



Stories from the Swedish forest debate in the light of the climate – and biodiversity crisis

- A discourse analysis of the concept Closer-To-Nature

Isabelle Östling

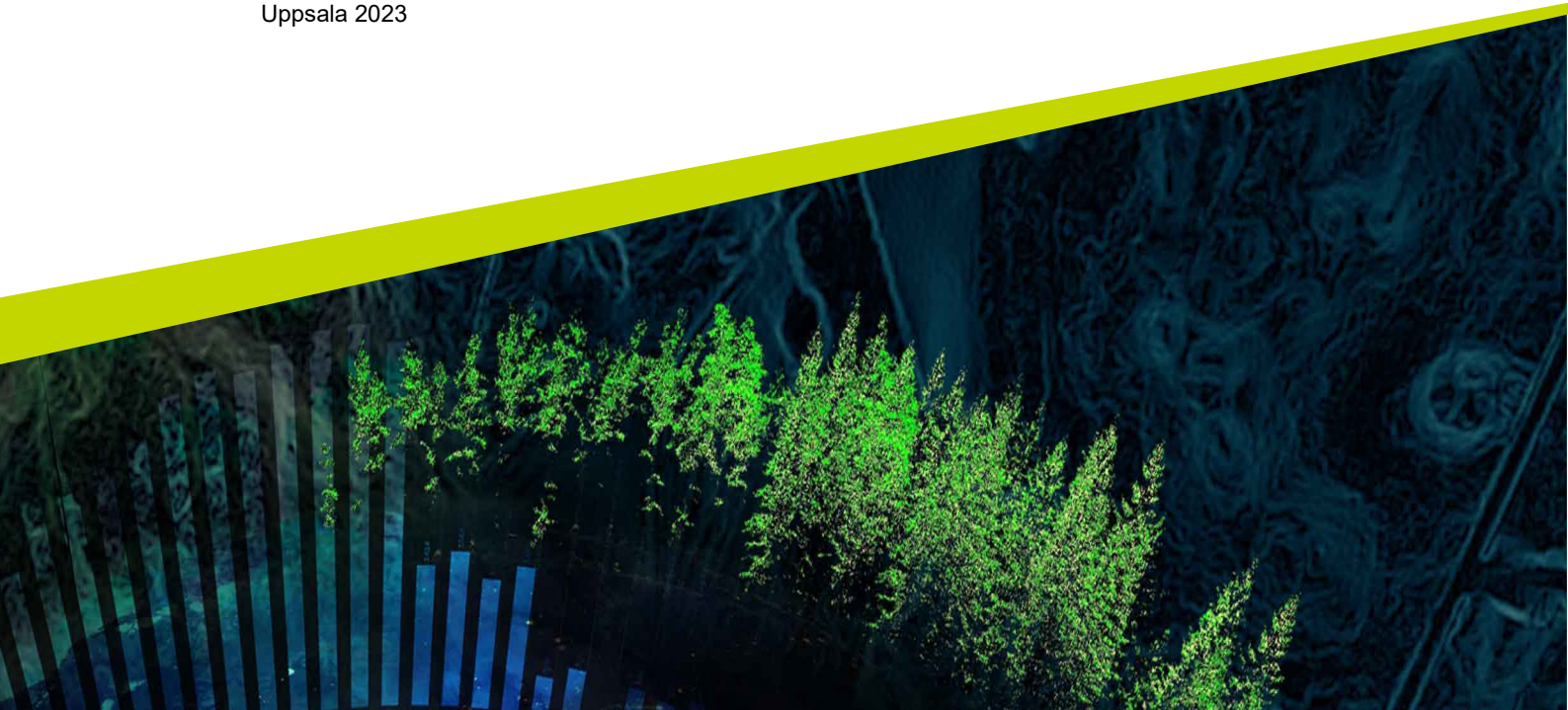
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Stories from the Swedish forest debate in the light of the climate - and biodiversity crisis. A discourse analysis of the concept Closer-to-Nature

Berättelser från den svenska skogsdebatten i ljuset av klimat- och biodiversitetskrisen. En diskursanalys av konceptet Naturnära Skogsbruk

Isabelle Östling

Supervisor: Sara Holmgren, SLU, Department of Urban and Rural Development
Assistant supervisor: Therese Åhlvik, SLU, Department of Urban and Rural Development
Examiner: Amelia Mutter, SLU, Department of Urban and Rural Development

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Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences
Faculty of Natural Resources and Agricultural Sciences
Department of Urban and Rural Development
Division of Environmental Communication

Abstract

The concept Closer-to-Nature in forestry is increasingly acknowledged in the forestry-debates in Europe and in Sweden. The concept is one of many that has evolved through the challenges of our time, where climate change and biodiversity crisis are at our doorstep.

In Europe and in Sweden there is an ongoing process taking place that involves developing a definition of the concept Closer-to-Nature, while on the same time the concept is ambiguous, and actors are struggling to fill the concept with different meanings. Drawing on Hajer's argumentative approach, this thesis aims to understand and illustrate how meaning is ascribed to Closer-to-Nature forestry and how that meaning (re)produces certain forest practices, as well as how storylines that are expressed in the debate about Closer-to-Nature in Sweden are mobilizing different actors. The study shows that Closer-to-Nature is filled with meaning through already existing practices and knowledge in Sweden, and what is emphasized in the debate is the power of decision-making by referring to who has the right to make decisions, who should be involved and on what level should decisions be taken, rather than the concept as such.

Keywords: Closer-to-Nature forestry, environmental communication, storylines, forest management, Sweden

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Abbreviations

EFI	Environmental Forest Institute
EU	European Union
IPBES	Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services
IPCC	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
NBS	Nature-Based Solutions

1. Introduction

In the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC 2023) Synthesis Report of the IPCC Sixth Assessment Report (AR6) it is highlighted that climate change and climate impact are more severe than expected. The report stresses the importance of climate adaptation solutions, and a climate-resilient future. CO₂ emissions are highlighted as one of the major reasons to the climate crisis and the report emphasizes the need to make a shift away from burning fossil fuels (IPCC 2023). Further, the world is facing a dual crisis of climate change on the one hand, and biodiversity loss on the other. These are argued to be two of the most important challenges for us as humans and our society. Nature-Based Solutions (NBS) are argued by the IPCC and Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES) to have the ability to contribute to global climate and biodiversity targets while also providing a range of other benefits (Pörtner et al. 2021). The concepts can however involve different meanings in different context and be referred to with different names (IUCN 2016). When dealing with concepts with many meanings in environmental politics, looking into language in use with its ability to create and reproduce meanings can help explain the political dynamics as well as the conceptualization of environmental problems (Hajer 1997). In this thesis I will focus on how NBS is filled with meaning within the forest policy area, with a special focus on Sweden. I will do this by looking at an emerging concept in the Swedish forestry debate with its foundations in a European context and the NBS concept. This concept is called Closer-to-Nature and is currently in the process of being defined in Europe and Sweden (European Commission 2021), indicating that Closer-to-Nature, as well as NBS, is a concept inherent to many meanings and understandings.

The forest sector is seen to be one of the most important aspects to the European bioeconomy (Lovrić et al. 2020) and more than 30% of the European landscape are covered by forests (Edwards et al. 2022). The many expectations of the forest and the bioeconomy has contributed to an optimistic and promissory discourse with a triple promise of social, economic, and environmental sustainability (West et al. 2022). However, there is a great variation of composition and management approaches in the European forests (Edwards et al. 2022), and the perception of what a “good forestry practice” are, or what Closer-to-Nature forestry mean can vary across countries and regions (Emborg et al. 2012). Discourses then, becomes

an interesting analytical focus when trying to understand how Closer-to-Nature forestry is talked about and made sense of in the light of the increased calls for nature-based transformations. This thesis will focus on the argumentative approach by Hajer (1997; 2002; 2009) where the concept of storylines has a central role. The focus will be put on how Closer-to-Nature forestry is conceptualized in the European Union (EU) and reinterpreted in a member state dominated by industrial forestry, where the aim is to understand and illustrate how meaning is ascribed to Closer-to-Nature forestry and how that meaning (re)produces certain forest practices, as well as how the debate is mobilizing different actors in the debate. By looking at how different actors express themselves and talk about the world we can understand their perception of where the society is right now, and where we ought to be going. Through this we can also see how the approaches to change are formulated (Hagbert et al. 2021). I argue that by looking into how actors ascribe meaning to the Closer-to-Nature concept, this thesis contributes to a deeper understanding on how actors in the debate are talking about changes in forestry and through that debate, *how* actors in the forest sector should work towards a sustainable future.

2. Aim and research questions

This thesis aims to understand and illustrate how meaning is ascribed to Closer-to-Nature forestry and how that meaning (re)produces certain forest practices, as well as how storylines that are expressed in the argumentative game are mobilizing different actors in the debate.

1. Which storylines can be identified in the debate about Closer-to-Nature forestry?
2. How are these storylines reproduced or challenged?
3. How are the storylines mobilizing actors in the greater context of a sustainable future and management of the forest?

3. Background

3.1 Nature-Based Solutions

In knowledge evaluations from IPCC and IPBES, the concept of NBS has emerged and are portrayed as a joint solution to climate change and biodiversity loss (Pörtner et al. 2021). NBS can be defined as:

Actions to protect, sustainably manage, and restore natural and modified ecosystems in ways that address societal challenges effectively and adaptively, simultaneously providing human well-being and biodiversity benefits (IUCN 2016:xii).

In 2019 during the United Nations (UN) climate summit in New York, a manifesto about NBS was signed by many countries, including Sweden. The manifesto stated that NBS will “unleash nature's full potential for climate action” (Naturvårdsverket 2021:20). However, the NBS concept has several different definitions within research as well as organizations, and there are also different names for similar solutions, such as `natural climate solution` amongst others (IUCN 2016).

According to IUCN (2021), Nature-Based Forest Management (NBFM) is seen to be among the most promising NBS to adapt future forests to a global change. In the European context, there is a long history of NBFM approaches evolving from the phenomenon such as land degradation, erosion, flooding, overcut forests, and negative experiences with even-aged plantations (Larsen et al. 2022). In the European Union, there are different definitions of NBFM in different regions, with different approaches and implementations. The concept has been both praised and opposed in European forests and there are both successful and unsuccessful stories from different countries throughout history. Nevertheless, NBFM has contributed to a new paradigm in forestry which emphasizes a holistic understanding of the forest as a complex system and highlights the importance of adapting management approaches to forest responses. This view includes an increased focus on the remaining stand after logging. In 1989 the Pro Silva association was founded and has contributed to challenge the industrial forestry in Europe by promoting NBFM and expanding alternative forest management approaches through practices of

exchanging knowledge and best management practices (Larsen et al. 2022). In modern time the overall definition of NBFM is that it

...considers forests as complex ecosystems, advocates management based on natural processes, attempts to integrate many forest functions at small spatial scales, and applies variable management approaches, most commonly low-impact harvesting, which means minimizing negative impacts on regeneration, the remaining stand, and whole forest ecosystem. Special emphasis is placed on maintaining the integrity of forest microclimate and soil; thus clear-cutting, intensive soil preparation and the use of fertilizers and herbicides are generally avoided (Larsen et al. 2022:10).

Depending on the geographical location, NBFM can have different synonyms, such as continuous cover management and forest ecosystem management. In central Europe it is referred to as Closer-to-Nature management, or Closer-to-Nature forestry (naturnära skogsbruk) (Larsen et al. 2022).

3.2 Closer-to-Nature forestry in Europe

In the European forests, Closer-to-Nature management is increasing but is currently practiced in 22-30% of the European forests with a wide range of variation between countries. In countries such as German and Slovenia it is practiced in an almost 100% range with the basis that it is included in the forest law, to being practiced in only a few percent range in countries such as Finland and Sweden (Larsen et al. 2022).

Closer-to-Nature management is included in the European Forest Strategy (European Commission 2021) and is currently highly debated in the EU. At the moment, there is no generally accepted definition of Closer-to-Nature management, but the European Commission are currently developing guidelines for Closer-to-Nature forestry. These guidelines are considered to work as indicators for sustainable forestry and will be discussed and implemented in close collaboration with the membership states (European Commission 2021), hence definitions of Closer-to-Nature management is not only debated in an international context, but also in a Swedish context. Building on the foundation that a proposal for guidance on Closer-to-Nature forestry is currently being developed by the European Commission, the Swedish Government has assigned the Swedish Forest Agency (Skogsstyrelsen) and Environmental Protection Agency, (EPA (Naturvårdsverket)), in a parallel process to propose a definition on Closer-to-Nature forestry in line with a Swedish context and the EU commission's proposal, where it is appropriate. The Swedish Forest Agency and EPA will report the assignment by 15 December 2023 at the latest (Skogsstyrelsen 2023).

Larsen et al. (2022), through a report released by the European Forest Institute (EFI), conceptualise Closer-to-Nature management as an overarching umbrella concept supporting all approaches of managing forests and landscapes in the aim of resilience, climate adaptation and biodiversity through a set of seven principles. Although Closer-to-Nature management is currently practiced in only a few percent in Sweden, it is highly noticeable in the Swedish forestry debate. It can be recognized through different sources and actors, for example in the EPA report on NBS (Naturvårdsverket 2021), the WWF and Bain Company report on Swedish businesses & the biodiversity crisis (WWF 2021), the report from Sweden's Nature Protection Agency on living forests and a sustainable use of the Swedish forest (Naturskyddsföreningen 2022) and in the ongoing debate about clear cut forestry that can be found, for example, on scientific platforms in Sweden such as Future Forests (Möller 2021; Hannerz et al. 2017). Even though not all actors explicitly address the concept Closer-to-Nature forestry, they are all advocating for the importance of talking about biodiversity, climate mitigation and long-term sustainability in the Swedish forest, which all aligns with the aspects of Closer-to-Nature management which emphasizes the forest's resistance, resilience, and adaptive capacity (Larsen et al. 2022). I argue that a concept of Closer-to-Nature with its multiple meanings is providing broadness and flexibility to the topic, but at the same time ambiguity. This ambiguity aligns with a greater notion of sustainability as an open-ended concept with multiple meanings (Christensen et al. 2015). Christensen et al. (2015) argues that sustainability is a socially constructed phenomenon, and what is seen to be sustainable is a contextual construct that is negotiated, defined, and redefined in stakeholder interaction. Building on this, Closer-to-Nature is in this thesis considered to be a socially constructed phenomenon, contextual and a result on actor's interactions and meaning-making.

3.3 Forest discourses – a historical overview

Research shows that national forest discourses in European countries are more or less intertwined with major environmental meta discourses. In recent years forest discourses have been constructed and reconstructed in convergence with climate change and sustainable forest management. However, the convergence differs from country to country (Edwards et al. 2022). By looking into history, we can see how the development of overarching environmental meta-discourses has evolved in the European Union and see the correspondence with national forest discourses. After World War II a *reconstruction discourse* emerged, from the *modernity discourse*, which emphasised industrialisation and permanent economic growth, with the idea that humans should have control over social and natural resources. Around 20 years later the *limits to growth discourse* arose and conflicted with the previous. This later led to the emergence of the *ecological modernization discourse* which started to

emphasise ecological problems but still focused on economic aspects. This discourse highlighted actions that were to benefit both the economy and ecology, a win-win discourse. Building on this, the *sustainable development discourse* emerged in 1980's where ideas of non-hierarchical policymaking were made visible. These discursive shifts have led to, in the light of the climate change debate, an idea of a *bioeconomy*, which is considered to be the latest discursive shift (Edwards et al. 2022).

This discourse does not conflict with ecological modernization but, in contrast to the sustainability discourse, emphasizes technology, innovation, and knowledge (Edwards et al. 2022:2).

In the European bioeconomy there are some aspects that are given more attention than others. There are some dominant discourses and visions within the bioeconomy that are closely related to the industry, technology, economic growth, and biomass innovations. The ecological, social, and cultural aspects tend to be overlooked. The dominant discourses and narratives about bioeconomy permeates everything from research to policy, influencing policymaking and strategies (Ramcilovic-Suominen et al. 2022b). The European bioeconomy has been argued to focus mainly on the substitution from fossil fuel to biomass and renewable materials to tackle climate mitigation (Bergström et al. 2020). In this global discourse, the aspects of climate change and biodiversity are often handled separately from each other (Bergström et al. 2020). However, this global discourse is challenged from a growing interest in a shift from substitution and tackling climate and biodiversity as separate processes, to a growing interest in developing an integrated management approach. This shift can be identified in reports on global knowledge evaluations from IPCC and IPBES. In 2021 they released a collaborative report on scientific outcomes from the evaluations, where the integration of climate and biodiversity is emphasized (Pörtner et al. 2021). The knowledge evaluations from IPCC and IPBES provide important foundations for decision making for international organizations, negotiations, and national strategies, as well as for the regional and local work with climate issues and biodiversity (Bergström 2020).

Swedish forest-discourses have developed over time from emphasizing primary economical aspects and timber production to emerging environmentalism and sustainable development. However, despite increasing environmental concerns, Swedish forestry has a continued strong focus on production (Edwards et al. 2022). National forest discourses in Europe and thus in Sweden are by Edwards et al. (2022) argued to be linked to the overarching global environmental discourses over the last 75 years, where bioeconomy is seen to be the current global environmental discourse. The development of Swedish forest discourses is illustrated in figure 1. This further aligns with what Fisher et al. (2020) argues, that the Swedish forestry policy follows the European discourses about bioeconomy as a production-oriented

perspective on forests. In the figure below we can see how national forest discourses in Sweden (top row) corresponds with global environmental meta-discourses (bottom row) over time (Edwards et al. 2022).

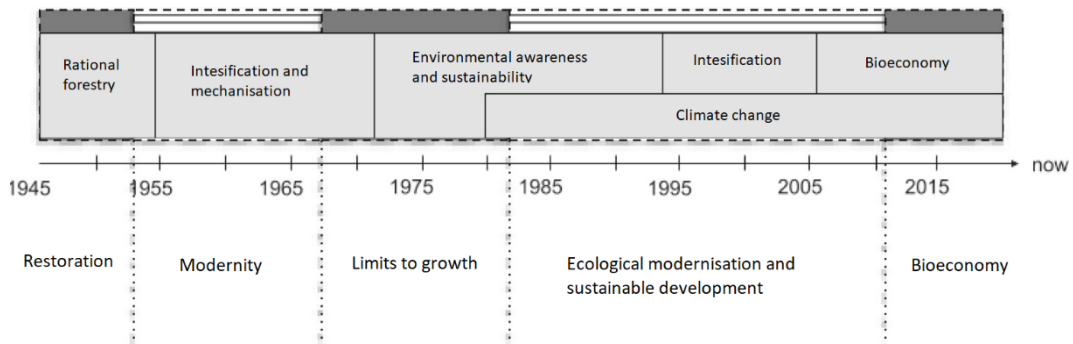


Figure 1. Environmental meta-discourses and national forest discourses (Edwards et al. 2022:8)

Forestry in Sweden has a huge importance in the country's economy (Fisher et al. 2020). In Sweden the forest has a central role in many aspects and provides multiple functions, such as biomaterial, biodiversity, recreation, and pasture lands. Sweden is a typical example for competing land use and trade-offs between different functions (Sandström et al. 2011), illustrated in the quote below:

...water quality and biodiversity together with cultural and social activities related to forests, are increasingly included as potential demands on forests in competition with traditional functions such as timber production. The challenge is thus related to trade-offs between different functions. How to balance the relationship and guide trade-offs between different functions of forests is, to a large extent, a matter of policy choice and the design of appropriate governance institutions and pro-active management activities (Sandström et al. 2011:218).

Drawing from Edwards et al. (2022) and their overview of meta- and national forest discourses, together with the ambiguity of the concept Closer-to-Nature, it is relevant to analyse the concept in relation to a changing global discourse.

4. Theoretical framework

4.1 Theoretical foundation

My theoretical point of departure for this thesis has its foundation in social constructionism. In this worldview people construct meanings when interacting with the world and each other, and making sense of it based on their social and historical perspectives. People seek to understand the world around them in which they live and operate (Creswell & Creswell 2018). Within the social constructionism approach there are different branches, but they all share the foundation of a post structuralist linguistic view giving language a central role. Post-structuralism rejects the notion of absolute truths and social practices as a part of the mental processes of individuals. Hence, social interaction cannot in this view be studied through individual cognition (Wiggins 2017). This view of communication aligns with Hajer's (2005) notion that language has the capacity of impacting policy, politics, and institutions (Hajer 2005). Through language we are shaping our understanding and creating meaning. In this view, communication shapes, orientates, and negotiates meanings and values through verbal and non-verbal interaction (Pezzullo & Cox 2018). Following this, communication is seen as a social construction of reality rather than a direct reflection of the world.

The role of language has been central for the study. The concept Closer-to-Nature have in this thesis seen to be ascribed meaning to through language and communication. This theoretical view of language implies that through language and communication we are creating and changing how we see the world, hence, language is not to be seen as a channel of facts and truths but rather as a tool or a machine through which the world is constructed (Jorgensen & Phillips 2002). Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) argue that "Our access to reality is always through language" (p. 15), by looking at language then, I can access the realities expressed in the Closer-to-Nature debate. By adapting this view of language, as constitutive of the social world, I want to explore the realities that are constructed in the Closer-to-Nature debate through discourse analysis.

Discourse analysis is one of the most commonly used approaches within the field of social constructionism. Jorgensen and Phillips (2002) define discourse as “a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)” (p. 9). Further, Edwards et al. (2022) highlights that discourses are specific formations of language and communication that contributes to certain ideas and understandings of reality or truths. Discourses forms our understanding of what is doable and sayable in a specific context. Through discourses, reality becomes a social construct. Consequently, discourses can have an impact on policy outcomes by limiting the policy options through its ability to reproduce a certain truth. However, discourses are not static, multiple discourses are competing in interaction to shape the certain understanding and meaning that will be given to the subjects and actions. Thus, forest discourses changes over time (Edwards et al. 2022). Discourse analysis can differ in theoretical and analytical focus. However, a common aspect for discourse analysis regardless of the focus is that method and theory are intertwined and ought to be approached as a package, where social construction of the world and the role of language, theoretical models and methodological guidelines together form this package. The phenomenon of discursive struggle is highlighted by Hajer (1997;2009) as an argumentative game in environmental politics, where actors are aiming for a discursive hegemony by trying to secure support for their specific definition of reality.

4.2 The argumentative approach

To explore and illustrate how discourses in the Closer-to-Nature debate are reproduced or challenged I will use the argumentative approach by Hajer (1997;2005;2009) where language through its ability to form storylines and discourses is considered an important analytical focus. Hajer (2009) defines discourses as “an ensemble of notions, ideas, concepts, and categorizations through which meaning is ascribed to social and physical phenomena, and that is produced in and reproduces in turn an identifiable set of practices” (p. 60). In this thesis I will follow this definition of discourse. The interaction of different discourses is a meaning-making process where discourses are influencing and constituting each other (Hajer 2009). As noted above, the argumentative approach has its foundations in the notion that environmental politics is an argumentative game. In the argumentative game actors seek to achieve discursive hegemony by making convincing arguments and supporting their definition of reality. In this argumentative struggle, actors seek to position themselves and others, and try to make others see things their way. This argumentative interaction is central in the argumentative approach since it is the moment where discourses are being reproduced and challenged (Hajer 2009). When communicating, people are using language to convey facts about a certain thing, this can be referred to as narratives;

“people tell facts in a story” (Hajer 2009:61). *Storylines* and *metaphors* are two central concepts in this approach. *Storylines* are condensed narratives and Hajer (2009) argues that storylines are framing the interaction, given that they highlight certain aspects of a situation and brings common references and understandings together. Through storylines aspects of ‘blame’, ‘responsibility’, and of ‘urgency’ and ‘responsible behavior’ are attributed. *Metaphors* is referred to as linguistic mechanisms through which we can understand and experience something in a simplified, focused, or compressed way (Hajer 2009).

Storylines and metaphors fulfill a particularly significant role in political processes where policies have to be determined in a group of actors that do not share the same frame of reference. In such settings metaphors and storylines are the vehicles for trust and consensus (Hajer 2009:62).

This quote highlights that storylines and metaphors have the ability to bring people together that not fully understand each other, but that they can, through these concepts, meet each other in a specific reference frame and produce meaningful interventions together (Hajer 2009). Further, a storyline can be linked to one or more discourses, this is the basis of the concept discourse coalitions. Discourse coalitions are defined as “the ensemble of particular storylines, the actors that employ them, and the practices through which the discourse involved exert their power” (Hajer 2009:65). Actors can form different coalitions around specific storylines, this means that politics is a process in which actors with various backgrounds can be connected (Hajer 2005). When a certain discourse is used by many people and dominate the way the world is conceptualized, we are talking of discourse structuration, and if this discourse further develops into a set of practices or arrangements of doings in an organizational or institutional way, it is called discourse institutionalization. A discourse is argued to be dominant if these both aspects are fulfilled (Hajer 2009).

If contradictory statements can be identified in the debate, this implies the presence of potentially competing arguments. This is referred to as positional statement and are explained as claims that can create a space for change by challenging the expressed realities and suggesting new definitions and descriptions of the world (Hajer 2009). In this thesis, the concepts of storylines, metaphors, and positional statements (Hajer 1997;2005;2009) will guide the analysis of the argumentative game in the context of the Closer-to-Nature forestry.

5. Method

5.1 Material

For this thesis I have analysed written material in the topic of Closer-to-Nature management and forestry. The reviewed text materials are reports and a text from the Swedish Government motivating assignments regarding Closer-to-Nature in a Swedish context. The reports are Closer-to-Nature Forest Management (Larsen et al. 2022), Closer-to-Nature forestry (naturnära skogsbruk) (Greenpeace 2022), Nature-Based Solutions (naturbaserade lösningar) (Naturvårdsverket 2021), Consideration of nature in forestry (naturhänsyn i skogsbruket) (Simonsson 2021) and Let the forest live (Låt skogen leva) (Naturskyddsföreningen 2022).

The selection of the material was based on its relevance for the concept Closer-to-Nature and its related themes, such as climate adaptation, biodiversity and resilient forests. The Swedish Government document is the proposition 2021/22:58 “Strengthened property rights, flexible forms of protection and increased incentives for nature conservation in the forest with a voluntary basis”. This text material was interesting because the assignment to The Swedish Forest Agency and The Swedish EPA to define Closer-to-Nature forestry in Sweden is mainly based upon this proposition. I have analysed recorded video materials from three different sources. These are explained below, in no particular order.

First: I analysed a seminar hosted by KSLA - The Royal Academy of Forestry and Agriculture in Sweden held on the 9th of March 2023. The seminar was hosted for the members of the academy and for special invited guests, I got access to the material through the KSLA webpage, where they afterwards posted the whole seminar online. The focus of the seminar was “naturalness and forestry”, in the context of European, historical and a boreal perspective. The motivation of hosting the seminar was that Closer-to-Nature has become a hot topic in the discussion of forestry, not at least in EU-related processes and thus also in Sweden. The seminar touched upon topics such as the natural conditions in the boreal forests, the European Commission process in Closer-to-Nature forestry, the concept

naturalness, and the concept Closer-to-Nature. Different interests were represented in the seminar, both as presenters and in the panel discussion as well as among other attendants. Among the seminars speakers, panellists and attendants were researchers, professors, people from the forest industry as well as from the environmental perspective, people with perspectives from political science, European processes, and historical contexts. An overview of the representatives can be found in Appendix 1.

Second: I analysed a webinar facilitated by the European Forest institute on Closer-to-Nature Forest Management held on the 6th of April 2022. The material was found on the European Forest Institute's website where they posted it online. The focus of the webinar was the current pressures on forests in a European context, Closer-to-Nature's ability to support biodiversity, stability, and adaptability, what the guiding principle of this framework includes and the barriers and opportunities for its implementation. Among the speakers and panellists were researchers, professors, and people from networks of forestry research and management. An overview of the representatives can be found in Appendix 1.

Third: I analysed a series of 6 different speakers from a seminar on clear-cut forestry in a Swedish and European perspective, hosted by the Forestry Technology Cluster (skogstekniska klustret) together with the Swedish Forest Agency, Future Forests/SLU (The Swedish University of Agricultural Science) and Forest Research (Skogforsk), on the November 23, 2022. The seminar was called "clear-cut forestry in the future, what is going on?". The speakers were from different perspectives of the debate. An overview of the representatives and topics can be found in Appendix 1.

5.2 Interviews

For this thesis I have conducted 5 semi-structured interviews. I chose to interview people that somehow works with and/or are engaged in the Closer-to-Nature debate in Sweden and/or in a European context from both the private and public sector. One thing all the interviewees except one had in common was that they had a broad and solid experience in the forest sector where they have had many different roles in the field, and thus have a broad and overarching perspective of not only the current debate about Closer-to-Nature, but also on overarching forestry, in both a Swedish and European perspective. This is what Hajer (2005) calls helicopter interviews, where the interviewees have an overview of the field, and is a sampling method used in the argumentative approach.

The interviews allowed me to deeper understand the occurrence of the patterns that I have identified through the text- and video material. Having interviewees with a solid experience in the forest sector made it easy for me to ask them to elaborate from their own perspectives. The questions in the interviews were asked in an open-ended structure related to themes of their own perception, experience and thoughts of Closer-to-Nature forestry, relevant actors, the debate in Sweden and in Europe, and about the historical context. In the beginning, I had a rather structured interview-guide, but I noticed quickly that my approach changed into letting the interviewees presenting themselves and their experience with the concept Closer-to-Nature forestry, and from there asking follow-up questions from focus areas that the interviewees brought up themselves. All the interviewees elaborated a lot on their experience with the concept Closer-to-Nature, so it was easy for me to find interesting and relevant follow up questions from that point. This allowed the interviewees to speak more freely and bring to the table perspectives that themselves perceived to be important for the topic, and to further elaborate on those perspectives. I transcribed all the material, and in the analysis, I use quotes from the interviews, some of the quotes are translated from Swedish to English, the original quotes in Swedish can be found in Appendix 2.

5.3 Analytical procedure

The material was collected in different blocks for this thesis. The text documents were collected early in the process and by analyzing them I could identify some overarching themes that were recurrent in the debate about Closer-to-Nature. The relevance of the identified themes further led to finding video material on the topic. When I analysed these seminars, I identified some perspectives that I wanted to look further into and hear more about, which led to my interviewees. After each interview I transcribed the text and were attentive to themes that were in some way recurring or extra highlighted. After conducting all the interviews, I listened to them again and went through the transcriptions looking for overarching patterns in the material. In a parallel process I went through the text and video materials several times to find patterns there as well. The search for patterns and analytical themes were guided by my research questions and my theoretical concepts. I started to analyse the interviews and the video material. The research questions were provided with different colours. Arguments and statements from the material were coded in the same colour as the research questions that I thought it was connected to. Since RQ1 involves several storylines, I created overarching themes that I found to be recurrent and coded them in different colours. Metaphors that I found to be recurring were coded in a separate colour. When I had gone through the interviews and the video material, I turned back to the text material to look at the themes that I found in the beginning, to see if they would align with the patterns that I had found

in the interviews and video recordings or provide new insights to the collected material. When I had gathered themes and identified storylines, I started to compare them with each other, to see if they were aligning or if they challenged each other, and overall, how they related to each other. In this process I were attentive to positional statements that could reveal challenging views. Throughout the analytical procedure I went through my material several times. In the beginning I identified too many themes and storylines, making the result a bit sprawling. By going through the material again, many times, I could identify the patterns that were most frequent and were often recurring as a subject for discussion in the material.

5.4 Limitations

Interviews in qualitative research are argued to come with a power imbalance between the data collector and the participants (Creswell & Creswell). This could be a limitation of the collected material and the outcome given that the researcher is the one who will make interpretations of the material, and the possibility of participants adapting their answers to be interpreted in a certain way must be acknowledge. Another limitation could be the interview situation as such, where the researcher is in a position of setting the scene to make the interviewees experience as good as possible. By relying on the human factor of setting the scene I argue that there is an increased risk of a variability between the different scenes in different interviews. Since they were held on different days and we as humans can be affected by different things. Further, Alsaawi (2014) highlights that interviews are a co-construction method, where not only the interviewee but also the interviewer are participants. The interview situation is important to think about when managing this limitation as well, where I find it crucial to think about not contributing to the interview in a way that is steering the interviewee in a certain direction or limiting the participants possibility to speak their mind.

All of my conducted interviews were held on zoom which can be a limitation for the collected material, given that the online context is in many ways affecting the interactional situation. The interviewer's ability to set a comfortable and welcoming scene becomes more difficult through a computer. Situations such as bad internet connection irregular sound can create irritation among the participants as well as for the interviewer, which might affect the motivation of participating in the interview.

The scope of the thesis could also be seen as a limitation. With a larger project one could focus on deepening the perspectives of specific actors, such as private forest owners. Nevertheless, the small sample of interviewees together with the video recordings and text documents highlighted perspectives that were recurring and

thus contributed to indications of certain patterns in the debate. In research, there will always be limitations in some way, but we cannot stop to conduct research because aspects of limitation. We can however as researchers do our best to minimize the risks for aspects that will limit the outcome of our study in some way. Alsaawi (2014) argues that the best way to evade limitations, is to acknowledge them.

5.5 Ethical considerations

The interviewees in this study were all sent a consent form to read and sign before the interviews took place. In this consent it was highlighted that the collected material will be treated with confidentiality, meaning that only the researcher and the supervisor would have access to the material. It was also highlighted that participation is voluntarily, and that the participant can at any time end their participation. Further, there were information regarding that the material will be voice recorded and later transcribed, and that the participants will be anonymous in the study. Before the interviews started, I made sure that the participants had signed the consent form and sent it to me by email. I started each interview by repeating the information from the consent form and made sure that the participants were aware of when the voice recording started. The debate as such, is widely spread throughout Europe and Sweden, and involved actors often express themselves in public contexts. Therefore, I have not considered the topic as particularly sensitive from an ethical point of view. However, I wanted to assure the anonymisation of the participants, even if the material was found online and open for anyone to find. Thus, I have chosen to not specify from which seminar a certain quote originates, only that it comes from video material and the spoken actor's role. For the interviewees, I chose to only refer to the participants by numbers; interviewee 1, 2, 3 etc. I did this since I chose interviewees with a wide experience of the field, which means that there is a possibility that they could be participants in other sources of my material. By referring to the interviewees only by numbers, I minimize putting the interviewees anonymization at risk if I were to quote the same person from a different material.

6. Results and analysis

In my analysis I have looked at the concept Closer-to-Nature forestry and how meaning is ascribed to the concept and how that meaning (re)produces certain forest practices in Europe and Sweden, with a starting point in the EFI report. In the following section, I describe the argumentative game in the Closer-to-Nature debate in Sweden in the light of the European discussion, with the chosen central concepts of storylines, metaphors, and positional statements in focus. The results section is divided into three main storylines that I have identified through my analysis.

6.1 Storyline 1: The European involvement as a threat to Swedish forestry

A recurring theme, especially in the interviews and the video-recorded material of the seminar hosted by KSLA, is that there is an implied reluctance in Sweden regarding an overall European involvement in Swedish forestry.

This reluctance is expressed among and about actors with economic interest in the forest, but also among and about actors with the interest of biodiversity and interests in the perspectives of nature and environment. This reluctance is not explicitly expressed and directed towards the Closer-to-Nature management approach as such, but as a more overall political standpoint in the debate, highlighting the preference of decision making on a more local level. This reluctance is not only recognized and expressed from Swedish actors. But also, from a European point of view.

They can have the feeling that now some bureaucrats in Brussels want to impose some centralized things in our place – interviewee 1

Condensed narratives from both the industry and the environmental movement, bring the actors together regarding the politics of forestry, taking a stand for the importance of not talking about and adapting too much to overall and general guidelines of forestry. This mobilizes actors to not take the guidelines regarding Closer-to-Nature forestry too serious referring to the Swedish forest not being withing the scope of the European Union's competence. The analysis shows that

different actors in the Swedish debate gather around a certain storyline, using a specific metaphor, “*one size does not fit all*”. In line with (Hajer 2009) I argue that this metaphor creates a communicative network among different actors with different understandings, which meet each other through a metaphor that indicates a consensus around the politics of forestry, despite having different understandings around other things in the debate. The analyzed material show that this metaphor is both mobilizing industrial interests who for economic reasons do not want to change forestry, and the ideologically driven forest owner movements who do not want decision-making power to be moved to Brussels. This “*one size does not fit all*” metaphor is expressed explicitly several times, especially in the KSLA seminar by different actors. It is also expressed implicitly.

You cannot compare olive groves and cork oak forests with our spruce and pine forests – Interviewee 3 (my translation)

Do not believe in one policy, not a one size fits all, you have to start from the local perspective – video material, professor in forest ecology (my translation)

The storyline of a European involvement as a threat to Swedish forestry is not only connected to the current Closer-to-Nature process. The EU involvement in Swedish forestry is often throughout the material connected to historical events. It is implied that ever since the beginning of a EU involvement in Swedish forestry, the narratives of the involvement as a threat could be detected. Several interviewees highlighted that Swedish forestry has historically emphasized the economic benefits of the forest as the forest’s primer asset, and when environmental issues from a European level began to take more place, the reluctance to a European involvement started to show from certain actors.

And then it came to a point when the forest industry and the economic interests within the forest became terrified that now the EU will come and tell us what to do. And you do not want that. And the environmental organizations were happy that the EU stepped in – interviewee 3 (my translation)

So there has been and there is a huge skepticism among foresters worldwide, but not least in Sweden, to reflect upon their own, their own paradigm, and reflect upon it in relation to changes in societal needs and use and so on – interviewee 1

The storyline illustrates that the reluctance is not about Closer-to-Nature as a do or don’t or as a concept a such. Rather, I argue that within the Closer-to-Nature debate, there is another debate regarding whether a European involvement should have influence over the management of Swedish forests, and if so, how much and in what way. The storyline contains different questions, and thus, attracts different groups of actors.

6.2 Storyline 2: Mimicking nature

Closer-to-Nature is through the EFI and the report Closer-to-Nature (Larsen et al. 2022) framed as a way to reach stability in the European forests by learning from nature, through mimicking the natural disturbance regime of the specific region.

Different management approaches are not talked about by the EFI to be more or less valuable, rather, what is highlighted is that the management should reflect the regions ecological, economic, social and cultural variation across the continent. This implies that different management approaches will be needed dependent on what is perceived to be a natural disturbance in the specific region. The storyline put forward by the EFI highlights that we need to incorporate structures and elements from the natural forest to the management, and that natural forests basically are structure rich. The storyline highlights that by homogenizing our forests, we make them vulnerable, and by mimicking nature we can increase the forests resistance, resilience, and adaptive capacity. The prerequisite to mimic nature is to look at the specific context, thus “different regions need different management approaches” (Larsen et al. 2022:4). This storyline is reproduced by the actors in the Swedish debate. The “*landscape perspective*” is a recurring used metaphor in the debate and illustrates how actors in Sweden perceive that Closer-to-Nature should be understood. The storyline is shared by all the actors in the collected material and the use of this metaphor implies a consensus around on which level decisions should be made.

Forests needs to be managed on a landscape - or property level – video material, manager in the forest industry sector (my translation)

Apply a landscape perspective. Planning takes place on stock and landscape level to ensure connectivity as well as to preserve and recreate the natural variation in the forest landscape – text material, report Nature Conservation Association (my translation)

However, the storyline put forward from the EFI is not completely shared in the Swedish debate. This storyline can be considered to have a two folded content. Where one aspect highlights that management should be put in the context on a landscape and/or regional level, and the other aspect highlights the need to further mimic what is considered to be natural for that specific context. The first aspect, as outlined above, is shared by the actors in the Swedish debate. When considering the other aspect, challenging perspectives can be identified in the debate. These challenging perspectives does not explicitly imply that forestry should not mimic natural disturbances, they are rather implying that what is seen to be natural is a matter of interpretation and are therefore very difficult to define. Hence, to decide what is seen to be a natural disturbance in a specific region is highlighted to be a great challenge in the Swedish debate and even an impossible task. The arguments

that oppose the dominant storyline of mimicking nature and naturalness will here be considered as positional statements given that they open for competing realities. Some actors are strengthening their arguments by putting it in a historical context. One example of this is illustrated through the example of forest fires in the KSLA webinar, which according to presented statistics occurred more frequently before the entering of industrial forestry where we started to put out fires to save the forest. The argumentation is that the demarcation for what is perceived as natural disturbances has shifted, thus, to know what is natural in a specific place is talked about as difficult to define and is not obvious. It is a challenge to draw the line between what is natural and what is unnatural.

Forest fires used to be natural in the boreal forests, and now we must do conservation burning to save species that depend on fire disturbance – video material, professor in forest ecology (my translation)

This implies that mimicking natural disturbances is in the Swedish debate perceived as a difficult task given that it is hard to know what the actual natural disturbances are. Some arguments are even suggesting that it is impossible to try to define what is seen to be natural in a specific context, and that we should not even try to do so. These are arguments that challenges the EFI storyline of Closer-to-Nature as a natural-disturbance-regime in the sense that some actors believe that entering a discussion of what is natural, is a hopeless and even useless task. In the analysed material, several positional statements to this storyline were expressed, which is illustrated by some examples below. Both regarding perspectives of naturalness, and positional statements indicating doubts and different perspectives of reality of natural disturbance regimes.

The use of the words “natural and unnatural” is like the wild west – video material, nature conservation officer (my translation)

The word “natural” should be forbidden – video material, nature conservation officer (my translation)

Is Closer-to-Nature forestry the same thing as Continuous Cover Forestry (kontinuitetsskogsbruk)? video material, manager in the forest industry sector(my translation)

So, then there was something called site adaptation (ståndortsanpassning), and that means that you should actually adapt the management of the forest to the opportunities provided by nature, it is very similar to this Closer-to-Nature approach – interviewee 4 (my translation)

Different perspectives about mimicking natural disturbances can also be identified by looking at how clear-cut forestry is talked about in the Swedish debate and how it is talked about through EFI. In the EFI report, this is talked about as a possible method that could be needed if it is considered to be similar to a natural disturbance in the specific area. It is not talked about as a general principle that should be banned

or advocated, but as a method that sometimes could be the kind of management that most closely resembles the natural disturbance in a specific area. In the Swedish debate one can sense a competing storyline about clear-cut forestry as something that does not belong in the management of the Swedish forests.

Clearcutting poses a huge threat to the biodiversity – text material, report Greenpeace (my translation)

They often say that the forests burned in the past and you can compare these forest fires with clear-cutting, and then I as an ecologist get really mad – interviewee 2 (my translation)

The biggest difference in the clear-cutting context between the European perspective and what is debated about in Sweden, is that the point of departure in the Swedish debate is that actors are either for or against clear-cutting, this is the core of the debate. Whereas in the European perspective, one does not attribute values on whether it is good or bad, but rather whether it is suitable for the specific area in accordance with what is perceived as a natural disturbance in the area.

I want to end this storyline with a quote that highlights the importance of being one with the nature, and thus, mimicking nature in our management of the forest.

I know that the challenges we face today can at times seem hard to manage, but we as humans have risen time and time again through history, and we are not alone. With the help of nature, with the help of forests, everything is possible, if we will only start behaving as being part of nature and not external to it – video material, President, ThinkForest

6.3 Storyline 3: The responsibility is on the forest owners

Overall, ownership is emphasized in the collected material. In the interviews, reports, and the webinars it is recurrently highlighted that owning land means having the possibility to decide for yourself what you want to do with your land based on your own goals, whether in forestry, agriculture or similar. This together with the proposition 2021/22:58 about strengthened property rights gives the impression that this is something that Sweden is proud of and understands as the best way forward. In the proposition, the metaphor of “*freedom with responsibility*” is highlighted, which is something that permeates the Swedish forestry policy in general.

This implies that there is a great amount of trust on Swedish forest owners to make good choices within the scope of their freedom. Through this metaphor responsibility is explicitly expressed, positioning the forest owner in the centre of global sustainability issues. This implies that the forest owners are the ones who are best suited to make decisions regarding climate and sustainable forestry, and that they should trust their own assessments and goals. This is illustrated in the quote below.

The government believes that strong owner- and user rights contribute to making greater use of the forest’s potential for the economy, climate, and environment text material, proposition 2021/22:58 (my translation)

As a forest owner, you have to trust what you want. All these different actors want to tell you what to do – interviewee 4 (my translation)

My results indicates that forest owners are through the metaphor “freedom with responsibility” being empowered in decision making, given that it is highlighted that forest owners should be the ones who decide what they want to do with their forests and how it should be managed to reach their goals. With this empowerment comes a great amount of responsibility to align their decisions with different goals and objectives of the forests. In Sweden, the concept Closer-to-Nature is talked about as a certification approach, meaning that it will build upon a voluntary basis. This would result in forest owners deciding themselves whether they want to embrace the concept or not. By implementing Closer-to-Nature forestry as a voluntary certification system puts a great amount of responsibility on the forest owner to make smart choices for the climate, given that Closer-to-Nature is talked about as an approach for climate adaptation. This storyline illustrates what Hajer (2009) argues; that we through storylines attribute aspects of ‘blame’ and ‘responsibility’. Given that the debate is highlighting the forest owners as responsible for decision making, one can also assume that blame can be put on

forest owners in relation to their decisions, even though this is not highlighted in this specific debate. In the quote below it is illustrated how responsibility can be talked about in the debate.

I think that it is a good thing that we have slightly different goals with the forest and that different forest owners have the opportunity to do things in different ways, as long as they are not destructive – interviewee 3 (my translation)

By some actors the implementation of the Closer-to-Nature approach together with the responsibility of the forest owners is talked about as a difficulty, given that different forest owners have different resources for learning about and maintaining their certification. This implies the possible occurrence of situations where the forest owner wants to be certified with Closer-to-Nature forestry, but their resources are limiting them in practice.

The conditions for converting to a Closer-to-Nature forestry differ between different landowners – text material, report Nature Conservation Association(my translation)

7. Discussion

In this section, I want to connect back to the aim of this thesis. I will summarize the findings in my analysis by turning to the research questions. I will then reflect upon the results of the analysis in relation to previous research and will reflect upon how I understand the phenomenon of a when a global discourse on sustainability meets the Swedish forestry discourse. I will end the section with some thoughts about forestry in the greater context of sustainability.

The aim of this thesis was to understand and illustrate how meaning is ascribed to Closer-to Nature forestry and how that meaning (re)produces certain forest practices, as well as how storylines that are expressed in the argumentative game are mobilizing different actors in the debate. The results of this analyse shows how actors in the debate, through their use of narratives and storylines, metaphors and positional statements are in a way closing the debate about Closer-to Nature forestry, and instead opens another debate and argues for aspects of decision-making. Who has the right to make decisions, who should be involved and on what level should decisions be taken. The results thus give indications of how to work towards a sustainable future through the politics of forestry. Further, the analysis shows that Closer-to-Nature are talked about in references to other management methods and are thus filled with meaning in a way that covers existing practices. The phenomenon of closing the debate aligns with previous research on phenomena in communication about sustainability, where the notion of discursive closures is highlighted by Christersen et al. (2015). Discursive closure is defined as:

When discussion is thwarted, a particular view of reality is maintained at the expense of equally plausible ones, usually to someone's advantage (Christersen et al. 2015:136).

Through the phenomenon of discursive closure, the concept, here Closer-to-Nature, are by actors bind to the past and thus creates a blindness to new issues of sustainability problems (Cristersen et al. 2015). Discursive closures are argued by Christersen et al. (2015) to reproduce and reinforce norms and routines rather than challenging them. They further highlight the risk of developing "frozen identities" through discursive closures. Frozen identities are argued to be systems that have no outside. They have internal rules and logics that lead to the reinforcement of specific views in communicative practices on sustainability for the involved

participants (Christersen et al. 2015). The results in this analysis does not indicate that Sweden has reached a point where we have developed a frozen identity in forestry and are completely closed to outside perspectives, but I do argue that, in line with Christersen et al. (2015), actors in this debate are closing the door to new ways of managing the forest, by binding the concept to the past through already existing practices. This implies that the forestry practices that is needed for resilient forests, climate adaptation and biodiversity are already out there, which results in not advocating for the need to change. I argue that the storylines that I have identified in this debate are thus in a way discursively closing the debate regarding the management of the forests, except for the clear-cut forestry context which the Swedish actors are referring to as good or bad.

Further, this analysis shows, in line with Hajer (2009), that actors can gather around the same storyline despite the lack of a common understanding, this implies that the actors in the debate might not be completely aware of their own alignment with other actors since it is not explicitly expressed in a common understanding. Thus, actors may not be aware of their own contribution, together with others, to closing the debate about Closer-to-Nature. This aligns with the argument by Christersen et al. (2015) that discursive closures occur in silence rather than as a planned strategy.

Discursive changes in forestry have been shown to contribute to a certain composition of actors that are involved in forest governance. For example, we have seen a development from a state dominated governance in the 1980's to an increasing engagement of non-state actors from both civil society and private actors. This increased engagement can be connected to a discursive shift from the limits-to-growth discourse to the dominance of ecological modernisation and sustainable development discourse (Arts et al. 2010). Thus, the current discursive shift will attract certain actors to the current forest debate, such as the EU. Drawing on this, the reluctance to EU's involvement might not completely lie in a centralized EU involvement as such but can be a result of the Swedish actor's relation to the discursive shift. If Swedish actors are opposing the discursive changes, they would seemingly also oppose the "new" composition of involved actors that comes with the change.

The possible Swedish opposition to a discursive change can be explained by Edwards et al. (2022) who argues that the forest sector is slow to innovate, are rather traditional, keeps similar forest management approaches over time and are resistant to change. They argue that a social change, which discourses are inherent elements of, can be a "slow and humbling process" (Edwards et al. 2022:9). If we assume that global environmental-meta discourses will continue to influence national forest discourses as it has throughout history (Edwards et al. 2022), and that these are slow changes, I argue that Swedish forestry and Swedish forest politics are in the middle

of a societal change and a shift in the Swedish forestry model paradigm. This can be identified through the use of language in the Swedish debate and its alignment with metaphors that are frequently used by the IPCC and IPBES (Pörtner et al. 2021), as well as through the EFI (Larsen et al. 2022) and in the European forest strategy (European Commission 2021), such as resilient, adaptation and mitigation. These words are recurrently used in the Swedish debate. The use of the same metaphors as IPCC, IPBES, EU and EFI indicates that a change has started, but closing the debate about Closer-to-Nature indicates that the process of change in forestry is indeed slow and humbling, and Sweden is not yet fully corresponding with the global discourse provided by IPCC and IPBES.

The results show that actors in the Swedish debate are perceiving and talking about Closer-to-Nature as “just another concept”, and that this is done in two ways. First, the fact that what is emphasized in the debate is the politics rather than the concept, and second, that Closer-to-Nature is viewed to be similar to other management approaches and thus, is not a very unique concept. Actors try to fill the concept with meaning in a way that covers existing practices. The concept then does not imply a demand for change, we are already doing it. By framing Closer-to-Nature as “just another concept”, together with highlighting the discussion of naturalness, gives the indication of not taking Closer-to-Nature seriously in the forestry debate and is thus something that will not lead to changes in Swedish forestry. This can possibly be the reason why the actors are emphasizing to focus more on the politics. By highlighting that we need to put politics first, it implies that we have everything we need as far as it comes to management methods and knowledge in forestry, and that what is questioned is rather how all this knowledge and objectives should come together in the best way possible for biodiversity, climate adaptation, and the forests resilient capacity.

When unpacking the debate, it becomes clear that management methods are not simply neutral and apolitical, this analysis of Closer-to-Nature forestry has made visible that forestry methods are highly political. My results align with previous research highlighting that there is no escaping politics in sustainable development (Meadowcroft 2011) as well as the argument of sustainable development as an inevitable normative struggle and project rooted in politics (Meadowcroft 2011; Scoones 2016). Drawing on this, the argumentative game analysed in this thesis can be seen as a communicative struggle where actors are filling the concept Closer-to-Nature and related concepts with meaning in a way that are aligning with their normative assumptions, making the debate highly political.

I want to end this discussion with a quote that takes the question of politics and decision making even one step further. This quote illustrates that we as human beings on this planet, are and should be able to make decisions about the planet in

relation to how we want our lives to look like. This indicates a matter of responsibility and blame, given that if we want a healthy planet, we are in a power position to make that happen, thus we are responsible for making that happen. If we don't succeed, we are also the ones to blame.

Somewhere, it is we, as a species, that choose very much what type of planet we want. What do we really want, and I think that, for me, is perhaps the most relevant question, what do we want? - video material, manager in the Nature Conservation Association (my translation)

8. Conclusion

By studying the concept Closer-to-Nature I draw the conclusion that forestry as a practice and subject to debate are in Sweden closely related to politics. The Swedish forestry model with its emphasize on “freedom with responsibility” contributes to a foundational political starting point for Swedish actors when engaging in the debate, making Swedish actors suspicious to outside perspectives with other foundational starting points.

I suggest that further research study the political starting point in Sweden, its foundations, assumptions, and history, related to other European countries and their political starting points in the context of forestry. This could contribute to a deeper understanding of the building blocks in the forestry debate and its different perspectives, in Sweden and Europe. This can further contribute to actors in forestry, as well as political institutions, reflecting upon their own foundational starting points, which, regardless of the outcome of such reflections, is highly valuable.

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Popular science summary

The forest is the most magical, mysterious, and wonderful place. In many countries people grow up with a strong relation to the forest. Maybe you have been building huts in the forest as a little kid or been standing gazing impressively at ants building themselves a home. Perhaps, our relationship with the forest changes as we grow older, maybe it becomes stronger, or less obvious. Regardless, the forest is constantly present in our lives in many ways. Our relationship with the forest is perhaps clearer now than ever - we are highly dependent on it.

There is an increasing demand on forests to meet many different objectives and goals. We want the forest to provide us with a pallet of different things, such as renewable material, biofuel, timber, recreational space, ecosystem services, biodiversity etc. Currently, we are facing a climate- and biodiversity crisis, and the concept of Closer-to-Nature forestry is outlined in the European Union as actions that will increase the forest's resistance, resilience, and adaptive capacity. In short, the forest is portrayed as central on the journey of mitigating climate change and biodiversity loss. In a country such as Sweden, who has been dominated by industrial forestry for a long time, the concept Closer-to-Nature (naturnära skogsbruk) is highly debated on, and the debate involves many different stakeholders. In this thesis I analysed this debate by using a qualitative method that highlights the importance of language through its ability to create and change how we see the world. In this analysis, I wanted to explore the stories that are told in the Swedish debate about Closer-to-Nature. I did this by looking at texts and seminars regarding the debate, I also had interviews for deeper perspectives. Through the identified stories I gained insights into how actors in the debate understand the world and conceptualize things, as well as how different actors gather around certain stories. Through these stories, I could understand the Swedish actors' perceptions of Closer-to-Nature forestry and how they understand the best way forward to sustainable forestry.

The result in this thesis shows that forestry has a strong connection to politics, and that the Swedish political foundation “freedom with responsibility” permeates the whole Swedish debate and is visible through the stories that are being told in the Swedish forestry debate. In the stories, Swedish actors are highlighting a reluctance to decisions coming from the outside, such as from a European level, threatening

the principle of “freedom with responsibility”. The resistance towards outside decisions is visible through the stories that are told in the debate about Closer-to-Nature.

This result is important in the sense that it highlights that politics affects actors' understandings of the best way forward to sustainable forestry. What becomes important then, and is a suggestion for future studies, is to look closely into the politics of forestry, in Sweden as well as in other countries, to understand and reflect upon the assumptions that actors in forestry are building their stories upon that are affecting the management. The results in this thesis thus lay a foundation for future studies, and in the long run, it may contribute to the possibility of future children to build huts in healthy and resilient forests and gaze at ants and other thriving species.

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John, I cannot thank you enough for all the love and support that you have showed me every day through this process – thank you!

May 2023

Isabelle

Appendix 1

KSLA seminar

- Professor in forest ecology and silviculture
- Professor in the forest's ecology and management
- Previous nature conservation officer in the Swedish forest industry
- Ministry Secretary from the government office
- Manager from the Nature Conservation Association
- Chief of forestry from the Swedish forest industry
- Forest historian

EFI webinar

- Head of communication of European forest institute
- Director of a department of Forest Policy and Economics
- Professor in Forest Ecology and Silviculture
- Head of the Land Use and Management unit in the European Commission
- President of ThinkForest
- Director for Policy support in the European Forest Institute
- President of Pro Silva
- Professor in Forest Inventory, Forest Modelling and Forest Management

Clear-cut forestry seminar lectures

- PhD student in forest ecology and management – focusing on biodiversity.

- Manager in the forest industry sector – focusing on clear-cut forestry and the Closer-to-Nature approach.
- Officer in the federation of Swedish Farmers (LRF) with a European and international context – focusing on the European perspective on clear-cut forestry and Closer-to-Nature.
- Senior Associate, World Resources Institute – focusing on international processes in forestry.
- Previous General Secretary, the Forest Association (Föreningen skogen) – focusing on a historical context of Scandinavian forestry.
- Professor in history of ideas – focusing on the human perception of the forest in a historical, present, and future context.

Appendix 2

- Skogsbruk behöver bedrivas på en landskaps och fastighetsnivå.
- Är closer-to-nature samma som kontinuitetsskogsbruk?
- Så då kom det någonting som kallades stå för ståndortsanpassning. och det är att man ska faktiskt ska anpassa sina åtgärder efter de möjligheter som ges av naturen, det liknar ju väldigt mycket det här med naturnära.
- Någonstans så är det ju så att vi som art, vi väljer ju väldigt mycket vilken typ av planet vi vill ha. Vad är det vi egentligen vill ha, och jag tänker att det, för mig är, kanske den mest relevanta frågan, vad är det vi vill ha?
- Användningen av naturligt och onaturligt är rena vilda västen.
- Ordet naturligt borde förbjudas.
- Skogsbränder brukade vara naturligt i de boreala skogarna, och nu behöver vi göra skogsvårdsbränning för att rädda de arter som är beroende av brandstörningar.
- Tror inte på en policy, en one size fits all, man måste se det från ett lokalt perspektiv.
- Kalhyggen utgör ett enormt hot mot den biologiska mångfalden.
- Och då kom det till en punkt när skogsindustrin och de ekonomiska intressena inom skogsnäringen blev livrädda att nu kommer EU och kommer tala om för oss hur vi ska göra. Och det vill man inte. Och miljöorganisationerna var glada att EU trampade in.
- Medan man liksom inte jämföra olivlundar och korrek skogar med våra gran och tallskogar.
- Det är bra att vi har lite olika mål med skogen och att olika skogsägare har möjlighet att göra det på olika sätt så länge de inte är destruktiva.

- Man säger ofta också att jamen skogarna brann förr i tiden och det går att jämföra bränder med hyggen och då blir jag jätte förbannad som ekolog nu.
- Tillämpa ett landskapsperspektiv. Planering sker på bestånds- och landskapsnivå för att säkerställa konnektivitet samt för att bevara och återskapa den naturliga variationen i skogslandskapet
- Förutsättningarna för att ställa om till ett naturnära skogsbruk skiljer sig åt mellan olika markägare.
- Som skogsägare måste du lita på vad du själv vill. Alla de här olika aktörerna vill tala om för dig hur du ska göra.
- Regeringen anser att en stark ägande- och brukanderätt bidrar till att i ökad utsträckning kunna ta tillvara skogens potential för ekonomi, klimat och miljö.

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