company for the present case study was the forest owner cooperative Norra Skogsägarna economic association (from here on referred to as Norra skogsägarna), situated in the north of Sweden, with head office in the city of Umeå. The 16 thousand memberships in Norra Skogsägarna, are divided into 4 regions and 26 management district (abbreviated SBO hereafter). The democratic principle, one member one vote, is important (www.norra.se 20110911). It is in the members’ custody to vote for the major board and also for the board in each SBO, which both are handled by election committees. To bring their voice, the members can make proposals that will first be discussed by the board of the SBO, and further at the superior board and finally brought to the representatives (assembly) meeting. At the annual meeting in each SBO, members are elected to represent the SBO members at the assembly which is held every year. Any member can raise a proposal, either to be treated at the SBO annual meeting or can request that it shall be treated at the Assembly meeting. The proposal can also be treated directly in the major board and is then called an official letter. In the regulations of the cooperative the main and first paragraph is: Work for the economic interests of the members through the association or through anybody else: 1) run business with and processing of forest and forest products from principally the members and according to this run financial business 2) work for a safe and well adapted marketing of the members’ timber deliveries to satisfactory prices (www.norra.se 20110910). As a member you are also owner and thus have to build up an owner capital by a 2% payment from every timber delivery to the forest owner cooperative up to a value corresponding to 10 % of the property’s ratable value. The minimum investment capital (capital share) is 2000 SEK and the maximal is 50 000 SEK. (10 SEK =1.1 Euro)

Norra Skogsägarna has 27 offices for inspectors, each of them having 1 to 4 inspectors at work, with a total of 56 inspectors. The cooperative also has 4 wood-processing industries and 3 department stores for building materials, and 400 people are employed at Norra Skogsägarna. In 2008 the cooperative had 1.8 billion SEK in turnover (www.norra.se 20110910). The profit generated from the business of Norra Skogsägarna goes back to the members. Before 2002 there was only one single instrument for this: a post-payment on the timber delivery done during the actual financial year. However, since 2002 there are also dividend and interests on invested capital. As an example, between 2004-2008, 93 million

SEK (~ 10 million Euro) has been distributed to the members in these ways. The superior board gives suggestions about the amount of the profit to be distributed to the members and which financial instrument shall be used, while the final decision is taken by the representatives (assembly) meeting.

The design of the study was elaborated with the assistance of an advisory group, consisting of one of the regional managers, the previous long-lasting member principal at Norra Skogsägarna, three elected members of the board of SBOs and the membership principal at the forest owner cooperative Mellanskog. Key questions were elaborated, pre-tested on a test panel, and then addressed through focus group discussions following the guidelines by Wibeck (2000). The main questions were:

- What are the benefits for you being a member of Norra skogsägarna forest owner cooperative?
- What are the benefits for you being part-owner of Norra skogsägarna forest owner cooperative?
- In what ways can Norra Skogsägarna forest cooperative assist you better in those issues that are important to you?
- What activities are poorly informed about to the members?
- What do you think about the interaction between the cooperative and the members?
- Are there new activities that both you and the cooperative could benefit from?

For each of the 12 SBOs a list of 15 memberships, randomly selected, was provided by the membership section, and from that list the local chairman was asked to recruit 4 – 6 persons for a focus group discussion. In order to capture the opinion of woman and non-resident members, who are often overlooked, it was decided that at least two of the SBO should have “women-only” focus groups, and further that one focus group discussion should be conducted with nonresident forest owners in Stockholm. One group with four managers from head office and another with four inspectors, who are active in day-to-day operation in the SBOs, were recruited. These discussions had a different course, as the inspectors and the managers were asked to tell how they thought the members’ answers to these questions were. They were also asked to reflect on the agreement or lack thereof between members and the cooperative from their own perspective as inspectors or managers. These group discussions were made late in the study, which was an advantage to the study, as many organizational questions had appeared during the discussions, and thus could be followed up with the inspectors and managers. In addition, webpages and printed materials, such as membership paper and an anniversary book, were surveyed in order to examine the discourse of the word ‘member’.

Prior to the first discussion, the recruited members got an invitation with a welcome letter together with the two stimulus material to get them familiar with the questions before coming to focus group discussion. The purpose of the first stimulus material was to initiate the discussion in the focus group and to explore their forest owner identity. This was done by asking the participants to select personal “key words” reflecting their personal opinion from a list of words related to the categories, experiencing the forest/nature, forestry as an occupation, management, family relations, emotions, work and tools. The second stimulus material dealt with benefits and values, and the participants were asked to indicate how they considered the importance (on a five graded scale) of the values and the benefits; forest

incomes, hunting/fishing, berries/mushrooms, firewood/timber for household use, residence/housing, outdoor life/recreation, opportunity to keep in touch with native locality and relatives/friends, opportunity to keep a forestry tradition, and feeling of ownership and decision-making belonging to a forest ownership.

Management district (SBO)	Sequence and place for FG discussion	No. of men	No. of woman
Sorsele - Storuman	1) Storuman, 20060418	5	1
Jörn- - Arvidsjaur	2) Arvidsjaur, 20060419	4	0
Lycksele	3) Lycksele, 20060421	4	1
Bjurholm - Fredrika	4) Agnäs, 20060423	3	0
Skellefteå - Södra	5) Burträsk, 20020424	0	4
Örn skjöldsvik - Norra	6) Gideå, 20060426	0	6
Vännäs - Umeå södra	7) Vännäs, 20060427	4	0
Sävar - Umeå norra	8) Umeå, 20060502	2	1
Bygdeå - Nysätra	9) Bygdeå, 20060503	4	0
Norsjö - Malå	10) Norsjö, 20060504	4	0
Nordmaling	11) Nordmaling, 20060515	4	0
Nonresident	12) Stockholm, 20060611	2	3
Inspectors	13) Umeå 20061110	4	1
Managers	14) Umeå 20061110	4	0

Table 1. Composition of focus group (FG) discussions with members, inspectors and managers Norra Skogsägarna economic association.

The FG discussions were recorded (total recorded time 32 hours), and transcribed (180 pages). The first statement related to the identity of the participants and it provided a list of identity" words to choose from. The selected "identity" words from each focus group were counted and put into a table for further analysis. The scores for benefits and values were processed with an mean value for each SBO and put into a table (Table 3). The results from the questions targeted directly to Norra Skogsägarna, were processed in a written form through existing theories, as a summary of the member's, inspector's and the manager's thoughts according to the private forest cooperative.

### 3. Analysing the organizational relationship

For each of the focus issues; identity, benefits and agreements, results are organized and presented according to three levels; members, inspectors and managers.

#### 3.1 Identity

From the discussions, initiated by the first stimulus material, two general views were expressed by the members, regarding their identity as forest owner (Table 2). Those that practice forestry work themselves identify as forest managers ("skogsbrukare"), while those who do not, identify themselves as forest owners ("skogsägare"). *"To own a property is not the most important, that is to manage a forest property, to achieve something. The ownership is of a secondary importance, it is the right to manage that is important. You can own a lot but, but not decide anyhow"* (FG discussion 9), *"A forest manager is one that do the forestry work by themselves,*



*a forest owner is one that pays to get the work done*" (FG discussion 11). From the inspectors' point of view, the identity of the members as forest owners is not connected to the forestry work but to the membership. *"They are forest owners; it is like a trademark for them, Norra Skogsägarna. They do not think like that if they sell to Holmen (a forest company, authors comment), with Norra Skogsägarna they are organized, have like a red thread in their business"* (FG discussion 13). According to the managers, the members identify themselves neither as a forest manager nor forest owner, but with their professions, i.e. forestry work or membership have not a major impact on their identity. *"I do not think that forest owners think of themselves in the first place as forest owners, they think of themselves as their profession, doctor, combat pilot, electrician or..."* (FG discussion 14). Altogether there is a significant discrepancy concerning the view of the identity of the members. This is further expressed by the use of different words (definitions) when referring to the members. *"That we, as managers, shall have an understanding in what our customers are, the members....."* *"The members, in the first place, do not identify themselves as owners of the cooperative, but as suppliers and partner"* *"They are absolutely the best customers we have....."* (FG discussion 14). The different wording or way of addressing members to Norra Skogsägarna are; member (all levels), owner (mostly in printed materials), customer (inspectors and managers) and supplier (managers).

In conclusion, the results show that some members consider themselves as forest managers others as forest owners. According to the inspectors the membership constitutes the forest owner identity, while the managers do not consider the forest owner identity as an issue.

The majority of the members live in a mix of independent-, wage-earner- or career mode of life, however their aspiration for independence by means of the forest property is often expressed. Thus, independence itself is the main function or goal of forest ownership. By owning and managing a private forest property, whether they do the work themselves or hire someone to get it done, this business will be the security for the member to stay with the independent mode of life. In line with Törnqvist (1995) our results indicates that members business is both the goal and the means to secure independence. Yet, many of the members live a waged-earned- or career mode of life for many reasons; make a career, have to move and so forth. However, even among the non-resident members, living in a mixed mode of life, their forest-land ownership is motivated by their desire for independence. One of them expressed: *"Whatever happens I have my forest-land to go to. It is a feeling of safety and independency"* (FG discussion 12). To make a living only on the forestland is a reality only for some of the members (often in combination with farming) and they live in the genuine independent mode of life.

The inspectors and managers view of the members' identity is different from the members themselves. The inspectors understand that the members consider the independency important but not that the members themselves have the means to achieve this independency. Instead it is the cooperative that provide them with this. That may also explain why the inspectors name the members as customers. According to the managers, all members only belong to the waged-earner- or career mode of life, and they express that the members are their off-farm profession, which could explain why the managers call the members "suppliers". In the waged-earned mode of life the work time and leisure time are distinctly separated part of life, and it is the revenue from work (wage earnings or forest income) that serves as means for up keeping this mode of life to which leisure time activities are very important. The managers understanding is that the timber sales that serves

members to improve their leisure time; by that they can pay the holiday abroad or the boat, as the managers pointed out.

Experience the forest/nature	The forest as an occupation	Managing the forest	The forest in family relations	Emotions on the forest	Work and tools in the forest
Outdoor recreation (10)	Forest owner (11)	Silviculture (11)	Family estate (11)	Confidence (11)	Cleaning saw (11)
Nature experience (10)	Forest manager (11)	Cleaning (10)	Inheritance (9)	Relaxing (10)	Chain saw (10)
Hunting (9)	Manager (11)	Fire wood preparation (9)	Single owner (9)	Satisfaction (10)	Plants (9)
Berry & mushroom picking (8)	To have many occupations (6)	Pension insurance (9)	How will take over? (9)	Responsibility (9)	Risky work (8)
Fishing (7)	Woman (6)	Thinning (7)	Alternation of generations (7)	Sense of belonging (5)	Workload (7)
Wildlife (6)	Farmer (6)	Harvesting (6)	Part-owner (6)	Peace, tranquility (5)	Planting pipe (6)
Seasonal changes (6)	To run my own business (5)	Planting (5)	Ownership history (6)	Preservation (4)	Tractor (5)
"Every man's right" (5)	Man (5)	Repairs (5)	"My place on earth" (6)	Lifetime achievement (4)	Injuries (3)
Show respect and considerations (5)	To have two jobs (5)	Forest owner movement (4)	Property history (5)	Re-creation (3)	Forwarder (3)
Ancient remains (4)	Self-employed (4)	"Bankbook" (4)	Forest farmer tradition (4)	Happiness (3)	Grapple loader (3)
Spruce forest (4)	Decision-maker (2)	Elected representative (3)	Family forestry (3)	Make duty for the family (2)	Harvester (1)
Plants (2)	Investor (2)	Nature conservation (3)	"Have to" (2)	Insecurity (1)	Trowel (-)
Birds (2)	Non-resident (1)	Game management (2)	Disagreement (-)	Make a duty for the authorities (-)	
Broad leaved forest (1)	Problem solver (-)	Protection of cultural heritage (2)	Forced inheritance (-)	Economic stress (-)	
Primeval forest (-)		Costs (2)		Emotional stress (-)	
Clear felled area (-)		Club activities (1)			

Table 2. Selected "key words" reflecting FG participants personal opinion on their identity as owner of a forest property (Number of times selected)

### 3.2 Benefits

Several forest property benefits and values of ownership are looked upon in a similar way by the members, the inspectors and the managers. Yet there is variation between individuals as well as between SBO-districts. To the owners of foothill forest land (Storuman and Arvidsjaur), hunting and fishing are more important than forest income. This is likely reflecting the generally low profitability in foothill forestry due to poor growing conditions and long distance to processing industries. Also, hunting and fishing are traditionally central activities in an independent mode of life in these areas. Housing is important in those focus groups where participants live at the property, while it is unimportant to the non-resident forest owners living in Stockholm. They, on the other hand, value the property for its function of keeping the relations to native locality, family and friends. Firewood and

timber for own consumption are generally considered as rather important. In four of the focus groups, participants indicate that owning and ruling of a property is most important to them. In Nordmaling and Vännäs/Umeå södra, this opinion is likely to have been influenced by an ongoing court process between private forest owners and reindeer herders, where the latter claim their immemorial right to graze their reindeers during winter time on any forest land from the mountain to the Baltic Bay. In Bjurholm, the regional authority's (Länsstyrelsen) actions in a specific nature conservation case have upset the local opinion.

Focus group	Forest property benefits								
	Forest income	Hunting & Fishing	Wild berries & Mushrooms	Fire-wood & timber	Residence & Housing	Outdoor life & recreation	Native locality	Tradition in forestry	Owning & ruling
Storuman	3.2	<b>3.6</b>	2.5	3.0	3.0	3.3	2.0	1.6	2.8
Arvidsjaur	3.0	<b>4.5</b>	3.2	3.0	3.2	4.2	2.2	2.2	3.2
Lycksele	<b>4.2</b>	3.0	2.6	4.0	3.4	3.2	2.8	2.6	4.0
Bjurholm/ Fredrika	<b>4.6</b>	3.3	2.0	3.6	2.6	3.3	2.3	3.6	<b>4.6</b>
Norsjö/Malå	4.0	3.0	2.0	3.6	<b>4.6</b>	3.6	4.0	4.0	<b>4.6</b>
Ö-vik Norra	<b>4.6</b>	2.3	2.6	3.5	2.3	3.1	3.5	3.0	3.8
Vännäs/Umeå södra	3.7	2.5	2.2	3.5	3.5	3.2	1.7	2.7	<b>4.2</b>
Sävar/Umeå norra	<b>5.0</b>	1.6	3.0	4.0	<i>0.3</i>	3.6	<i>0.6</i>	3.0	2.6
Skellefteå södra	<b>5.0</b>	2.5	3.7	4.2	4.5	3.7	2.7	3.5	4.2
Bygdeå/Nysätra/ Lövånger	<b>5.0</b>	2.5	2.0	3.5	4.2	3.2	3.0	4.0	3.7
Nordmaling	4.5	3.2	3.0	4.0	3.5	2.5	3.0	3.5	<b>4.7</b>
Non-resident owners, Stockholm	2.0	1.2	1.8	2.0	1.4	1.8	<b>3.4</b>	1.0	<i>0.6</i>
Inspectors	<b>4.4</b>	3.6	2.4	3.6	3.6	2.8	2.6	3.6	4.0
Managers	4.3	3.5	2.5	2.3	3.3	3.3	2.5	3.0	<b>4.5</b>

Table 3. Mean values of forest property benefits by each focus group. 1=Not important, 5=Very important Table 4. Mean values of forest property benefits by each focus group. 1=Not important, 5=Very important. Figures in Bold indicate the value with highest mean value, while figures in Italics indicate that only one or two of the participants have given a response on that particular issue.

The most frequently discussed and valued benefit was the forest incomes, mainly in terms of timber price (Table 3). Some members who expressed that forest income was not important, had another income, but for others the forest income supports their living and provides them with "a gilt edge" (FG discussion 6). Also it was frequently referred to as a kind of pension insurance. Many of the members said that they used to compare the pricelists of various forest enterprises before deciding to harvest and chose the one

that offered the “best price”. Only a few expressed a responsibility of selling to the cooperative due to their membership *“I have not had any contact with Norra Skogsägarna, so I cannot speak in this issue. It was a long time ago I delivered to them. We have delivered to Soea Skog while they offered the best price”* (FG discussion 5). In addition, many members ask for transportation if timber suitable for firewood to their farmyard in connection to the harvesting operation *“Firewood and timber would surely be high ranked for members, higher than keeping in touch with relatives and friends. But I also think it is important, the firewood”* (FG discussion 6).

The inspectors have the same opinion; members chose the enterprise that offers the “best price” to contact for harvesting. However, they point out that this attitude and behavior is based on an illusion, as the pricelists are constructed as to make comparisons impossible. *“The price is built up in such a complicated way in order to not be comparable between different actors”* (FG discussion 13). In case the members don’t strictly go for what they assume is the “best price”; the personal relationship to the inspector is important. The inspectors have the crucial position, to establish a good relationship with the members in the SBO. *“We fail in explaining about member benefits, some of them have an understanding but many act due to old habits, to sell to that certain person” “They sell to you, not to the cooperative”* (FG discussions 13). Further, the inspectors understand that household firewood is important for the members and has to be dealt with seriously. *“You can see, if you are in charge of the harvesting and they can keep the firewood, it is very important. They say do not transport the last because I use that for firewood. It is almost more important than the felling” “Sometimes the firewood initiates the harvesting”* (FG discussions 13).

The managers share the inspectors’ opinion regarding the incomparable price lists, and the members unconsciously accept “the best price”, argument. *“All actors are working for the prices not to be comparable at all. They are making the pricelists not to be comparable. It is impossible to compare, it is like that, it just does not work”* (FG discussion 14). Further, they argue that forestry income and to own a forest property is the most important benefit. When reflecting upon the latter benefit, they realize that the forest owner views that particular property as being important, otherwise more forest properties should be put on the market for sale. According to the managers, household firewood is not considered as important to the members.

Participating in a cooperative, can also give (intangible) abstract benefits as the sense of belonging and a common ground and common interest (c.f. Skår, 1981). According to the member opinion, they get good service in practical forestry operations, but wish for a more sensitive organizational approach when it comes to a more diversified refinement of their own timber, more resistant plant material, more social activities like forest-days and evenings. In political matters, they ask for more help representing the members in conflict issues on hunting, nature protected areas and reindeer husbandry. Another important aspect is that there must be a distinction between members and non-member. *“It shall make a difference if you are a member or not, if you can have a discount. In that way you shall feel your membership”* (FG discussion 3). The inspectors pointed out the importance to support the members in political matters, which distinguish Norra Skogsägarna from the other forest enterprises. *“.....It is not the other enterprises that stands on the barricades for the forest owners, in terms of nature protected areas, dealing with reindeer husbandry, they do not care about those issues,*

and I think this is a great advantage with us that we really must show the forest owners" (FG discussion 13). However they admit that many members are not aware of these benefits as they have not been explaining these services well enough. "We have not been plain enough in showing advantages and special values you get as a member, unfortunately I think the members are not aware of this values" and further "It has been a too little difference if a member makes a timber delivery versus a non-member" (FG discussions 13) (c.f. Skår 1983 and Nilsson & Björklund 2003 regarding the cooperative dilemma). Regarding the political argument the managers fully agree with the inspectors but not regarding the importance of making differences between members and non-members. Beside the political issue, the managers do not consider intangible benefits as important. They stress that being offered a good timber price, being at presence on a short notice, and the quality of the work, is what matters. "The tools we have are price, presence at time and quality" (FG discussion 14). They also mark the importance of take active part in political matters. "We work for the forest owners, it is exclusive for us and we must indicate that for the members. No one of the other enterprises put time and money on that. It is easy to argue for, like service in time, it is concrete (tangible) and objective. (FG discussion 14).

With regards to the stationary relationship and functional relationship (c.f. Skår 1983, Figure 1), another benefit, should be the part-ownership of the cooperative Norra Skogsägarna and its industry. However, a majority of the discussed members expressed a skeptical attitude both to the ownership and the price on their timber deliverance. "You cannot look at the saw mill and think it is something I own, it is impossible" (FG discussion 3). "I do not feel like an owner to a cooperative nor to an industry" (FG discussion 12). "But the forest owner cooperatives, they have like two feet, they act like timber brokers and they have their own saw mills and do not want to pay too much for the timber to the own saw mill. Is that for cutting down expenses to make as big profit as possible? I think it is easier to have business with the others" (FG discussion 2). Yet, they think of benefit in other terms; the cooperative cannot refuse a delivery from members if nothing else is said, the existence of the cooperative helps to keep the prices of the raw material on an acceptable level even if they do not know how it works. With an industry, that cannot be moved abroad, they can gain knowledge of processing costs.

The inspectors claim, that only few members understand the member- and part-ownership concept, and therefore something has to do be done to enlighten them on the entire workings of Norra skogsägarna cooperative. Until now this issue has not been communicated, i.e. the organizational relationship aspect (c.f. Figure 1) does not work well enough. "We have not been successful to implement the advantages of being a member; I do not think the members have it clear" "One got to do something radical to really point out the benefit of being a member and an owner to the cooperative" "It is less than 5 % of the members that understand the connection between the industry and the membership" (FG discussions 13). Yet, it should be stressed that the members do not show such trust to the cooperative, as the inspectors thought because they regard the cooperative as any other forest enterprise, questioning their motives and actions. In contrast to the inspectors, the managers don't think it's necessary for the members to identify as part-owners, it's enough if they identify as suppliers and partners. "I think they look upon themselves as partners, because the owner capital they have is, it is a small amount, in most cases it is a small capital"... "They do not identify as an owner to the cooperative, I do not think so, but as a supplier and a partner" (FG discussions 14). However, one

manager had a different opinion, a wish that the members should show more interest in being a part-owner, while it's the intention from the superior board. *"The superior board has decided to mark the ownership through sharing the profit, it is important, they want to strengthen the connection with the ownership, in any case that is their intension, that this is important that the members also have an obvious engagement in the ownership"* (FG discussion 14). Information about the part ownership is provided from the cooperative at every annual SBO-meeting, where the members get informed of what they own and why they are owners of a cooperative. However, *"It is a drawback when only 7 to 8 % come to the annual meetings, the account of the business. If we have done a good presentation with accessible information it had been good if 20 % would come, it would have been a strenght, so one can say, it is very few that show owner engagement when you shall tell what the cooperative really works for, what you as a member own and why"* (FG discussion 14). Another manager argues in opposite direction; *"I think this member/owner benefit is exaggerated, I do not think the expectations is that big, as long as you are pleased with price, service, quality and accessibility it is good enough. That is what is valuable for the members.....and if there are something else that makes it important to be a member I think is ideological perspective, that it has a value, I think they are members more for that reason....."*(FG discussion 14).

### 3.3 Agreement

The members do not feel as cooperative part-owners, and express a lack of information beside the activity for the members. They have noticed that they are mostly regarded as suppliers or customers. *"They talk so much that we shall act as owners, we shall make demands on the economic association, but it is hard to get by this and not to look upon this issue as we versus them. After all, what should be done should be initiated from us, the members, but it is always coming from the top, from the managers. We should say what we want but it is hard to get by, to have the knowledge and most of all understand what the managers are saying"* (FG discussion 9). Predominant among the participating members is a *"we versus them"* feeling. We are the forest owners/members/customers/suppliers and they are the managers/the cooperative/the industry. The members contact the cooperative as suppliers, mostly in questions about the *"best price"*. Some of them also state the importance of a good relation to the inspector of their SBO, if business shall be done. *"What forest enterprise I shall chose, is up to the personal contact I have with the buyer"* (FG discussion 10). The inspectors are aware of the members *"we versus them"* feeling and admit that the cooperative must improve to make the *"we-feeling"* stronger. *"To strengthen the we-feeling is our opportunity"* but at the same time they call them customers. *"They are our customers, you have had the feeling of saying this and that....but you cannot do anything "*. The only measure they can think of is more information about the entire working. *"I think they would like to have more information about the cooperative, I guess it is like that. From the cooperative out to the members, and on the annual meeting they can have this information"* (FG discussions 13). One of the managers agrees with the inspectors that *"We have failed in informing about advantages and values the members have access to, just because they are members, so unfortunately I think they are not aware of this"* (FG discussion 14). Other manager thought that there is no need for improved agreement within the cooperative. *"How the members apprehend the cooperative in the local sphere together with the inspectors of hers/his SBO, that is what Norra Skogsägarna is for many members. Other contacts are not so important for them, I believe". "If they got the service, confidence and are listened to, that is good enough, they do not ask about anything else"* (FG discussions 14).

Going over the 75 years anniversary book (Jonsson, 2008) and the member magazine No.1 Norra Skogsmagasinet, searching for how members are addressed, it is found that the term member is used frequently while the term owner only is used as being an owner to a forest property, but never in relation to the economic enterprise Norra Skogsägarna.

### 3.4 Towards a new organizational approach

The cooperative Norra Skogsägarna is organized towards the achievement of one single goal; to optimize the economic results for the members. To reach this goal, the cooperative is hierarchically organized in levels and therefore it becomes hard for the members to realize agreement while communicating with the cooperative. If the cooperative was organized in line with the theory of the new institutional organizing (c.f. Nilsson & Björklund, 2003) which leaves “open doors” between the levels and where different benefits and goals, even those beyond the cooperative business are given importance, better communication and trust could be reached. The cooperative ought to incorporate a wider range of benefits and goals, and define, express and also act in accordance to this approach through all organizational levels.

According to our results, to make a new institutional organizing successful like for the different benefits and goals of the members, these issues needs to be communicated and the communication has to be meaningful. In this context, the communication is not only a technical matter as e. g. printed materials for information, as pointed out by Skår (1983) and Weick et al (2005). The communication has to be looked upon as a complex social teamwork between different people in different levels within the cooperative. Further, the communication has to create meaning and importance in this teamwork. In all the different categories of employees and members in the cooperative there are different interpretations of the “real world”, also what they consider as benefits and goals differ; and these differences ought to be communicated.

In this study, we found a mismatch between the desired benefits of the members and those on offer from the cooperative, which could be seen as a reflection of the lack of meaningful communication. Further the members could not comprehend the entire workings of Norra Skogsägarna. This was also was expressed as desirable by the superior board. Both managers and inspectors argue that there are occasions when the members could ask about the entirety, such as forest days and evenings and at the annual meeting in every SBO, but less than 10% of the members do come to these meetings. However, to create agreement, meaningfulness and a sense of entirety when you address the members as suppliers and customers may be impossible. Rather, this is part of the organizational relationship problem, as it emphasizes the “we versus them” feeling. Still the circumstances can become different as one of the managers finally said, “*This is a request from the board; we must communicate the organization*” (FG discussion 14). To try to understand the agreement problem, one can look at it in a further direction, as the title of this paper also points out, the perspective of the members are so different. Who and what are the members: owners, members, customers or suppliers? And will it be possible to organize in a new institutional way or create a meaningful communication for people that are looked upon in four different perspectives?

Sociologically it should be mentioned that the words the employees of Norra Skogsägarna use to refer to the members, who also are the owners of the cooperative, is an urgent issue to analyze and explain. The inspectors say customer, the managers say supplier (contractor) and customer, and no one ever mentioned the word owner, not even the members themselves. But they are mentioned as owners in printed materials from the cooperative e.g. in the annual report: "Our economic surplus goes back to our owners – the member" (Norra Skogsägarna, 2006, p 3). The theory of structuralism is useful to explain this phenomenon. The usage of the different definitions, of what the members really are, and what the members are called, must be considered important, since out of that definition steps are taken, in developing the suitable language, the way one speaks to, and as a result of that, the way one treats that certain person (member). Language usage counts, while through the words that are used, the receiver, and also other persons within the cooperative and outside, gets an impression, what that word really imply. Within that frame of definition, a perspective emerges in which way those people belonging to the definition are treated, it states the way one deals with the persons in question (members). The language, the choice of word, can make the basis how the individual is going to be looked at, treated, spoken to verbally and in writing (Ritzer 2000, Lash 1991). On the other hand it also states the way the individuals are going to think, talk and act towards the cooperative where the language are used as a communication for interaction between actors. To put it into the Thomas theorem; "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences" (Thomas and Thomas 1928: 572), which underlines the importance of what people think and how this affects what they do.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study confirms the need for better agreement between the members, the inspectors and the managers as pointed out by Berlin (2006), and it becomes very obvious when looking at the forest owner identity. Upon exploring the identities of the members, it was found they belong to the independent mode of life or mixed with wage-earned mode of life or carrier mode of life, where the independence itself is still very important. It is essential to consider this, in order to create an agreement between the forest owner member and hers or his cooperative and also to other institutions in the society as the authorities, forest-business and the science.

The forest owning members has to be attended with respect as an independent forest owners, where the forest property guarantee her/his independence. When the member's expectations on the cooperative to support their life mode of independency are not satisfied, and also there is a "we versus them" feeling, they expressed their disappointment. I. e., this example of the "cooperative dilemma" becomes very apparent when superior levels in the cooperative organization look upon them as dependent owners and members, respectively customers and suppliers. As the members were addressed differently, this phenomenon adds to the scarcity of agreement and this makes the perspective of the members different. It really makes a difference if you are addressed as a member, an owner, a customer or a supplier. This is a vital dilemma to resolve in order to get an agreement followed by a meaningful communication between the levels and parts of the cooperative.



The members are part owners and obtain a share of the cooperative's profit, and regularly receive information about the ownership from printed materials and at the annual SBO-meetings. However, this information seems to be insufficient as they do not internalize the information and perceive themselves as an owner. It is obvious that the members do not internalize the entirety of the cooperative and this, as well as the lack of agreement is important to resolve.

To talk, act and think of the member as the independent forest owners they are, and with organizing the cooperative with "open doors", in a new institutional way, will facilitate the communication to become meaningful and improve the situation. This could create an environment where members can mediate values and benefits which are important to them, and also become more receptive to the information from the organization. By this, better agreement between the levels can be achieved, and thus it will be easier for members to internalize the entirety, which must be considered crucial for the long-time survival of the cooperative. In other words, the "we versus them" feeling will fade away.

Finally, this study stressed the illogical way of defining and addressing the members in four different ways - as member, owner, customer or supplier. According to what is found so far, they are members and nothing else. It is not clear if it is juridically correct to call them owners, because this is not a personal ownership, it is a collective ownership. This latter issue could be a topic of another study.

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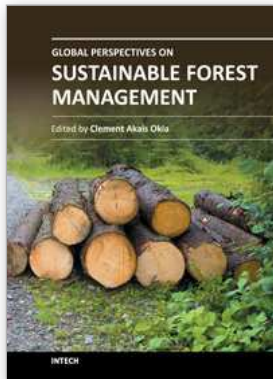
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This book is dedicated to global perspectives on sustainable forest management. It focuses on a need to move away from purely protective management of forests to innovative approaches for multiple use and management of forest resources. The book is divided into two sections; the first section, with thirteen chapters deals with the forest management aspects while the second section, with five chapters is dedicated to forest utilization. This book will fill the existing gaps in the knowledge about emerging perspectives on sustainable forest management. It will be an interesting and helpful resource to managers, specialists and students in the field of forestry and natural resources management.

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