

# Intersectionality in the Forest

Connecting Social Diversity and Sustainability in the Swedish Forest Agency

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Lund University Centre for  
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## ABSTRACT

The sustainability problems of tomorrow require a creative approach today. This paper examines how social diversity offers opportunities for dealing with environmental sustainability in the future. It employs the approaches of social sustainability and intersectionality to examine the national strategies for equality and diversity within the Swedish forest sector and how these are relevant and used within the case of *Skogsstyrelsen*, the Swedish Forest Agency (SFA). Through a qualitative analysis of four central strategies and the interview data collected from representatives at district level, this study explored several levels of reality within this context. The results show an over-emphasis on gender in the national strategies which is reflected in the regional work and has had consequences both on how the debate on gender is conducted in the organisation but also what attention other aspects of diversity are given. The focus on rights rather than future effects of diversity is also present in the national strategies but achieving targets of diversity need to be founded on a meaningful discussion of what opportunities or challenges it may involve. This paper is a call to question the persisting images of who works in the forest and to explore the reasons why there is still little diversity within the sector. These findings are aimed to be useful for the SFA as an organisation but also to acknowledge the importance of the social dimension and intersectionality within Sustainability Science in the pursuit of a problem-solving science.

**Keywords:** Equality, Sustainability Science, Transdisciplinarity, Qualitative Content Analysis

**Word count:** 14698

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Swedish forest is part of a complex system of social, economic and environmental demands. The forest holds social values for example to those who spend time there, economic values as a producer of raw materials for a wide range of products and environmental values due to its central role to biodiversity, water issues and more. This results in a system that holds complex problems and requires solutions that address this complexity. This study builds on a call within Sustainability Science to bridge science and practice and to consider the social elements in relation to nature (Jerneck et al., 2010, p. 78). It also builds on the call for addressing environmental challenges through the approach of intersectionality as it has mainly been applied to the social system (Lykke, 2009, p. 39).

Naturally, there are often competing social, economic and environmental demands (Vallance, Perkins, & Dixon, 2011, p. 342) and there is therefore a need to consider what solutions are available to deal with such multifaceted issues. Sweden has 16 national environmental objectives, one of which is *Living Forests*. However, Sweden is unable, at either national or regional level, to fulfil this goal by 2020 (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). This goal states that the values of the forest for biologic production shall be protected whilst simultaneously maintaining the biodiversity as well as cultural heritage and social values. It incorporates issues and targets connected to amounts of dead wood, protection of forested areas and biodiversity (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). Many attempts are being made to contribute towards this goal but have thus far failed (Swedish Environmental Protection Agency, 2012). Hence, there is a need to consider and develop new strategies to address environmental problems. A better understanding of the social elements becomes crucial to this task (Vallance et al., 2011, p. 342). Bridging natural and social sciences is needed to develop creative solutions for these problems (Jerneck et al., 2010).

Therefore, I aim to explore social diversity as one aspect of social elements that could contribute to the development of more creative solutions to environmental problems within Swedish forestry. I am using an intersectional approach to explore this proposition by examining *Skogsstyrelsen*, the Swedish Forest Agency (SFA), as a case. Partly, more diversity in an organisation is meant to increase the level of creativity and create a flexibility to deal with future challenges (Bantel & Jackson, 2007; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004) such as environmental problems. Gender has become mainstream within the SFA but the empirical data suggest that there is a persisting image of the forester as male with a simultaneously increased tiredness of discussions of gender within the organisation. This indicates a need to deal with questions of equality and diversity in a new way. Intersectionality is an approach which considers the connections between these different markers of

identity and thereby assumes that no group can be considered homogenous on this basis (Ludvig, 2006, p. 246). There are of course practical aspects to increasing social diversity where language skills or lack of people with the right competency for the organisation need to be considered. However, much of the focus in the forest sector has historically been on gender which fails to consider these intersections with other markers of identity. According to the HR department of the SFA, the Equality plan became an Equality *and Diversity* plan in 2007. The progress of including more people with foreign background into the workforce of the organisation has been slow. Only 4.5% of the workforce is born abroad or has parents born abroad (Swedish Forest Agency, 2011, p. 3). Although anti-discrimination policies are in place, it may be insufficient to talk about rights to encourage this process. The clarity and understanding of future benefits or even challenges with social diversity may be an important part of creating an additional incentive within the organisation as Håkan, one of the interviewees, describes.

*You should have heard how the discussions went 20-25 years ago when we started talking about recruiting those with a background in biology instead of forestry! There were those who completely dug their heels in. [...] This was handled by allowing those districts who thought it sounded interesting [...] to act as icebreakers. [...] Eventually all districts thought it was necessary. It is similar to what has happened with women. The more women that have come in, the more people realise that it is good and is enriching. Eventually you reach a point when it isn't questioned or is anything strange. That's maybe the experience to bring to other backgrounds, that if you open your eyes to it and try a bit harder, you will notice the same thing. It is pretty obvious that there are many benefits to having those with a different background and a different way of viewing and twisting and turning things compared to the usual. [Translation from Swedish original]*

For the purpose of exploring this subject, I focus on the SFA as it is both a governmental agency and an active part of the forest sector as a business but it is also an actor within the sector that has come relatively far, at least in terms of gender equality. The central question addressed is: Can social diversity be part of solving future environmental challenges? In addition to being addressed through the theoretical foundation, this question is divided into several sub-questions: How are equality and diversity addressed within national strategies and at district level within the SFA? How is the connection between social diversity and future challenges addressed at national and district level within the SFA? What are the theoretical and practical consequences of these approaches? Hence, this study explores the ideas at governmental/national level to then examine how they are implemented at local level within the SFA and to what extent the organisation adopts an approach that is flexible to future challenges. This is done, firstly by exploring certain national strategies which

shows that these are crucial to the direction of the organisation. The analysis of the documents demonstrates that they are overly focused on gender and lack an explicit inclusive vision for the future. Secondly, interviews conducted at district level within the organisation aim to examine the implementation of the strategies. Understandably, the overemphasis on gender and the focus on rights rather than future benefits are to some extent reflected in the regional work as the strategies limit and guide the organisation. This is further confirmed in the second round of interviews where the preliminary analysis of the first round are discussed with the interviewees as this study builds on the call for a science that is participatory and goal-oriented in that it “can be harnessed and used by society in political processes” (Jerneck et al., 2010, p. 80).

Hence, social diversity could be a part of solving future environmental challenges as a purposive aspect of creating an organisation that is inclusive but also flexible to these challenges. Social diversity does not automatically lead to environmental sustainability, however, it holds potential in the bridging of the natural and social systems. Changing the approach towards the social system is in turn connected to the approach towards the natural system. Equality and diversity and the intersections of markers of identity are an important part of understanding the challenges and broadening the approach towards inclusion. It is insufficient to treat the markers of identity as separate as it is only part of what makes a person. It is also insufficient to treat social and natural systems as separate as they are connected in complex ways.

## 2. THE CASE – THE SWEDISH FOREST AGENCY (SFA)

The SFA is a governmental agency responsible for turning national Swedish forest policy into reality amongst those who own and work the forest (Swedish Forest Agency, n.d.a). The agency falls under the Department of Rural Affairs and their activities are decided through the annual directive issued by the Swedish government (Swedish Forest Agency, n.d.a). The organisation is divided into five regions (Nord, Mitt, Svea, Öst and Väst), a forestry section, administrative section and an operative section. The regions are in turn divided into several districts with sometimes multiple local offices for the same district (Swedish Forest Agency, 2010).

The work within the SFA for equality and diversity has taken different forms and, in certain areas, has seen more success than the rest of the forest sector. In 1990, the organisation received state-funding to work with a project called *Allas lika värde i arbetet* [Everyone's equal value at work] and part of this was to map gender within the organisation (S:son-Wigren, 1996, p. 8). At the time, only 2% of the organisation's employees working in the forest were female and many of these felt the organisation was very hierarchical and that women lacked the same opportunities as men (S:son-Wigren, 1996, p. 8). In 2011, 33% of the SFA's entire workforce was female and the proportions were roughly the same for both project leaders and regional managers (Swedish Forest Agency, 2011). This can be loosely compared to the forest sector in general where 14% of the 16500 employees were female in 2004, a reduction from 23% in 1990 (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, 2006). In the year 1990, the Swedish forest company SCA Skog AB employed 9 women whilst MoDo Skog AB had none (S:son-Wigren, 1996, p. 12). The SFA has therefore progressed comparatively quickly when it comes to the employment of women. However, for people with foreign background, i.e. themselves or both their parents were born abroad, the proportion in 2011 was only 4.5% which is a total of 44 people (Swedish Forest Agency, 2011, p. 3). This is the same level as for women in the early 1990s (S:son-Wigren, 1996, p. 8). Today, the central project to involve young people and create an interest for forestry amongst children is called *Skogen i Skolan* [Forest in the School] (Swedish Forest Agency, n.d.b). This started in 1973 and its importance to the involvement of young girls was made explicit for example in the 2012 directive for the SFA (Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2011a) and the Equality strategy for the forest sector (Government Offices, 2011, p. 5). The involvement of other groups is rather implicit in this case.

### **3. METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

#### **3.1. EPISTEMOLOGY, ONTOLOGY AND SUSTAINABILITY SCIENCE**

My epistemological perspective is interpretivist in the sense that the study highlights the ways social actors interpret their own context since human beings act on the basis of this interpretation, the meaning of their own actions and those of other actors (Bryman, 2012, p. 30). From this perspective, the researcher interprets and attempts to contribute to an understanding of certain parts of the social world through the actors within that context and how they interpret their actions (Bryman, 2012, p. 30). This means that the starting point is the actors' own interpretations of concepts, obstacles and opportunities. The actors included in this study are both national level i.e. government and the SFA as a national authority as well as local level i.e. the representatives of the local SFA office. However, the interpretations of these actors are understood through the theoretical underpinnings in order to place it within the scientific frame and explore the context rather than theory as a frame to explain the context.

Further, the ontological position is critical realist in the sense that although there are no absolute truths about the world, some explanations are more plausible than others and the interpretation of what is true are important to understanding less tangible aspects (McCall, 2005, p. 1793). Partly, this highlights the importance of which actors are perceived to be included or marginalised within the formation of the social context. It is also crucial to highlight the opportunities for change, if the order is not pre-defined. Lastly, it also means that the power relationships within this social order are important but are constructed and crucially they are therefore changeable. Forming part of the social order that is within the scope of this study, are therefore the interactions between the national and local level but also their respective understandings and interpretations of equality and diversity and the boundaries and opportunities they set or perceive.

However, the study goes beyond understanding with the aim to contribute to problem-solving science. Sustainability Science is an explicitly problem-solving science and to achieve change requires a vision of a future solution (Lang et al., 2012, p. 26). This is in accordance with Pasteur's quadrant of applied research (Stokes, 1997). According to this approach, the end goal of research being application and use makes it inherently different from the traditional approach as it specifically addresses individual or societal problems (Stokes, 1997, p. 6). What is often present is an explicit focus on problems which emerge within society (Lang et al., 2012, p. 26; Pohl et al., 2010). With practical goals in mind, the Science explores a variety of routes and methods (Stokes, 1997, p. 11). In accordance with these goals, this study is based on the identification of a problem for the

individuals and groups within forest management as well as society more broadly and aims not only at understanding the processes but also at building a capacity to act on such issues in a complex system. I see this study as resting comfortably within these aims but also as a deepening of the engagement with social theory. Acknowledging that no problem-formulation is an objective truth but rather a construct where power relations are at play, it is necessary to remain critical to these claims. For this reason, my aim is to use intersectionality in a way that is concrete and accessible. The problem identified is the dual and somewhat contradictory status of gender in the SFA. Partly, there is an aim at individual level to see it as a non-problem whilst there is a parallel overemphasis on gender within the organisation and at national level which may not be helpful to the equality goals and it means other aspects of diversity may be ignored. Within Sustainability Science, my task is to explore these aspects to understand them but also contribute to encourage reflections over a move towards positive change towards sustainability.

### **3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research design employed is that of a qualitative approach to a case study. The SFA can here be seen as a case for the qualitative study of equality and diversity as connected to opportunities within sustainable forest management. It is focused specifically on the SFA as a unit of analysis which is central to the forest sector but not typical as it is a governmental agency with particular sets of responsibilities and a mandate to perform certain tasks. Case studies tend to be associated with a qualitative and intensive study of one particular location or organisation (Bryman, 2012, p. 67). Although the findings of the case study are not generalisable to other cases they can be used to engage in the theoretical debate (Bryman, 2012, pp. 69-71). It helps to form, so called, theoretical generalisations where the case serves almost as an experiment for theoretical propositions (Yin, 1989, p. 21). In this case it is that concerning the opportunities of social diversity. Through a research process that is guided by theory but open to the unexpected, I attempt to combine the strengths of the case study and the exploration of different methods. The case of the SFA therefore remains a useful contribution to our understanding of the specific context and contributes to the exploration of theory and the development of context-specific solutions.

In the first stage, in order to determine whether an explicit or implicit connection is made between social diversity and sustainability in forest policy today, it is relevant to follow the chain from public policy to practice. This can be seen as a response to encompass the level of structure as well as identity and representation in the intersectional approach (Winker & Degele, 2011, p. 53). By examining both the national and local level, I attempt to contribute with at least a two-level comparison. Organisations are mass-producers of documents. However, these are not neutral but

should be seen as part of the organisation's representation of itself, for itself and also for others (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004). It is therefore a construct written with a purpose and cannot be taken as reports of any true reality (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004). These documents are to be seen as representing a certain level of reality where both the context and the audience for which they are produced matter (Atkinson & Coffey, 2004). Although both international and national law and policy sets the direction of the Swedish forest sector, the boundaries of this study are set to national policy and identifying any connections made between the social sphere in terms of social diversity and future challenges such as sustainability within the natural spheres. Within the national context, central Swedish policy documents have been analysed in this study which outline the action strategy of Swedish forest policy with regards to equality and social diversity within the forest sector. The strategies analysed (see Chapter 6) are central documents to the forest sector that have been chosen due to their particular importance to questions of equality and social diversity. Partly, the perception of their centrality was based on my own judgement while exploring the different sources referred to within the organisation's web based communications but it was also confirmed in the interviews. For the purpose of analysing these documents, a qualitative content analysis has been conducted aiming to detect underlying themes within the documents (Bryman, 2012, p. 557). According to the Ethnographic Content Analysis (Altheide, 1987), they are analysed in order to understand the meaning but also to relate it to theory. Here, categories like markers of identity are used provisionally and with the acknowledgement of their fluidity (McCall, 2005). They are used in order to reveal and speak of the relationship between them and whether there are inequalities at all (McCall, 2005, p. 1785). However, my approach is not one of quantifying inequality but rather complexity in a qualitative way. The analysis then consists of a constant discovery and comparison, meaning categories and variables are both guiding the study and emerging throughout it (Altheide, 1987, p. 68). Therefore, the reports and strategies have been studied by making note of the occurrence of, for example, the different social categories in the policy documents. Going beyond conceptual analysis, there has been an examination of the relationship between these categories and their context. This refers to their reasons for developing strategies of social diversity within the forest sector. For the purpose of developing solutions, the analysis aims to identify what future benefits or drawbacks of equality and diversity that these strategies and policies highlight. On the basis of these guiding topics, themes within the documents have been discerned to better understand the context and to provide a foundation for the next step of the research process.

In the second stage, interview data were collected from the SFA as an extension of government policy but also as an organisation with its own agency, able to construct its own connections and solutions. Interview data are seen as particularly useful for the purpose of a

detailed study of a case (Bryman, 2012, p. 68) and the qualitative interview aims to understand the interviewed and his/her view of the world (Kvale, 2007). In combination with the documentary analysis they form two levels of reality relevant to the research at hand. Here, the focus is on investigating if, at this level, connections can be made between the national strategies and the local practice. It is also an examination of the local perceptions of equality and diversity, both as concepts and as influencing factors in the organisation. The interviews were semi-structured i.e. a set of guiding questions were developed in advance based on the research questions (Bryman, 2012, p. 471) but also on the analysis of the national strategies (see Appendix 1). The order and wording of these questions were mostly followed, however, they were open in the sense that critical follow-up questions were posed when answers need to be explained further (Kvale, 2007, p. 2). This created a flexible interview process responsive to what the interviewee considers important (Bryman, 2012, p. 471). Nine interviews were conducted with representatives from four of the organisation's five regions (Nord, Mitt, Svea, and Öst but not Väst) and one representative of the administrative section, making up a total of seven districts. The representatives interviewed are district managers or other personnel within the organisation expected to have a good knowledge of working strategically with issues of social diversity or sustainability e.g. previous managers or those who have been developing the strategies for the organisation. They were not chosen specifically as men, women or other markers of identity, but rather there was an aim to create even geographical distribution. The interviews were either audio-recorded and then transcribed or merely transcribed without audio-recording when the interviewee preferred this option. The interviewees' identities are kept anonymous through coding with fictive names to not be identifiable within the organisation to allow more personal reflections. The personal stance of regional representatives is assumed to impact on the way issues of social diversity and sustainability are addressed, however, their real identities are not important for the purpose of this particular study. The interview data have been analysed through content analysis as an attempt to align it with the documentary analysis of policy. By examining both occurrence and meaning through categorisation there is possibility for rich analysis.

Subsequently, the data collected have been connected to the theoretical underpinnings to identify weaknesses and opportunities within the current practices but also obstacles and opportunities in linking social diversity to sustainable forest management, and hence to explore possible solutions. Using a transdisciplinary approach, this study assumes that members of different cultures will have different perceptions of what is, what should be and how it can be achieved and then aims to interact with them to co-produce knowledge in order to address the complexity of environmental problems (Pohl et al., 2010). It is an attempt to create a bridge between science and

practice (Jerneck et al., 2010, p. 79). Through co-production of knowledge the perceptions of non-academic and academic actors are considered to form hopefully useful solutions. The usefulness of exchanging and processing the knowledge created has become apparent to me in the process of this study. This means follow-up interviews were conducted with seven of the nine interviewed the first time. The new interview questions were based on the set of topics discerned from the analysis of the first round of interviews (see Appendix 2). A summary of the analysis (see Appendix 3) was sent to all interviewees from the first round and the topics were discussed for the purpose of sharing the results of the first round of interviews but also to create a deeper understanding of their perceptions. By the second round, the interviewees already had a closer connection to me as a researcher but also the topic was fresh in their mind. This is an aim to move beyond understanding and contribute to a co-production of solutions. The results of the finished study will therefore be shared through a collaborative workshop in order for the organisation to evaluate its usefulness to their future work.

### **3.3. REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROCESS**

It is inevitable that I as a researcher and my own goals within this research project have influenced the boundaries I have set and the approaches I have employed. There is, as Haraway (1988, p. 584) describes, a need to go beyond self-criticism to allow constant contestation with a vision for transformation. This involves an acknowledgement of the partial perspective of all knowledge (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). Thereby, reflexivity is the result of acknowledging the limits of science. To locate the knowledge is to be responsible in claims to knowledge (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). This study has been both a process of learning the topic but also a process of learning the practical application of methods. This has certainly involved a need to be responsive to unforeseen perspectives and become “answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). Although the interview questions remained the same throughout, my skills of interviewing have certainly evolved, contributing to more confidence, an ability to listen better and anticipate where follow-up questions may be needed. It means the focus shifted from posing the questions to listening to the answers which ultimately improved the quality of the data collected.

Also, practical limitations to the study occurred as I was not able to meet with all my interviewees. Around half of the interviews needed to be done through an internet based communication system. The sound quality was not ideal which made it harder to respond well to the interviewees comments and the recording was interrupted several times. Also, one interviewee did not want to be recorded which made it more challenging to listen, transcribe and at the same time be flexible with the interview structure. For the second round, not all interviewees were available

and of those who were, some had not had time to read the summary. This meant the quality of the interview was slightly compromised since I could not ask detailed questions about the analysis.

Further, the information I gave to the interviewees influenced the answers. Perceptions of what should be said influence the responses. I provided initial information that the study concerned the national strategies and the regional implementation and it seemed in the interviews as though they had prepared for the interview by rereading the most important ones which in turn influenced the answers to some extent. This was evident in that some answers were, almost word for word, the same as in the strategies. Whether this meant they remained more within the frames of the strategies during the interview than they otherwise would have is difficult to discern.

## 4. THEORETICAL UNDERPINNINGS

### 4.1. SOCIAL SUSTAINABILITY - EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY

In agreement with Vallance et al. (2011), it seems important to highlight the social dimension of sustainability as it has somewhat been sidelined to the debate over environmental protection vs. economic growth, particularly in what can be termed the developed countries. A better understanding of the social elements “is crucial in reconciling the often competing demands of the society–environment–economy tripartite” (Vallance et al., 2011, p. 342). The specific social elements focused on here are equality and social diversity within an organisation such as the SFA. *Equality* tends to be related to gender equality, such as the millennium development goal of the United Nations (Lu, 2012). The concept incorporates aspects of formal equality such as equal rights to both men and women in laws and regulation (Brandth, Follo, & Haugen, 2004, p. 467). It also incorporates the more difficult problem of performance, of for example gender, in everyday life (Brandth et al., 2004, p. 467). Hence, equality in general can be seen as an idea of equal rights and opportunities regardless of gender or other social categorisations. Eva, one of the interviewees within the SFA, describes how the term “jämställdhet”, meaning equality in broad terms, has been used primarily with reference to gender equality and the diversity concept has come in later to primarily describe the inclusion of those with a foreign background. Most often the term *diversity* relates to gender, ethnicity, race, age, disability, sexual orientation and religion but incorporates the normative stance that differences should be embraced (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004, p. 410). Although all people are different in some ways, the concept of diversity is often divided into, on the one hand, plausibly more observable aspects of diversity such as gender, age and ethnic background and, on the other hand, less visible aspects related to education and abilities even though these are not mutually exclusive (Milliken & Martins, 1996, p. 404). The addition of the word “social”, is here used only to not confuse the concept with biological diversity.

As for research into the effects of social diversity, this has been conducted largely within business settings in order to discern the potential for increasing competitiveness (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004, p. 409). Working towards social diversity within business and organisations started as a necessity because of legal requirements, however, it has evolved into a positive and progressive process (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004, p. 409). Progressive here implies that the reasons for working for equality and diversity are found in the future effects of achieving such goals rather than being based on legal requirements or what should be. There are three primary arguments why social diversity is good for competitiveness; (1) as society is diverse, purposefully searching for employees from different groups increases the chance for recruiting the best staff; (2) having a diverse workforce

means employees are able to understand a wider range of the customer basis; and (3) a diverse workforce holds a wider range of information and perspectives which means it is more creative and better equipped for problem-solving (Cox & Blake, 1991; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004; Johnston & Packer, 1987). A heterogeneous group has been shown to be more creative and innovative particularly where the group has high education level and functional diversity (Bantel & Jackson, 2007). These arguments can be said to relate to some idea of what the important differences are i.e. if an organisation is to recruit from different groups, then it must have an idea of what the important groups are. There is also an assumption of the benefits of similarity as it is assumed that those who have similar backgrounds to the customer will be able to understand them better. Hence, there is an implicit categorisation and matching of those who are employed and those who are the customers. This would then also be highly influenced by who the organisation or company considers their target group or customers. The third argument is based on an assumption of innate differences and the benefits that this may have for an organisation.

However, it would be overly simplified to argue that social diversity automatically or only has positive outcomes. An increasingly diverse workforce does not necessarily mean an increasingly talented workforce (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004, p. 412). It is therefore not enough to only recruit from different social categories but rather to purposefully work towards diversity with the aim allowing for future opportunities and problem-solving. Further, it has been shown that individual employees associate working with people dissimilar from themselves as having more negative outcomes (Riordan, 2000). This in turn leads to communication difficulties and fragmentation (Milliken & Martins, 1996). This can be connected to the positive view of the same idea i.e. that the diverse workforce will be able to understand a wider range of customers as they will be similar to them. The strategy for dealing with this type of issue can be assumed to be different if it is in reference to internal diversity or contact with external actors. Hence, it is not an automatic consequence that diverse groups within the workforce perform better than heterogeneous ones or create an organisation that performs better (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004, p. 413). However, perceptions are constructive and therefore changeable and abilities to communicate are possible to deal with through increased knowledge and awareness. Therefore, it should be expected that as ideas of what is similar or dissimilar change, so will perceptions of attitudinal outcomes. As abilities and knowledge of how to communicate improve, negative outcomes of diversity can perhaps be expected to diminish.

However, in the research on social diversity, what has largely been ignored is the implications for the broader context. Although related to business scenarios, it must be acknowledged that social strategies impact on wider society and on the environment and therefore should also be based in social and environmental sustainability. Also, however, the lessons learned in one discipline may be useful, as an extension, in other ones. The arguments for social diversity within the business-setting are concerned largely with the direct or indirect opportunities and challenges to the organisation or company in terms of monetary gain or increased competitiveness. However, the findings in the studies on social diversity within the workplace are also relevant to sustainability problems and solutions. Particularly the argument that a diverse workforce holds diverse information and perspectives which in turn makes them better equipped for solving a diverse range of problems (Johnston & Packer, 1987). This concern for the future capabilities and the opportunities that lie within social diversity is therefore an important part of creating sustainable practices or at the very least create the preconditions needed to solve future sustainability challenges.

#### **4.2. INTERSECTIONALITY**

The intersectional approach emerged as an acknowledgement of the persisting social categories such as gender, class and race but also of the fluidity and constant change of identity of groups and individuals as a negotiation between different social categories (Lykke, 2005). The approach is rooted in feminism (Morris & Bunjun, 2007, p. 18) and emerged implicitly in the 1970s with a critique that feminist theory disregarded the differences of discrimination between white and black females (Ludvig, 2006, p. 246) and feminists became aware of the limitations to gender as a uniform category (McCall, 2005, p. 1771). *Intersectionality* became an explicit concept in the 1990s through Kimberlé Crenshaw's seminal work (1989). This approach is more inclusive and allows for a questioning not only of the existing structures but also of the existing roles in society based on different forms of social inequality. This does not mean that these categories are necessarily uniform. It merely involves the inclusion of a broader set of perspectives in both the analysis and the solutions. This approach reveals the complexity of the social system, and thereby offers a basis for strategies toward sustainability which goes beyond the traditional solutions for environmental problems to also include the make-up of the social system and thereby bridging this gap.

Further, intersectionality focuses on the processes between gender, race, class, sexuality etc. in constructing power relations (Lykke, 2005, p. 8) and emphasises that these "markers of difference/ identity" intersect (Ludvig, 2006, p. 246). Intersectionality is therefore a normative frame where it is assumed that groups are not homogenous but rather there is a constantly changing

diversity within, for example, women as there are differences between each individual (Ludvig, 2006, p. 246). The intra-action means a constantly changing weave of social identities and power relations rather than interaction between separate units (Lykke, 2005, p. 10). The weakness of intersectionality in practice is then the impossible task of identifying all markers of difference (Ludvig, 2006, p. 246; McCall, 2005, p. 1773), however, the aim is to demonstrate the existence of “axes of difference” that cannot be separated rather than creating an exhaustive list (Ludvig, 2006, p. 246). No person can be within all or wholly within one of these positions (Haraway, 1988, p. 586). As Haraway (1988, p. 584) explains through the idea of situated knowledge and reflexivity, the aim is to remain responsive to the unknown and acknowledge the specificities of that knowledge. Although the approach may have started with a focus on gender and race, intersectionality implies that no category is inherently more important than the other, meaning that gender is not necessarily the starting point (Lykke, 2005, p. 13), although it often is. Hence, the categories themselves are changing but also the hierarchy of identification may change depending on the context. Consequently, the markers of identity are not fixed categories but are negotiated, inseparable and potentially infinite.

In furthering the analysis of the connection between humans and nature, the notion of intersectionality is therefore useful to both understand the complexity of the human system but also its relationship to and domination of nature. However, according to Lykke (2009, p. 39), the intersectional approach has to very little extent been used to address environmental issues and the interaction between humans and nature. In accordance with an intersectional approach, gender is merely one variable in the many different forms of societal inequalities and systems of oppression that are connected to environmental change (Agarwal, 2001; Gupte, 2004; Haraway, 1988; Lykke, 2009, p. 42; Rocheleau, Thomas-Slayter, & Wang, 1996; Warren, 1994). These different forms are then part of understanding the interconnections and the processes that construct social differences (Banerjee & Bell, 2007). To effectively address power differences, it is necessary to consider all these aspects to avoid reproducing the differences (Lykke, 2009, p. 42).

Hence, similarly to the approach within Sustainability Science, intersectional studies tend to involve the active pursuit of solutions to complex problems but with a focus on marginalised groups and the systems that create these structures (Morris & Bunjun, 2007, pp. 19–20). Many currents of feminism build on “the vantage points of the subjugated” (Haraway, 1988, p. 583). However, it is not only a negative framework addressing exclusion and marginalisation but an approach for empowerment (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1242). Rather than merely identifying and analysing problems, there is an explicit drive toward more balanced power relationships (Morris & Bunjun, 2007, p. 20)

meant to incorporate a wider perspective on problems and solutions (Hemmati & Röhr, 2009, p. 20). This vision is of course subjective and as Haraway (1988, p. 586) states;

*The knowing self is partial in all its guises, never finished, whole, simply there and original; it is always constructed and stitched together imperfectly, and therefore able to join together, to see together without claiming to be another.*

The researcher then seeks a partial connection with the subject and the research project involves the recognition of, if not the collaboration with, these same marginalised groups in order to develop relevant, effective and inclusive research (Hemmati & Röhr, 2009, p. 21; Morris & Bunjun, 2007, p. 19). As Crenshaw writes “the social power in delineating difference need not be the power of domination; it can instead be the source of social empowerment and reconstruction” (1991, p. 1242). This provokes questions of what the barriers are to social diversity but also what can be done to change these structures. It also highlights the opportunities for reframing the issue of social diversity as an opportunity rather than a problem. Hence, studies of diversity in the workplace can, in addition to being rational strategies for the pursuit of a comparative advantage and profits, also be understood as matters of intersectionality and social sustainability.

## 5. GOVERNMENTAL STRATEGY – ANALYSING POLICY

For the national strategies, the central questions for my study have been concerned with what is included in the concepts of equality and diversity, what the underlying reasons are for a strategy towards these goals and what, if anything, equality and diversity lead to. The first question is not an attempt to identify all social categories that might be relevant but is based on the assumption that what is presented as important in the national strategies matters to how structures are created, reinforced or changed. For the second part, it is examined whether reasons are based for example on legal requirements, future benefits to the sector or other. This incorporates the search for perceived links between the make-up of the organisation and its capabilities and goes deeper into the potential effects of more equality and social diversity. The analysed strategies are as follows;

1) *Skogsriket – Med Värden för Världen* [The Forest Kingdom – With Values for the World] (Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2011b) (hereon referred to as Skogsriket), is an action plan for the forest sector outlining the vision and actions needed to fulfil the goals for sustainable forest management. Within sustainable forest management it aims to balance increased production, maintain biodiversity, fulfil the goal of Levande Skogar, protect social values and ensure equality within the forest sector.

2) *Konkurrenskraft kräver Jämställdhet – Jämställdhetsstrategi för Skogssektorn* [Competitiveness requires Equality – Equality strategy for the Forest Sector] (Government Offices, 2011) (hereon referred to as the equality strategy). The equality strategy specifically addresses equality between women and men and the ways it could be encouraged on the basis of a proposition from the Government (2007/08:108) (Government Offices, 2007).

3) *Regleringsbrev för Budgetåret 2013 avseende Skogsstyrelsen* (Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2012) (hereon referred to as the directive for the SFA). The parliament's directive to the SFA concerns the activities and funds for the coming year and partly it involves the vision for equality and sustainable forest management. Here, Skogsriket, is a central part of realising this vision.

4) *Jämställdhets- och Mångfaldsplan 2012-2014* [Equality and Diversity plan] (Swedish Forest Agency, 2011) (hereon referred to as the SFA plan). The SFA's own countrywide operational strategy for equality and diversity utilises the annual survey conducted within the organisation in order to demonstrate the status quo, the goals for the next two years and the steps needed to achieve these goals (Swedish Forest Agency, 2011).

## 5.1. THE OVER-EMPHASIS ON GENDER IN NATIONAL STRATEGIES

Not surprisingly, all documents refer to gender in some way when defining equality and/or diversity, however, only two mention other aspects. As mentioned previously, the term *jämställdhet* tends to refer to gender equality and two of the strategies are focused explicitly on this. Brandth (2004) describes, with reference to women's organisation, that strategies of highlighting, for example, gender are meant to be a step towards making that marker of identity irrelevant and the strategies redundant. Concerning the aspects of social diversity that are mentioned, the overarching vision, *Skogsriket*, mentions women, men, people with foreign background and young people (Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2011b). The SFA plan mentions age, competency, origin, ethnicity, religion, skin colour and sexual orientation and identity with reference to diversity (Swedish Forest Agency, 2011). Despite this, in all four strategies examined, the concepts of equality and diversity are used in a very limited way. The directive for the SFA focuses only on gender (Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2012, p. 5).

Further, although the SFA plan mentions several different categories of identity it gives them very uneven attention. Only one of the seven target areas in the plan is from the outset explicitly focusing on gender i.e. gender distribution amongst different levels of staff, but apart from the first two, most goals reflect a centrality of gender. The third target area concerns parenthood which highlights the centrality of issues related to gender. The fourth area is where diversity is explicitly addressed and two new activities have been added since the previous plan (Swedish Forest Agency, 2009). However, it only considers nominal aspects of ethnicity when it previously acknowledged a multitude of markers of identity within the concept of diversity. The target is here set for 2014 with no intermediate goals, there is a lack of measurements for tolerance and openness in the workplace but also of a detailed plan for how to achieve the goals. The last area of focus, related to the external work, also highlights how girls should be encouraged through school projects. The other targets within this area, though more general, lack useful descriptions of the status quo and has a less ambitious action plan. As the responses are only presented as a percentage of the total or as a percentage of women and men respectively, it creates a skewed image assuming that women and men respectively have similar experiences. It is also of course only a nominal representation which cannot consider power differences. Regardless, it may be more productive to consider other markers of identity as they may be more pertinent to the experience of the workplace (Crenshaw, 1991). Hence, the aim to increase the percentage of those who see equal opportunities needs to consider not only gender but also additional aspects of identity. Achieving an even nominal representation between men and women fails to reflect distribution of power. Even if there was a consideration for such differences concerning gender it does not account for intra-group differences. On the one hand, it is made explicit in more general terms that no discrimination should be tolerated in

determining salaries. On the other hand, it is insufficient for the national strategies to have such a one-dimensional focus, but particularly for an equality and diversity plan to focus so heavily on gender.

Further, there may be conflicting attempts to highlight gender as a social marker of identity whilst simultaneously aiming to make it irrelevant. In the equality strategy there is explicit focus on gender addressed through education, work and private forest ownership e.g. the vision for education outlines how education within forestry should be made more attractive to women (Government Offices, 2011). The directive for the SFA similarly only highlights the problem of uneven gender distribution (Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2012). It also argues for a solution based on the evaluation and improvement of the courses available and specifically cater to female forest owners and their needs (Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2012). A similar idea is expressed in the equality strategy with an aim to create activities within forestry that appeal to girls and a parallel aim to incorporate an equality competency where students are treated based on non-gender stereotypical norms and values (Government Offices, 2011). Both these strategies are therefore based on the idea of a uniform female interest and need as it is assumed that certain activities or ways of address will be more appealing to women as a group without taking into consideration the intersections of identity that may be present amongst those women. This assumption ignores other markers of identity and demonstrates a narrow view of diversification without significant consideration for educational, ethnic or other differences. In the latter of the examples, the two approaches are potentially conflicting as the activities themselves would be based on gender stereotypical ideas of a uniform female interest and within those activities the students are meant to be treated according to an opposing idea of neutrality.

Overall, equality of conditions, rights and opportunities within the forest sector cannot be addressed by this overemphasis of gender as it produces a narrow view of the unevenness of the workforce within the forest sector. Crenshaw (1991, p. 1242) offers an explanation for the overemphasis on gender in that it is a reflection of the problem with identity politics; it ignores the intragroup differences. Even if the solutions for achieving gender equality are included in the analysis, the strategies fail to widen the scope for inclusion. For Skogsriket, the existing action outlined to achieve goals for equality and diversity is only the equality strategy (Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2011b, p. 6). This in turn only mentions gender apart from one mention of age (Government Offices, 2011, p. 12). Therefore, although Skogsriket mentions gender, origin and age, it fails to incorporate these aspects in the actions. These approaches can be seen as perpetuating the mechanisms for exclusion and inclusion based on the power relations that organise society (Lykke, 2005, p. 14) as they demonstrate the primacy of gender in the forest debate. It is part of a

hegemonic discourse where male and female are complementary and simultaneously exclusive categories (Lykke, 2005, p. 12). What matters is not only what is mentioned but also in what context as the actions meant to be taken on the basis of these strategies are central to the effect on equality and diversity in the forest sector.

## **5.2. NATIONAL STRATEGIES - LOOKING BACK OR INTO THE FUTURE**

The basis for the equality and diversity strategies and plans tends to refer to the rights of people. All documents make references to that people, or more specifically men and women, should have equal conditions and/or rights and opportunities to work in the forest sector (Government Offices, 2011; Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2011b, 2012; Swedish Forest Agency, 2011). The equality strategy also mentions people's right to be active participants in society and be able to influence their own lives (Government Offices, 2011). The equality and diversity plan refers to the values of the Swedish state and the legal frameworks against discrimination in the workplace and highlights that as a governmental agency they should aim to reflect society in general (Swedish Forest Agency, 2011). Also, there are more progressive justifications with reference to aspects of competitiveness and efficiency (Government Offices, 2011). The 2013 directive for the SFA does not elaborate on the justifications other than that women's opportunities to active forest management should be improved (Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2012). The previous directive justified the goal with a need to make the forest sector attractive as a workplace (Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2011a, p. 4). Therefore, the current strategies tend to be justified on either normative ideals of how society, the sector or the organisation should be or on legal requirements. Goals should be specific, difficult to achieve but remain within reach rather than too easy, unclear or too ambitious in order to increase the performance (Drach-Zahavy & Erez, 2002). Therefore, although it is important to discuss and ensure the rights of people, it may not encourage change as efficiently as if there was more focus on opportunities and how to overcome challenges.

Also, there is varying emphasis on expected effects of equality and/or diversity. Three out of four documents mention the expected effects and the focus is mainly on increasing competitiveness. Three documents also highlight the strategy's goal to secure a competent workforce that keeps the sector competitive (Government Offices, 2011; Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2011b; Swedish Forest Agency, 2011). The sector needs to be attractive to both women and men to make use of the entire potential of the national workforce and hence a more equal forest industry is meant to be more competitive (Government Offices, 2011). The SFA's own plan goes further by also making reference to equality and diversity's potential to more generally increase the organisation's ability to efficiently meet its future goals (Swedish Forest Agency, 2011). Additionally, the equality strategy mentions

that different strategies for increasing participation also contribute to more even power distribution in society (Government Offices, 2011). The directive for the SFA is the only one to not discuss future benefits other than stating the aim of increased active participation and equal opportunities for women. Therefore, although there is mention of potential effects of equality and diversity as increasing competitiveness, all documents except one fail to give any reasons for why this would be. For example, the SFA plan does not elaborate on the ways more women will make the organisation efficient in achieving their goals. Certainly if one of the goals is more equality then it will be necessary but if this goal is in turn based on normative ideas rather than any benefits that such change may bring, then the potential for a discussion on how equality and diversity could improve their capacity to achieve other goals is lost. For example, whilst Skogsriket has environmental goals and social diversity goals in the same section of the report the action plans that follow treat them as separate issues (Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2011b). The forest sector then seems to have accepted the argument that equality and diversity leads to competitiveness but the wider effects, or potential, of social diversity are not included in the same way. If production and sustainability goals are meant to have equal weight, as was introduced in the 1993 Forest Act, then a focus on competitiveness is somewhat contradictory and lacks a concern for the broader aspects of creativity and flexibility.

Hence, of the primary arguments for social diversity mentioned previously, the equality strategy is the only one to explain the logic further as it incorporates the idea that more inclusive recruitment increases the chance of having the best employees which in turn would lead to competitiveness (Government Offices, 2011). Of the primary concerns over increasing social diversity mentioned previously, certain strategies are only indirectly addressing the aspect that an increasingly diverse workforce does not necessarily mean an increasingly talented workforce (see Jayne & Dipboye, 2004, p. 412). They do so by referring to a need to involve education. Hence, the strategies and action plans lack an important step in the process as the end vision concerns equality between primarily men and women and are not as focused on the potential of actually achieving this. The benefits and difficulties with increased equality or even social diversity more broadly need to be made explicit. For example, if individual companies are meant to be responsible for creating work opportunities or company placements that take gender equality into account, but the benefits or challenges of such an approach are unclear, it may create a false perception of risk that is unnecessary (Drach-Zahavy & Erez, 2002). This also applies to a potential diversity approach. Hence, there is not a sufficient link made to the benefits or challenges of social diversity.

## **6. LOCAL ATTITUDES AND ACTION – ANALYSING INTERVIEWS**

For the analysis of the interviews, it is relevant to consider how the SFA works towards the national goals of equality and diversity. The SFA is guided in their work by the strategies for the organisation and the directives of the government. Aspects of equality and diversity, e.g. problems and opportunities, are brought forward for example at the district meetings. This is where the needs of the organisation are discussed and the work ahead is planned. More importantly, however, all interviewees emphasise the moment of recruitment as the central moment for influencing and working with these aspects. This is when they are able to choose who to call to an interview, who to have present at this interview and who to ultimately hire. After the moment of recruitment it is the annual survey that stands out most in their work. This is what helps identifying the progress and the potential problems areas within the district. According to Martin and Bengt, in addition to the surveys and the work during recruitment of new staff, there are no active projects on the subject apart from *Skogen i skolan* aimed at involving school children. Stefan emphasises that it is rather when specific situations occur that it becomes important to address matters of equality in a tactful way. The other interviewees do not mention any other active projects specifically addressing these issues. Concepts of equality and diversity are therefore continuously revisited but not otherwise addressed.

### **6.1. IT'S ABOUT THE WOMEN**

The concepts of equality and diversity are generally seen as very inclusive. Maria describes how equality is about some idea of sameness and diversity, on the other hand, refers to some idea of difference. Hence, the prerequisites and opportunities to participate in the work place or society and the power to influence one's own context should be the same regardless. Equality is then about equal treatment in the work place or more generally in society. Diversity refers to a multitude of aspects. Starting with the most frequently used aspect, the interviewees speak of diversity in terms of primarily gender but also of ethnicity, competency, age or other personal backgrounds and sexual orientation. The definitions of the concepts are kept broad, however, in discussing the strategies, the opportunities and the barriers it is gender that remains central. Stefan, Bengt, Eva and Kristina explicitly describe the forest sector as having been a male world. Certain tasks still do not seem to interest women and four of the interviewees point out primarily the operative side of the organisation as still having mainly men e.g. timber purchasing. Bengt highlights that these tasks do not even appeal to most men. Kristina mentions that the interest for the forest declines amongst

girls when they grow older and therefore schools are the most useful tool to target them, raise awareness and interest. What is argued by Bengt, Martin and Stina, is that competency is and should be the main focus rather than anything else when recruiting and building the organisation.

Hence, although the terms equality and diversity are defined very broadly by all interviewees, the tendency remains the focus on gender. A telling image that emerges is that of who works in the forest and with what. Eva, Håkan and Maria, all hypothesise that the SFA appeals to women because it has already created an environment of equality. It was indicated in the interviews that the organisation has come far in dealing with gender equality. Martin and Maria, however, perceive an emerging frustration within the female work force concerning issues of equality and diversity. Martin describes how it has rendered the subject less interesting to the employees and that the women just want to get on with work. Maria describes how she has never experienced any negative remarks from her male colleagues but rather from a female colleague. The overemphasis of gender may then have resulted in a counter-movement where this reluctance is a manifestation of women not wanting to be portrayed as victims or in need of special support in what is otherwise seen as a male world. It is also perhaps an indication that women do not necessarily want to be forced into an assumed homogenous group that is women but are consciously choosing to identify more with the male colleagues. Ludvig (2006, p. 247) offers an explanation for why women want to distance themselves from women as a group in need of help and identify themselves with the positive perception of the male colleagues as difference creates both a positive perception of the self and a negative perception of the other and identity is constructed through the appeals to differences within the classification system. The consequence of this overemphasis on gender may then be the victimisation of women working within the forest sector. Brandth et al. (2004, p. 467) describe the dilemma in strategies singling out women as a group meaning they become outsiders in the context to which they want access. It is difficult to balance the act of discussing specific markers of identity whilst simultaneously allowing for their questioning (Ludvig, 2006, p. 247). This can be said to be founded on the conflict between choosing to emphasise the differences or similarities between men and women (Moi, 2004) which reinforces a dichotomy. Rather than emphasising the particularities of women, and forcing a choice between celebrating their differences to men or fight for the image of sameness, it may be more fruitful to move beyond this categorisation to an understanding and celebration of diversity.

## **6.2. THE SWEDISH CONNECTION**

Kristina, Stefan, Håkan and Anders highlight the tendency for those working in the organisation to have a personal connection to the forest or rural areas which may not be developed in the same way

for non-Swedish people. They are either owners of forests or have grown up with forests. Anders points out that when recruiting, many state that they want to work with the SFA because of their personal connections to the forest or rural areas. He also points to this as an objective explanation to why there are few of a foreign background within the SFA and forestry in general. Håkan, Kristina but also Bengt and Maria mention that efforts towards diversity is then limited by the recruitment base i.e. not enough diversity amongst those who graduate within the field of forestry in Sweden. Stina and Maria emphasise that the geographically bound knowledge concerning forestry complicates the recruitment of people with a foreign degree. Håkan highlights how forests may in some countries be seen as a dangerous place. Anders highlights that in many countries there is little forest which means forestry will not be the career path of choice in the new country. It is also highlighted, by for example Stina, as a question of communication as the Swedish language is crucial to external contacts if these are mainly with the older generation of forest owners. She sees many applicants with foreign background, but the language skills have often been too low. It is here unclear where interviewees set the boundaries between those who are considered to have a foreign background and those who are Swedish. It is likely that different interviewees define this differently. Nevertheless, it points to some practical difficulties with increasing diversity at this point although in some places there seems to be an interest in working in the forest. It means that although the representatives of the SFA want to have diversity, they do not have applicants with what they describe to be appropriate competency.

Hence, despite the seemingly objective explanations, these ideas presented as common sense reflect a persisting image of who works and is interested in the forest. Claims to this being something natural could be seen in the light of the evolution of the debate on equality within the sector. Before the number of women grew within the SFA and within the forest sector in general, there was an argument that women just were not interested (Brandth & Haugen, 1998, p. 437). This same debate can now be extended to people of foreign background or other aspects of social diversity. Much like Brandth and Haugen's (1998, p. 437) study of women breaking into forestry, there are no comments implying forestry should be kept for Swedish people or that non-Swedes are better suited elsewhere. However, the forest sector seems to have evolved from being an arena for men to being an arena for people who are more than 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> generation Swedish, and still mainly men. Consequently, there may be a need to shift focus to other aspects of diversity, to discussions on how to address external contacts with forest owners and the specific roles that so far do not seem to attract women to the same extent. Lykke (2005, p. 10, 2009, p. 42) offers an explanation through the idea of the weave of social identities and power relations that are constantly negotiated and need to be considered to avoid perpetuating the power differences. Haraway (1988, p. 580)

similarly describes how there is a need to explore the creation of meaning, not to deny it, but as an empowering project. It can therefore not be assumed that gender will be the most important aspect of social identity but rather the strategies need to respond and be flexible to how power relations evolve to include other aspects of diversity.

### **6.3. DIVERSITY FOR LEGITIMACY**

Being a governmental body, the SFA is seen to be different to the forest sector in general by all interviewed representatives. The SFA is seen to have come far in terms of gender equality, particularly in comparison the forest sector in general. Stefan, Bengt, Kristina and Stina also express a need for the organisation, due to its specific position as a governmental agency, to roughly have the same composition as society as a whole. Bengt, Kristina, Stina, Håkan and Anders use the expression “spegla samhället i stort” [mirror society in general], however, Håkan argues that it would be very difficult to achieve within their fairly narrow field. This is meant to create trust through representation. Both Håkan and Stefan state that the varying tasks within the SFA compared to forest companies means more opportunities to recruit people with different backgrounds, both educational and personal. All interviewees argue that forest companies are likely to be more traditional in their composition i.e. with fewer women. Hence, the SFA has a different kind of responsibility. These responsibilities are both towards the state and the strategies set but also, as Kristina points out, towards the citizens. As Stina and Anders emphasise, it is not merely about creating good relationship with the traditional customer, who might be mainly Swedish male forest owners, but rather represent a wider range of societal interests. Hence, the SFA as a governmental representative has a responsibility to represent society in matters concerning forest management and through this representation they can be mandated to act through for example *Skogen i skolan*, a project to raise awareness and interest for forests and forestry in schools. All interviewees consider the progress of the SFA to have been successful even though more needs to be done. All, but one, highlight the diversity aspect as needing more work. Although the activities of forest companies overlap somewhat, there is a view of greater advancement in terms of equality and diversity.

### **6.4. DIVERSITY FOR CREATIVITY AND MORE**

According to the interviewees, there is value in creating a workplace with diversity. These are both practical and direct benefits in the work place but also the long-term benefits to decision-making. They tie in with all three main arguments for social diversity i.e. increasing the base for recruitment, understanding a wider range of external contacts and increasing the range of perspectives which in

turn increases the ability for solving problems (Cox & Blake, 1991; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004; Johnston & Packer, 1987). In addition to the broad markers of identity mentioned when specifically asked what diversity means, some interviewees identify aspects of diversity that are more specific to the SFA. Anders emphasises that when employees are asked in the annual surveys to specify if and on what basis they feel they have been subject to discrimination, the category *Other* is the most frequently chosen. He mentions that rather than the grounds for discrimination included in legal requirements, the respondents point to not be willing to move to a different location for a higher position as the basis. Other aspects mentioned are, for example, having representatives of the different offices in the district, also considering those who participate in projects within labour market policies aimed at bringing people back to work from long-term unemployment and further the inclusion of indigenous people. According to Stefan, labour market policy projects tend to have more people with a foreign background and increasing diversity then also becomes a consideration for who belongs to the work place and is included in the social and professional activities of that environment. Stina and Bengt also highlight these projects as an opportunity to consider equality and diversity aspects. They emphasise the potential for increasing diversity as there are more people with foreign background here, although they are mainly men. Stina mentions how the district could be more proactive in requesting a diverse group with female participants as there is a shortage of women working with the tasks they are normally assigned to. This demonstrates the wide range of aspects within the diversity concept but also how it can be context specific.

Also, four of the interviewees use the word “berikar” [enriches] to describe the effect of diversity. All of the interviewees agree that equality and diversity enrich the workplace and the organisation in different ways and see no or few drawbacks to more equality or diversity when directly asked. Some reasons for why one strives for these goals are based on rights which, for example Eva argues that it relates to the basic value of all people and Kristina emphasises that everyone should have equal opportunities. Partly, it is therefore about tending to the rights of the individual where people should not be treated differently on the basis of their gender or ethnicity. Martin points out that people do not want to be treated based on being for example a middle aged man but rather on who they are as a person. Eva, Stefan, Maria and Håkan also bring up aspects of improvements to the work environment as, for example, in the breaks people do not only talk about just moss and lichen but have other interests. It also comes out clearly in many of the interviews that equality and diversity is needed to create an attractive workplace which in turn appeals to the most competent people and benefits the organisation. Others are more progressive, for example Martin’s first response to the question of positive effects of diversity is that it leads to more creativity. He also points out that even though decision-making may take longer, the result will be better in the end if

based on a wider set of perspectives and ideas. Anders argues that if the goals of equality and diversity are met then the SFA will be more efficient and will more easily reach other goals for the organisation. Hence, having different competencies, expertise and background creates the preconditions for a more flexible organisation that can adapt to a wider range of future challenges. These challenges may include aspects of climate change and other sustainability issues. This demonstrates that there are normative, practical and broader ideas of how diversity contributes to the organisation which helps the decision-making procedure, contribute to creativity and ensures the organisation does not get stuck in the same ideas.

### **6.5. DIVERSITY NOT A PROBLEM?**

When asked about negative aspects, most interviewees say there are none as an initial response but have some reflections over what could be negative. Partly, these are practicalities such as the need for separate locker rooms mentioned by Bengt. What Maria mentioned was the potential that taking it too far, for example, hiring people with irrelevant competencies would have a negative impact on the organisation. Stefan mentions the potential for conflict in the work place but considers it highly unlikely and contrived. Describing external contacts, Håkan, Martin and Bengt mention that for example older, male forest owners may react differently to a female forester which in turn makes it more difficult for that employee.

Simultaneously, although they do not see any difficulties there were emerging ideas that similarity is a facilitating factor which implies some difficulties with increased diversity. For example, Bengt mentions that as female forest owners are becoming more proactive, it may be easier for them to talk to female foresters. Stina highlights that a spread in age and experiences among the staff is important to reach the customer basis. Martin and Kristina highlight that part of the equality strategy is having a female employee attending interviews for recruitment purposes. Women are therefore expected to better communicate with female forest owners and courses for women should have female teacher which implies an assumption that women will understand and communicate better with each other. When recruiting, Bengt argues that it is important to consider if they fit in with the group. This connects to the idea that people prefer working with people similar to them and associate negative outcomes with people dissimilar from them (Riordan, 2000). It then becomes an issue of what similarities or differences matter to the employee being able to fit in. This approach assumes that gender is the primary aspect through which people identify with each other. Hence, a female at the interview will naturally be able to see things that a man would not, however, this ignores other aspects of social diversity and does therefore not necessarily contribute to more balanced power relationships.

## 7. LINKING NATIONAL STRATEGIES TO LOCAL IDEAS

As Stefan stated, there can easily be a discrepancy between the national strategies, their intentions and the actual results. It very much depends on definitions and good communication. It is therefore relevant to consider how it has worked in the case of equality and diversity within the SFA and discuss the potential discrepancies. In linking the national strategies to the ideas at district level, it becomes relevant to firstly highlight the documents that were mentioned in the interviews. Most often, if a document was mentioned, it was the Equality and Diversity plan of the SFA. Martin brought this document to the interview. The second most mentioned document was their annual surveys closely followed by the directive for the SFA issued by the Swedish government. The overarching strategy of *Skogsriket* was also mentioned once. This confirms the centrality of the documents analysed previously, contributes to the validity of examining this link and means it is to be expected that the documents will be used as the foundation of how these issues are addressed.

Therefore, it is not surprising that there is an overemphasis on gender both within the national strategies and with the local offices. The concept of equality is seen as more than just gender in the interviews, it is an idea of how people should be treated. However, the centrality of gender is exhibited in responses to other questions where mainly this aspect is brought forward. For example, even though most questions relate to both equality and diversity, the experiences described and the actions taken relate mainly to gender. The order of importance placed on other markers of identity is fairly similar with age and ethnicity being discussed the most. What is not mentioned in the strategies but is acknowledged in interviews are the local experiences of what constitutes diversity, such as the aspect of having several district offices. The overemphasis on gender that has been identified in the national strategies is therefore mirrored at local level and is acknowledged at local level in the sense that women express a frustration with having to discuss this topic.

Moreover, the national strategies provide unclear definitions of what equality and diversity are and weak indications of the opportunities or problems linked to equality and diversity. If the strategies are based on norms rather than an understanding for the benefits, it seems unlikely that it can be efficiently implemented. For the SFA, working with issues of diversity and equality are both a legal requirement and a necessity for the organisation and, when prompted, most interviewees see the relevance of the argument that equality and diversity leads to competitiveness as expressed in national strategies (Government Offices, 2011; Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2011a). As previously stated, many studies of the effects of social diversity have been conducted within business settings to identify the effects on competitiveness (Jayne & Dipboye, 2004, p. 409). Although the SFA is a

governmental organisation, the interviewees generally acknowledge the relevance of this argument due to the existing competition for the best employees. A work place with equality and diversity is a crucial part of creating an appealing place to work. As the interviewees also tend to correlate diversity and equality with increased creativity, access to multiple perspectives and the solving problems for the future which in turn could lead to a more competitive organisation. However, the idea that diversity has benefits beyond creating an attractive workplace in order to recruit the best people could be brought forward more systematically in order to create a purposeful discussion about creativity, flexibility and the ability to deal with future challenges. Also, potential differences between recruitment for competitiveness and recruitment for a socially sustainable organisation which is better equipped to deal with future challenges needs to be explored. This would contribute to the understanding of the plurality of strategies to deal with future environmental change and the consequences this may have for forestry in Sweden. What becomes crucial to more sustainable forest management is making the connection to not only competitiveness in terms of financial gains but also to the potential for creativity in solving environmental problems.

## **8. MOVING BEYOND GENDER – TRANSDISCIPLINARITY IN PRACTICE**

### **8.1. THE IMPORTANCE OF NATIONAL STRATEGIES**

Amongst those interviewed, there is neither consensus concerning the importance of the strategies nor to what extent the initial analysis is accurate (see Ch 7), however, all acknowledge that the ideas expressed in the national strategies ultimately impact on the organisation's work at district level. Maria and Stina argue that the national strategies serve as a foundation or minimum requirements whilst the work at district level is more focused and considers a wider range of questions. Eva points to how equality has become synonymous to gender equality and most strategies focus on this which in turn sets the focus for how the region operates. Håkan argues along the same lines but highlights how more demanding strategies help push the regional work a few steps further. However, he points out that although aspects of diversity are not clear on paper or in action, it is something that is always considered when recruiting. Although Bengt initially states that national strategies do not significantly influence regional work, he later argues that there is no difference of approach between strategies and district level. He acknowledges that an explicit direction in policy is more likely to be considered in the implementation. For example, he agrees that the strategies being focused on gender impacts on how recruitment is done but argues it is not to be seen as a problem. What is therefore clear is that national strategies, the ideas and the language in them do influence the regional work. These strategies serve to frame the problems, the opportunities and guide this organisation towards common goals. These common goals, as specified, become part of everyday work, regional meetings and discussions and ultimately the identity of the organisation.

### **8.2. THE STATUS OF GENDER**

Although the focus on gender is acknowledged by all interviewees, despite a few admitting to not having recently studied the documents, it remains relevant to them and gender needs to be discussed together with other aspects of diversity even though these may be significantly different. Particularly Bengt and Stina argue that just because the SFA has come far does not mean these issues become irrelevant or that the organisation can relax. Maria argues that it remains an important part of achieving the other goals for diversity. Eva highlights how its relevance may vary between different districts. They all argue that the discussion needs to be kept alive. Kristina, however, speculates that the organisation may have become stuck in the focus on gender. Martin emphasises that it is not merely the strategies but also its implementation in the district that influences the feelings towards the topic. However, Stina points to the dangers of the perception

externally that the SFA only employs women which could create a negative atmosphere. Also, Martin highlights that men have indicated in the surveys that they feel discriminated against but rejects this as an inaccurate representation. Whether the survey result is a reflection of discrimination on other grounds than gender or if it is perhaps a reflection of the dangers that Stina pointed to is unclear and Martin does not speculate on this. Håkan agrees with the preliminary analysis of the data concerning the potential problems when ideas concerning groups, such as women, are applied in practice where the individual as a consequence is placed in a group they might not be able to identify with. He argues that the translation of real life into statistics might not be an accurate or always helpful description. Once a phenomenon such as gender equality had progressed, it could be relevant to shift the focus to other aspects. Therefore, it becomes a question of whether the overemphasis on gender is really helpful in creating diversity if it means other markers of identity are sidelined in the discussion and in the efforts.

### **8.3. WIDENING THE SCOPE FOR INCLUSION**

Maria agrees that the forest sector has moved from being an arena for men to an arena for Swedish people. There is an opportunity for the organisation to learn from the successes of working with gender equality when addressing other aspects of diversity partly by shifting focus towards the future rather than to legal requirements. On the one hand, Stina points to differences between gender and other, less obvious, aspects of diversity. Gender is an easily identifiable aspect, whilst for example religion or sexuality may not be. This, to her, means it is easier to focus on gender. Also, pointed out by Håkan and Stina, is the different set of challenges to including people with a foreign background such as language barriers. Håkan emphasises that this is often exaggerated as perfect grammar is not necessary to many tasks within forestry and the bigger problem is that few hold a Swedish forestry degree. He emphasises that as a governmental body they have a broader set of tasks, however, if one is to buy timber then someone with that competency will be hired. This, he describes, as a gap between aspirations of the organisation and the reality of the recruitment base.

On the other hand, Maria sees a situation of carrot and stick in that the responsibilities and the legal requirements form the stick whilst the future benefits for the work place and the organisation constitute the carrot. According to Håkan, it is the purposeful work and the will of people within the organisation which has increased gender equality, however, the future benefits are not discussed significantly at district level. Stina agrees that strategies tend to focus on rights rather than future effects of diversity and states that it could mean that the organisation fails to be clear of where it is heading with these issues and what benefits it has. Kristina reflects on the possibility that if the future benefits were more clearly outlined, it may be easier to reach the district

level. Eva and Martin also agree that the organisation would benefit from considering future benefits of diversity. Eva describes the change in who works within the SFA as previously there were no academics and there was reluctance when the shift first started. Håkan also describes the unwillingness 20-25 years ago when it was first suggested that the SFA should recruit biologists and archaeologists. It was seen as unnecessary for a forest agency to broaden their competency in this way. However, once people realised that it worked well and actually benefited the whole process, it quickly spread in all the districts. The process of including women, he says, has seen a similar development. Therefore, he envisages a similar potential when it comes to other aspects of diversity. Hence, whilst there are opportunities in the need to broaden competencies within the organisation, these needs are limited by the directives for the organisation. Depending on the goals of this organisation short- and long-term, the recruitment needs will vary greatly.

#### **8.4. STRATEGIES FOR SOLUTIONS**

Positive experiences are highly relevant to the organisation's learning about diversity but strategies also play a role in clarifying the opportunities and challenges as well as driving the progress. Eva describes how the experience of having more diversity also creates an understanding for its benefits. This could mean that the SFA acts as a catalyst and creates what both Stina and Håkan refer to as a ripple-effect within the SFA or the forest sector in general. Stina describes how the SFA has an opportunity to be a role model for gender equality in the external work with forest companies. However, this could also be a platform to address other diversity aspects. Consequently, there is a need to make future benefits clearer. Håkan argues that if there was a more purposeful focus on future benefits of diversity within the organisation, the process towards this goal might advance more quickly. As Kristina points out, the strategies define what is important to the organisation as a whole and the future benefits would need to be part of this. Martin also suggests this forward-thinking perspective as a way of avoiding negative associations with the gender debate viewing it as something that merely has to be done. Hence, it would be a way of demonstrating the opportunities and the practical benefits to the district and the organisation from the outset rather than basing it on a responsibility to mirror society and then wait for positive experiences to demonstrate the benefits. As the directives are what specify the responsibilities, these are crucial to addressing such a shift. The potential influence of the organisation is in part delimited by these specifications. Håkan questions where the boundaries of that responsibility should be. Stina points to *Skogen i skolan* and work placement programmes as ways of working with these issues and show both young and those with foreign background the opportunities within forestry. However, ultimately it is the directive that sets those boundaries and forms the framework within which the SFA works.

## 9. CONCLUSION

The social dimension of sustainability has not been given enough attention within the broader concept of sustainability in developed countries (Vallance et al., 2011) such as Sweden. In this study I have explored whether social diversity can be a useful aspect of solving future environmental challenges. This brought me to the Swedish Forest Agency as a case to see its relevance within the forest sector as an arena where social, economic and environmental questions meet. I have therefore considered the national strategies and how equality and diversity are addressed. Further, I have spoken to representatives of the organisation's district offices to explore the connections between the ideas at national level and the action at the local level. This chain is shown to be crucial to the process towards change as strategies are seen to be both limiting and facilitating aspects of working within the organisation. Also, the actions and perceptions at local level are what create the experience of diversity and of dealing with existing challenges but it is also what creates the conditions for meeting future challenges.

The primary conclusion of this study concerns the existence of a focus on gender rather than other markers of identity, which needs to be questioned. National strategies, as the frames that guide regional work, have a significant impact on what happens at regional level. As these are highly focused on gender, the boundaries of regional efforts are narrowed. There needs to be a questioning of whether this focus is still relevant and what the consequences are on the work environment. It becomes a question of how employees talk about the work for equality, their position in the organisation and how it relates to social diversity. Through an intersectional approach, it becomes important to consider markers of identity as interwoven rather than separable and, hence, to problematise this centrality in relation to the overall goals of diversity within the organisation. It is then relevant for future research to consider the heterogeneity of the traditional categories such as ethnic background and consider for example where people migrating to Sweden come from, what the relationship to forests is in those countries and why.

Also, the strategies are, to some extent, concerned with future effects of social diversity, however, this is limited to business-arguments about competitiveness. This study has also utilised arguments from business studies but attempted to extend these to the broader context of society to demonstrate how a creative and flexible organisation is not only beneficial to competitiveness but also may create pre-conditions for solving sustainability problems. There is an agreement within the organisation that diversity is beneficial, but those benefits are not cleared or discussed significantly. There is an opportunity to work more actively in shifting the focus from rights to the possibilities that equality and diversity may hold, in addition to competitiveness, with a long-term perspective.

More research into the impact of social diversity on aspects other than competitiveness would be needed to strengthen the link. Whether a make-up for competitiveness would be the same as for social and environmental sustainability is outside the scope of this research but is a relevant question to ask for the future. Policies concerning social diversity with an aim of social sustainability may look different from those focused on rational strategies of comparative advantage.

Further, I have found that through lessons from different disciplines, there can be a more holistic approach to sustainability challenges. Hence, the concepts of equality and social diversity are not only to be considered strictly within this social dimension, but are useful in the discussion of economic but also environmental sustainability. Through a process of qualitative analysis in several stages and an explicit transdisciplinary ambition, I have examined the SFA and explored the possibilities of equality and diversity in developing solutions for future challenges such as sustainable forest management. I have done so on the basis of social sustainability but utilised ideas that have emerged within the business-setting where diversity has been shown to contribute to a range of benefits for companies. I have employed intersectionality as a frame for viewing the world and the structure of human and natural systems. Through these approaches, national strategies and regional attitudes have been analysed in order to disseminate how these concepts are viewed and addressed. This process has been an examination of the current status but also of what the future may hold. This study has aimed to contribute to Sustainability Science by exploring the possibilities of improving the chances of developing visions for future solutions through social theory and method by combining it with lessons from business. It may be time for Sustainability Science to consider social diversity through an intersectional perspective as a way of viewing sustainability challenges with new eyes.

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## APPENDICES

### 1. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 1<sup>ST</sup> ROUND

#### Inledande information

Projektet handlar om att titta på nationell policy och strategi för jämställdhet och mångfald. Fokus är på förhållandet mellan nationell policy och det regionala/lokala arbetet. Jag tittar på eventuella skillnader och likheter.

Anonyma intervjuer då fokus är på att beskriva det arbete som görs och den inställning som är.

Lös intervjustruktur men vi försöker hålla oss till ämnet.

#### DEL 1 – Definitioner och generella frågor

Vad är jämställdhet/mångfald? Vilka aspekter innefattar de olika koncepten?

Är, och isf varför är, är jämställdhet/mångfald viktigt?

Är jämställdhet/mångfald ett problem inom skogsbruket?

Är jämställdhet/mångfald ett problem inom Skogsstyrelsen? Varför?

Vad är positivt/negativt med att ha jämställdhet/mångfald?

Vilka möjligheter/hinder finns idag för att öka jämställdhet/mångfald?

#### DEL 2 – Skogsstyrelsen och det regionala arbetet

Vilka är de styrande dokumenten för jämställdhet- och mångfaldsarbetet i skogsstyrelsen?

Hur implementeras dessa regionalt?

Hur arbetar man annars regionalt med frågorna?

Hur ser jämställdhet och mångfald ut i regionen? Varför?

#### PART 3 – Framtiden

Nationell strategi och policy pratar om att jämställdhet och mångfald leder till konkurrenskraft i skogsbruk, hur ser du på det?

Är det relevant för Skogsstyrelsen? I så fall, hur?

Hur ser du på framtiden, hur kommer arbetet med jämställdhet och mångfald att utvecklas?

Något annat du vill lyfta fram?

Är det ok att kontakta igen om det kommer upp ytterligare frågor?

[English Translation]

Introductory information

Project is about linking national strategy for equality and diversity to the regional work. I look at potential differences and similarities.

Identities will be kept anonymous as the focus is on the work that is being and the attitudes.

Loose interview structure but we try to stick to the subject.

PART 1 - Definitions and general questions

What is equality/diversity? What aspects are included in the concepts?

Is, and if so why is, equality/diversity important?

Is equality/diversity a problem nationally within forestry?

Is equality/diversity a problem within the SFA? Why?

What is positive/negative with increased equality/diversity?

What opportunities/barriers exist today for increasing equality/diversity?

PART 2 - Forest Agency and the regional work

What national policy documents guide the work towards equality/diversity within the SFA?

How are these implemented regionally?

How are these issues addressed otherwise in the district?

What is the status of equality and diversity in the region? Why?

PART 3 – The Future

National strategies and policy speak of equality and diversity leading to competitiveness in the forest sector. What do you think of this?

Is it applicable to the SFA? If so, how?

What future developments do you envisage for the work toward goals of equality and diversity?

Is there anything else you would like to bring up?

Would it be alright to contact you again for further questions?

## 2. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS 2<sup>ND</sup> ROUND

Stämmer bilden av jämställdhets- och mångfaldsproblematiken som den beskrivs i sammanfattningen?

Stämmer bilden av strategierna kring jämställdhet och mångfald som fokuserat på kön?

Vad har det för effekt? Är detta ett problem?

Stämmer bilden av strategierna som baserade på människors rättigheter och statens värdegrund snarare än framtida fördelar?

Vad har det för effekt? Är detta ett problem?

Stämmer bilden av arbetet regionalt kring jämställdhet och mångfald som fokuserat på kön?

Vad har det för effekt? Är detta ett problem?

Stämmer bilden av skillnaderna mellan skogsstyrelsen och övriga skogssektorn?

Tror du att det lokala arbetet påverkas avsevärt av de nationella strategierna, det språk och de ideer som uttrycks där?

Hur, om nödvändigt, skulle de kunna förbättras?

Är frågorna kring jämställdhet fortfarande relevanta?

Hur kan man undvika att de ses som uttjatade?

Vad kan man lära sig av utvecklingen av arbetet med att få in kvinnor på arbetsplatsen för att utvidga det till andra sociala kategorier?

Hur skiljer sig arbetet med kön från övriga mångfaldsaspekter?

På vilket sätt diskuteras de effekter som mångfald kan ha på arbetsplatsen/i organisationen?

Skulle det kunna göras annorlunda?

[English Translation]

Is it an accurate image of the work for equality and diversity that is presented in the summary?

Do you agree that the strategies on equality and diversity are highly focused on gender?

What is the effect of this? Is it a problem?

Do you agree that the strategies are based more on people's rights and the state values rather than future opportunities?

What is the effect of this? Is it a problem?

Do you agree that the regional work on equality and diversity is highly focused on gender?

What is the effect of this? Is it a problem?

Do you agree about the differences between the SFA and the rest of the forest sector?

Do you believe the local work is influenced significantly by the national strategies, the language and the ideas expressed here?

How, if needed, could they be improved?

Are the issues on equality still relevant?

How can they be prevented from becoming outdated?

What can the organisation learn from the development of the work with increasing women in order to expand this work to other social categories?

How if the work for gender equality different from other social categories?

In what way are potential effects of diversity on the workplace/organisation discussed?

Could it be done differently?

### 3. PRELIMINARY SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS

#### 1. NATIONAL STRATEGIES

The four strategies analysed are central documents to the forest sector that have been chosen due to their particular importance to questions of equality and social diversity are:

- *Skogsriket – Med Värden för Världen* [The Forest Kingdom – With Values for the World] (Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2011b) (hereon referred to as Skogsriket);
- *Konkurrenskraft kräver Jämställdhet – Jämställdhetsstrategi för Skogssektorn* [Competitiveness requires Equality – Equality strategy for the Forest Sector] (Government Offices, 2011) (hereon referred to as the equality strategy);
- *Regleringsbrev för Budgetåret 2013 avseende Skogsstyrelsen* (Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2012) (hereon referred to as the directive for the SFA) and;
- *Jämställdhets- och Mångfaldsplan 2012-2014* [Equality and Diversity plan] (Swedish Forest Agency, 2011) (hereon referred to as the SFA plan).

These have been analysed separate from the interviews but also in connection to them.

#### 1.1. OVER-EMPHASIS ON GENDER

- There is an over-emphasis on gender within the national strategies.
- There may be a conflict between highlighting gender issues and simultaneously neutralizing them.

All documents refer to gender in some way when defining equality and/or diversity, however, only two mention other aspects. In all four strategies, the concepts of equality and diversity are used in a very limited way. This creates a conflict similar to what Brandth (2004) describes with reference to women's organisation where strategies of highlighting for example gender are meant to emphasise gender whilst also attempting to make it irrelevant and the strategies redundant. The directive argues for a solution based on the evaluation and improvement of the courses available and specifically cater to female forest owners and their needs (Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2012). A similar idea is expressed in the equality strategy with an aim to create activities within forestry that appeal to girls and a parallel aim to incorporate an equality competency where students are treated based on non-gender stereotypical norms and values (Government Offices, 2011). Both these strategies are therefore based on the idea of a uniform female interest. In the latter, the two approaches are potentially conflicting as the activities themselves would be based on gender stereotypical ideas of a

uniform female interest and within those activities students are meant to be treated according to an opposing idea of neutrality.

Further, the equality and diversity plan of the SFA mentions several different social categories (age, competency, origin, ethnicity, religion, skin colour and sexual orientation and identity) but gives them uneven attention and reflect a centrality of gender. The first two target areas in the plan address equality and diversity in general, however, the third concerns parenthood which highlights the centrality of issues related to gender. On the one hand, it is made explicit in more general terms that no discrimination should be tolerated in determining salaries. On the other hand, it is insufficient for an equality and diversity plan to focus on gender to this extent. The fourth area is where diversity is explicitly addressed. However, it only considers ethnicity when it previously included a multitude of categories into the concept of diversity. As responses are only presented as a percentage of the total or as a percentage of women and men respectively, it creates a skewed image assuming that women and men respectively have similar experiences. For example, 66% of women and 76% of men felt there were equal opportunities, however, it is possible that those who did not were of foreign background, with disabilities, within a certain age category or other aspects of identity creation. These aspects are not visible in the plan. Hence, achieving an even distribution of power between men and women does not mean there is equality as there are other social categories that may still be marginalised. There is therefore a need to develop a strategy for diversity that goes beyond gender.

## 1.2. LOOKING BACK OR INTO THE FUTURE

- Rights is the main justification for working toward equality and diversity.
- Where future opportunities are mentioned, it is mainly to do with competitiveness.

The basis for the equality and diversity strategies and plans tends to refer to the rights of people. All documents make references to that people should have equal conditions and/or rights and opportunities to work in the forest sector (Government Offices, 2011; Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2011b, 2012; Swedish Forest Agency, 2011). Also, there are more forward-looking justifications with reference to aspects of competitiveness and efficiency (Government Offices, 2011; Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2011a). By forward-looking, it is here meant that the reasons for working for equality and diversity are to be found in the future effects of achieving such goals rather than being based on legal requirements or what should be. Therefore, all but one of the strategies are explicitly justified on either normative ideals of how society, the sector or the organisation should be or on legal requirements. Focusing on rights rather than future opportunities may not sufficiently encourage

change within the sector as if there was more focus on opportunities and how to overcome potential challenges.

Also, three out of four documents mention, but put varying emphasis on, the expected effects of equality and/or diversity but the focus is mainly on increasing competitiveness. The SFA's own plan goes further by making reference to equality and diversity's potential to more generally increase the organisation's ability to efficiently meet its future goals (Swedish Forest Agency, 2011). The directive for the SFA is the only one to not discuss future benefits other than stating the aim of increased active participation and equal opportunities for women. Therefore, although there is mention of potential effects of equality and diversity as increasing competitiveness, all documents except the equality strategy fail to give any reasons for why this would be. Hence, the strategies and action plans lack an important step in the process as the end vision concerns equality between primarily men and women and are not as concerned with the consequences of such a result.

## 2. LOCAL ATTITUDES AND ACTION

The SFA is guided in their work by the strategies for the organisation and the governmental directives. Aspects of equality and diversity, e.g. problems and opportunities, are brought forward for example at district meetings. More importantly, the interviewees emphasise the moment of recruitment as central for influencing and working with these aspects. Several interviewees state that, other than *Skogen i skolan*, there are few projects on the subject. Concepts of equality and diversity are continuously revisited but not otherwise addressed.

### 2.1. IT'S ABOUT THE WOMEN

- The concepts of equality and diversity are seen as broad.
- Most work and discussions concern gender.
- Over-emphasis on gender has created a counter-movement.

The concepts of equality and diversity are generally seen as very inclusive amongst the interviewees. One interviewee states that equality is about some idea of sameness where prerequisites and opportunities to participate and power to influence should be equal. It is also about equal treatment in the work place or more generally in society. Diversity, according to the same interviewee, refers to some idea of difference. Starting with the most frequently used aspect, the interviewees speak of diversity in terms of gender but also of ethnicity, competency, age or other personal backgrounds and briefly of sexual orientation.

Hence, the concepts are kept broad. However, in discussing the strategies, the opportunities and the barriers, it is gender that remains central and which has been worked with for a long time. A telling image that emerges is of who works in the forest and with what. Several mention the idea of the forest sector as a male world which has previously not interested women and still certain tasks do not interest women. Some interviewees hypothesise that the SFA appeals to women because it has already created an environment of equality. Several interviewees, however, perceived an emerging frustration within the female work force concerning issues of equality and diversity. The lack of interest in the subject was indicated and that the women just want to get on with their work. Brandth et al. describe the dilemma in strategies singling out women as a group meaning they become outsiders in the context to which they want access (2004, p. 467). This can be said to be founded on the conflict between choosing to emphasise differences or similarities (Moi, 2004) and reinforces the dichotomy between women and men. The overemphasis of gender may therefore have resulted in a counter-movement where this reluctance is a manifestation of women not wanting to be portrayed as victims, in need of special support in what is otherwise seen as a male world, and being forced into an assumed homogenous group. The consequence of this overemphasis on gender may, contrary to the aim, be the victimisation of women in the forest sector.

## 2.2. THE SWEDISH CONNECTION

- Mainly Swedish people are interested in forestry i.e. those with foreign background do not choose this field.
- There are similarities between early discussions on bringing women in and more recent ones concerning those with a foreign background.

Interviewees express that people working within forestry tend to have a personal connection to the forest. They are either owners of forests or have grown up with forests. Before the number of women grew within the SFA and within the forest sector in general, there was the argument that women just were not interested (Brandth & Haugen, 1998, p. 437). Much like Brandth and Haugen's study of women breaking into forestry (1998, p. 437), there are no comments implying forestry should be kept for Swedish people or that non-Swedes are better suited elsewhere. These ideas reflect a persisting image of who works and is interested in the forest which may in turn influence who it appeals to. It needs to be emphasised that, although it may help, it is certainly not a necessity for people to own forest or know much about it to be able to attend university programs within the field. Rather, it becomes relevant to ask why those with foreign background are not represented to

the same extent within the SFA. If it does relate to that few have a history of owning forest, then it may be interesting to study why this is. Hence, the forest sector seems to have evolved from being seen as an arena for men to being an arena for Swedish people and there are possible lessons to be learned from the progress within gender issues.

Further, several interviewees mention that efforts towards diversity is limited by the recruitment base i.e. not enough diversity among those who graduate within the field of forestry in Sweden. The geographically bound knowledge concerning forestry complicates the recruitment of people with a foreign degree. It is also a question of communication as the Swedish language is crucial to external contacts. It is here unclear where the interviewees set the boundaries between those who are considered to have a foreign background and those who are Swedish. It is likely that different interviewees define this differently. Nevertheless, it points to some practical difficulties with increasing diversity at this point. It means that although the representatives of the SFA want to have diversity, they do not have applicants with what they describe to be appropriate competency. However, some interviewees have pointed to Arbetsmarknadspolitiska åtgärder as a potential for increasing diversity as there are more people with foreign background here, although they are mainly men.

### 2.3. DIVERSITY FOR LEGITIMACY

- The SFA has more opportunities and a responsibility to work with issues of equality and diversity.
- The SFA has come far compared to the rest of the forest sector, partly because of their position as a governmental agency.

Being a governmental body, the SFA is seen to be different to the forest sector in general. The specific position of the SFA means there is a need and a responsibility for an internal composition that mirrors society in general as much as possible to create trust through representation. Several interviewees state that the varying tasks compared to forest companies means more opportunities to recruit people with a different educational background within the SFA which may increase the opportunities of recruiting people with different personal and professional backgrounds. Several interviewees mention that the SFA also has a different kind of responsibility. These responsibilities are both towards the state and the strategies set but also towards the citizens. The SFA, as a governmental representative, needs and has a different legitimacy when acting within these issues through for example *Skogen i skolan*. When asked, the interviewees acknowledge a need to work more with aspects of equality and diversity but also emphasise that they have come far, particularly

in comparison to many forest companies but also compared to certain external contacts. Although their activities overlap somewhat, they see a greater advancement in terms of working towards goals of equality and diversity but also a simultaneous development where women seem more likely to want to work for the SFA.

#### 2.4. DIVERSITY FOR CREATIVITY

- There is agreement that diversity is positive
- Creativity and the inclusion of more perspectives are seen as positive effects.

All of the interviewees agree that equality and diversity enrich the workplace and the organisation in different ways and see no or few drawbacks. Some reasons are based on rights whilst others are more forward-looking. They bring up aspects of improvements to the work environment as, for example, in the breaks people have more varying interests. There are also broader ideas of contributing with different perspectives that help the decision-making procedure, contribute to creativity and ensures the organisation does not get stuck in the same ideas. One interviewee stated that though it may be more difficult to make decisions, they will be better ones in the end if emerging from a wider set of perspectives and ideas. It also comes out clearly in the interviews that equality and diversity is needed to create an attractive workplace which in turn appeals to the most competent people and benefits the organisation. Having different competencies, expertise and background creates the preconditions for a more flexible organisation that can adapt to a wider range of future challenges.

Hence, there is a value in creating a workplace with diversity. The interviewees tie in with three main arguments for social diversity i.e. increasing the base for recruitment, understanding a wider range of external contacts and increasing the range of perspectives which in turn increases the ability for solving problems (Cox & Blake, 1991; Jayne & Dipboye, 2004; Johnston & Packer, 1987). In addition to the broad categories mentioned when specifically asked what diversity means, three interviewees identify aspects of diversity that are more specific to the SFA. The first is having representatives of the different offices in the district, the second is considering those who participate in labour market policy projects aimed at bringing people back to work from long-term unemployment and the third is the inclusion of indigenous people in Sweden. Increasing diversity then also becomes a consideration for who belongs to the work place and is included in the social and professional activities of that environment. This demonstrates the wide range of aspects within the diversity concept but also how it can be highly context specific.

## 2.5. DIVERSITY NOT A PROBLEM?

- Diversity is not seen as a problem.
- Similarity is seen as a facilitator.

When asked about negative aspects, most interviewees said there were none as an initial response but went on to have some reflections on the matter. Partly, these were practicalities such as the need for separate locker rooms but it seemed that otherwise they felt negative aspects would be unlikely. However, describing external contacts with for example older, male forest owners, two interviewees mention that these may react differently to a female forester rather than a male one which in turn makes it more difficult for the female employee. On the other hand, it is also mentioned that as female forest owners are becoming more proactive, it may be easier for them to talk to female foresters. Therefore, although they do not see any difficulties within the organisation, a few expressed that similarity is a facilitating factor both internally and in external contacts e.g. forest owners. This implies some difficulties with increased diversity. When recruiting, one respondent argues that it is important to consider if they fit in with the group. This connects to the idea that people prefer working with people similar to them and associate negative outcomes with people dissimilar from them (Riordan, 2000). It then becomes an issue of what similarities or differences matter to the employee being able to fit in.

## 3. LINKING NATIONAL STRATEGIES TO LOCAL IDEAS

- The national strategies analysed are also central to the regional work of the SFA.
- The national strategies are reflected in the regional work which shows their impact.
- Local experiences matter to the implementation of the national strategy.

As one of the interviewees stated, there can easily be a discrepancy between the national strategies, their intentions and the actual results. It is therefore relevant to consider how it has worked in the case of equality and diversity within the SFA and discuss the potential discrepancies. In linking the national strategies to the ideas at district level, it becomes appropriate to highlight that the documents analysed were mostly the ones mentioned in the interviews. This confirms the centrality of the documents and means their content can be expected to significantly impact on how these issues are addressed.

Therefore, the overemphasis on gender is not surprising as it is both in the national strategies and the local offices. The concept of equality is seen as more than gender in the

interviews, it is an idea of how people should be treated. However, the centrality of gender is exhibited in other responses where issues of gender are mainly emphasised. What is not mentioned in the strategies but is acknowledged in interviews are local experiences of what constitutes diversity, such as having several district offices. The overemphasis on gender identified in the national strategies is therefore mirrored at local level and is acknowledged partly in the frustration of having to continuously discuss this topic.

Moreover, the national strategies provide unclear definitions of equality and diversity and weak indications of opportunities or problems linked to equality and diversity. If strategies are based on norms rather than an understanding for the benefits, the efficient implementation seems unlikely. However, at local level, the opportunities are clearer. For the SFA, working with issues of diversity and equality are both a legal requirement and a necessity for the organisation. Most interviewees see the relevance for the SFA that equality and diversity leads to competitiveness, as expressed in national strategies (Government Offices, 2011; Ministry for Rural Affairs, 2011a). A work place with equality and diversity is seen as crucial to an appealing place to work which attracts the best people. The interviewees tend to also correlate diversity with increased creativity, access to multiple perspectives and solving problems for the future.