

Passing down the forest problem

A case of collaborative governance in Swedish forest policy

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Abstract

In transitioning to a sustainable society and ensuring a growing bioeconomy, a National Forest Program (NFP) has been adopted in Sweden. In order to meet the goals set out in the NFP, forest programs have been decentralized to regional authorities in which collaborative governance should be the guiding instrument. This thesis investigates the effectiveness of new forms of decentralization, through the unexplored case of the Regional Forest Program in Norrbotten. The politicized IAD framework has been adopted to answer to what extent collaborative governance manages to address issues of polarization and sustainability conflicts characterizing Swedish forest management. Based on stakeholder interviews and official documents, the study explores how aspects of power, context and institutions interact in producing certain outcomes, such as imbalances in rule enforcement and power relations. Results show discrepancies between policy intentions and outcomes. The use of collaborative governance has resulted in policy confusion, characterized by a lack of coordination and capacity in dealing with forest conflicts. Prevailing production discourses with storylines on 'multifunctionality' have reinforced power asymmetries and polarization. The study concludes by providing policy recommendations focusing on how to improve collaboration, specifically by emphasizing a greater responsibility for state authorities.

Key words: forest policy, collaborative governance, sustainability conflicts, IAD framework, discourse

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Abbreviations and definitions

CAB: County Administrative Board, specifically referring to Norrbotten

MEI: Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation

NFP: National Forest Program

NRM: Natural Resource Management

RFP: Regional Forest Program, specifically referring to Norrbotten

SFA: Swedish Forest Agency

Concepts and definitions

Collaborative governance: “the process and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres to carry out public purposes that could not otherwise be accomplished” (Emerson and Nabatchi, 2015:18).

Polarization: politics and/or individuals “[...]divided into small number of factions with high internal consensus and sharp disagreement between them” (Flache and Macy, 2011:149).

Politicization: “[...] the demand for, or the act of, transporting an issue or an institution into the sphere of politics – making previously unpolitical matters political” (Zürn, 2019:977-978)

1 Introduction

Forest has in the last couple of years gained increased political attention in climate debates, both on a national level as well as on the global level. During the COP26 meeting in Glasgow, the world witnessed more than 100 world leaders signing an agreement to end deforestation by 2030 (Rannard and Gillett, 2021). While the unsustainable management of global forests have been pointed out as one of the most serious drivers of climate change, forests are also recognized as key resources in fighting climate change by transitioning fossil-dependent societies into carbon-neutral states. The role, use and potential of forests has thus seen an uprising in climate politics. How we govern, manage, and use forests are therefore framed both in terms of climate change *accelerators* as well as climate change *solutions*.

With a growing interest in the use value of global forests, we are now witnessing an escalation of conflict of interests regarding the management of them. Traditional approaches to forest management as mainly focused on its production value are now in competition with other interests, framing forest in terms of a climate change mitigation tool, as a resource for ecosystem services, and for its recreational purposes. This have forced policymakers to rethink past decision-making procedures to avoid land-use conflicts and increased polarization. Due to this, we can now see how new modes of governance have gained importance within the forest sector, influenced by macro political ideas adhering to good governance principles and sustainable development (Sergent et al., 2018).

This reflects much of what Elinor Ostrom (2015) refers to in her theorization of polycentric governance and collective action as instruments in managing natural resources and in dealing with common-pool resource problems. The need for decentralization and collaboration have been motivated by current trends of polarization and sustainability conflicts characterizing forest management. While proponents of decentralized models emphasize the gains in terms of increased effectiveness and legitimacy since policy design and implementation develops into co-management between stakeholders and agencies committed and connected to the specific issue (Andersson et al., 2004), others have provided warning examples of cases where collaborative governance have increased policy confusion and polarization. This suggests a need for further examination of the effectiveness of collaborative governance in answering to issues of increased polarization and sustainability conflicts in forest management.

1.1 Sweden and the National Forest Program

In 2018, the Swedish government adopted a National Forest Program (NFP), for the first time. The main aim of the strategy is to ensure a growing bioeconomy and a sustainable society with the overarching vision being, “Forests – our ‘green gold’ – will contribute to creating jobs and sustainable growth throughout the country, and to the development of a growing bioeconomy” (Näringsdepartementet, 2018a:11). According to the NFP, the Swedish forest has a key role in mitigating climate change, contributing to a sustainable economy and in building a resilient welfare state. The strategy centers around five pillars (see figure 1), which are considered crucial in achieving the stated vision as well as to contribute to the two “co-equal” objectives of the NFP, “to provide a valuable yield and at the same time preserve biodiversity” (Näringsdepartementet, 2018b). The Swedish forest is an important contributor to the national economy, but also stores important social, cultural and environmental interests and values. The policy is an attempt to lay the groundwork for long-term solutions built on consensus and cooperation to encourage sustainable biobased industries and green growth. It is also an attempt to resolve sustainability trade-offs as well as in finding middle ways to avoid polarization. To meet the goals set out in the NFP, the Regional Forest Programs (RFP) play a crucial role. All counties in Sweden have been tasked with developing and implementing RFPs, tailored to their specific environment and local needs. However, the RFPs still serve under the national strategy and should realize the national goals. The regional process should be guided through collaborative governance and ongoing dialogue between forest actors and players connected to the specific context (Näringsdepartementet, 2018a).

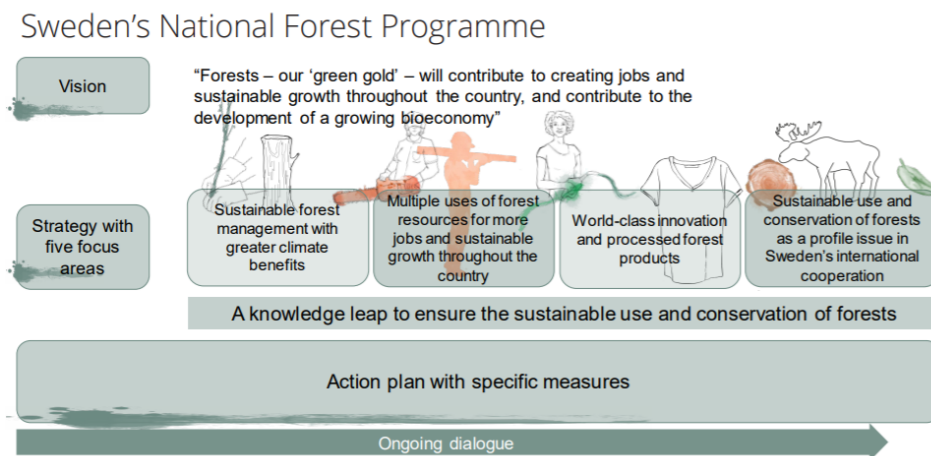


Figure 1. Sweden's National Forest Program (Näringsdepartementet, 2018b)

Collaborative governance and strategic dialogue are considered two key tools and policy instruments in achieving the regional as well as the national forest program. Collaborative governance implies that the state together with public authorities and institutions should not be the sole actors determining the policy objectives and outcomes in the forest strategy. Actors, businesses, non-commercial interests, and citizens should instead be treated as equal partners in the decision-making procedure. This partnership should further be guided by an ongoing dialogue in

which all parties have a central role in determining the future of Swedish forest governance and management.

Although attempts of broadening representation and participation in Swedish forest policy, research have shown that new modes of governance tend to follow an economic rationale, and marginalize social and environmental claims (Beland Lindahl et al., 2015). With new forms of governance, steering mechanisms, and a dominating view on forests as multifunctional, the question remains to what extent collaborative forms of governance manage to undertake the various roles and conflicts ascribed to the Swedish forest. Specifically, research needs to enquire if participatory approaches can lead to more sustainable and equitable outcomes, for people and nature, and if so, how? Furthermore, how can this be accomplished without risking social and environmental backlashes?

1.2 Purpose and specific aim

Derving from this contested issue, the aim of the thesis is to examine collaborative governance as policy instrument in realizing the goals set out in the NFP. Specifically in addressing the economic, social, and environmental sustainability conflicts characterizing forest management in Sweden. This will be done by particularly focusing on the county of Norrbotten, the largest forest region in the country. By studying their RFP in realizing the NFP, this study aims to investigate the processes of collaborative governance and forest governance in action. By aiming to understand the process in itself and whether policy outcomes match the intentions, I aim to fill in a gap and illuminate what collaborative governance in this matter actually means. How does the final regional forest strategy come to play, who's influence and interest matters, and and to what extent can it answer to polarization and the sustainability conflicts forest management stores. I motivate this choice of focus based on the notion that national states still are considered the main actors and the central political authority over forest policy in Europe (Sotirov and Storch, 2018). However, much is still unknown considering the effects and policy outcomes of the new modes of decentralization and governance in forest policy that have been introduced across Europe, in this specific case, in Norrbotten, Sweden. Following this, three research questions have been formulated to guide the thesis:

- What does collaborative governance mean and how does it play out?
- To what extent does collaborative governance address the economic, social, and environmental sustainability conflicts within Swedish forest policy, and how can this be improved?
- In what way does collaborative governance affect polarization, and why?

1.2.1 Analytical procedure and structure

To investigate the application of collaborative governance in Norrbotten's RFP the analysis borrows from the politicized Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework presented by Clement (2010). In line with Clement, I have added the two external variables of politico-economic context and discourses to address power dynamics shaping the collaborative governance and dialogue between actors. I argue that it is imperative to understand how power is distributed, furthermore how political and economic preferences motivate actor's decisions within a specific setting and set of rules.

Insights from research analyzing decentralized natural resource models building on the IAD framework have shown that by placing power rather than institutions at the core of the analysis enables the examination of the way power relations influences the governance situation, the actors as well as the decision making (Brodrechtova, 2018; Clement and Amezaga, 2009; Whaley and Weatherhead, 2014). Inspired by this, the variables of politico-economic context and discourses are treated as centerpieces in this paper. The variables of rules-in-use, attributes of the community and biophysical conditions originating from Elinor Ostrom's (2015) approach are treated as crucial for setting the stage as well as in outlining how their interactions with each other affect the politico-economic context and discourse, and vice versa. Building on collected data consisting of fifteen interviews with a mix of experts, government officials and local stakeholders together with a collection of approximately 90 official memos and policy papers, the politicized IAD framework have been used in structuring the analysis and in providing questions guiding the research, such as: *what beliefs and which incentives have driven actors' decisions; and in what way have institutions, politico-economic context and discourses shaped these beliefs and incentives?*

The framework illuminates how certain external variables, a particular set of rules-in-use and existing discourses affect power distribution and policy outcomes (Clement, 2010; Clement and Amezaga, 2009). Hence, the use of the politicized IAD framework guides the examination of the functioning and effectiveness of the RFP, which in this paper is considered an example of a system for governing natural resources.

1.2.2 Relevance and scope

I situate this paper within research adhering to critical institutionalism, political ecology, and decentralization studies. What these approaches particularly have contributed with, are the various insights and models of analyzing natural resources management (NRM) and systems of environmental governance (i.e., Andersson et al., 2006; Arts, 2014; Blaikie, 2006; Cleaver and Whaley, 2018; de Koning, 2014; Forsyth, 2003; Ribot et al., 2006). However much of this research take place in a development context, primarily examining case studies from a global South setting. While current and historical trajectories of managing global natural resources through oppressive systems of colonialism and imperialism highlight the continued importance of these studies (Goldman, 1997), there are aspects within the field less explored. In particular, natural resource governance research has tended to focus

much on local and indigenous communities' struggle in securing land and property rights in a politico-economic context of weak institutions, corruption and patronage systems (Blaikie, 2006; Nelson and Agrawal, 2008). Far fewer studies have explored resource governance in a European context, with multiple institutional and policy layers, where actors participating have strong political and economic interests that are strongly embedded in systems of production. Thus, it is within this apparent research gap I motivate the study of collaborative governance in Swedish forest policy.

For the purpose of this thesis, I define collaborative governance in line with Kirk Emerson and Tina Nabatchi (2015:18) as "the process and structures of public policy decision making and management that engage people across the boundaries of public agencies, levels of government, and/or the public, private and civic spheres to carry out public purposes that could not otherwise be accomplished". Several studies have explored collaborative governance in NRM. While proponents of collaborative governance claim that through decentralization, outcomes will be more flexible, efficient, participatory, accountable, and equitable since communities, local individuals and politicians are better acquainted with local needs and their environment (Andersson et al., 2004), others have provided deviating examples, emphasizing risks of increased policy confusion and polarization (Beland Lindahl et al., 2015) There are thus research particularly focusing on developing principles and methods for collaborative governance to be successful. These have specifically emphasized the importance of stakeholders feeling motivated to participate; committed to the cause and willing to obey by the rules and decisions enforced; as participating on equal terms; and that they experience it as worthwhile and as in giving them something in return. In general, this requires what Johansson (2018:10) suggests as: "inclusive stakeholder participation, transparency of decisions, awareness of collective responsibility, trust building and measurable outcomes".

However, some studies have shown that efforts of collaborative governance tend to fail or even risk exacerbate power asymmetries due to lack of balance (both in numerical terms as well in terms of representation) and failure of mitigating trade-offs between various sustainability goals (Johansson, 2016; Saarikoski et al., 2012). Studies covering recent modes of decentralization and forest governance in a Swedish context have for example showed that even though ambitions of broadening decision-making in forest policy and management, they have remained relatively closed with primarily already established and well-organized forestry actors dominating policy implementation and outcomes, sidelining a large group of local actors and forest users lacking means of policy influence (Beland Lindahl et al., 2013; 2015).

Research on collaborative governance in Swedish forest policy (see particularly Johansson, 2016; 2018; Johansson et al., 2020; Zachrisson and Beland Lindahl, 2013) together with expert interviews have informed this paper in terms of aspects and principles to consider when studying collaboration in forest governance. Specifically, in order to secure longstanding legitimacy, processes need to be based on transparency, equal participation and accountability. Furthermore, well-defined rules, explicit terms for participation, and most importantly, a clear stated purpose

are key requirements. It is with the notion that much of recent literature on collaborative processes in Sweden have tended to focus on the national level, with little regards to the regional processes, that I motivate my focus on the Regional Forest Program in the county of Norrbotten and their application of collaborative governance, that yet stands unexplored.

2 Previous research

This literature review aims to review and indicate what the state of knowledge is with respect to the purpose of the thesis, particularly by illustrating the contributions and reasonings behind NRM and resource governance. A large body of literature has inspired this thesis, specifically those adhering to commons literature, decentralization studies and political ecology. They all offer important insights on institutional arrangements and systems of governance considering the management of natural resources. The section will start by introducing institutional perspectives on resource governance to subsequently discuss more complex notions that involves perceptions on decentralization, power, and discourse. The review is considered the backbone for the theoretical framework later introduced.

2.1 Theorizing institutions and commons

Much of the commons literature refer back to Garrett Hardin's Tragedy of the commons published in 1968. Back then, governing commons such as open-access pastures or lakes seemed impossible without government regulation or privatization because of the presumption that collective action was bound to fail due to individuals' rational character and strive towards self-maximization and willingness to free-ride (Hardin, 1968). Successively, large bodies of literature challenging this assumption have flourished, one of the more prominent one being Elinor Ostrom's extensive work on polycentrism and self-government (Ostrom, 1999; 2005; 2015). By developing the Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework, Ostrom demonstrated that the commons dilemma was an oversimplification of human nature and that communities and individuals throughout history have succeeded in managing resources through self-government without risking exploitation or resource degradation (Ostrom, 2015; Dietz et al., 2003). While Ostrom grounded the IAD framework on the principals of game theory and rational choice theory, she expanded it to illustrate how aspects such as institutions, rules, complexity, and norms affect NRM, further policy processes (Ostrom, 2005). The framework has particularly been employed to studies of common pool resources (CPR), illustrating how these could be managed on a collective basis, highlighting the importance of functioning institutional arrangements and favorable conditions such as correct and available information, mutual understanding of rule enforcement, shared norms, and trust (Dietz et al., 2003).

Although Hardin-like tragedyists and Ostrom-like anti-tragedyists both acknowledge the worlds' commons are in crisis, they conceptualize the problems through a particular lens focusing on communal disintegration, institutional breakdown, social indifference, but lack aspects of power and conflict (Cleaver and Whaley, 2018; Whaley, 2018). This have been especially recognized by a second school of thought, drawing from more critical fields of social science including anthropology, sociology and development studies, termed by Cleaver (2012) as 'critical institutionalism'. While 'mainstream institutionalism' suggest that institutions for governing commons are created or altered by individuals through deliberative design (Dietz et al., 2002; Ostrom, 1999), critical institutionalism maintain that systems of resource governance are socially constructed, by which social reality and meaning is historically and contextually set, and evolves through the interaction between individuals part of a group or society (Cleaver and Whaley, 2018; Hall et al., 2014; Cleaver and de Koning, 2015).

From a critical institutionalist perspective, the analysis of resource governance requires the examination of meanings and values part of the systems and the power relations in which they are embedded (Cleaver and Whaley, 2018). Concepts such as "institutional bricolage" is commonly employed in explaining how processes, meaning and power shape NRM (Cleaver, 2012; de Koning, 2014; Cleaver and de Koning, 2015). Through processes of bricolage, institutional components stemming from different origins are continuously reused to create new functions. Sets of rules, norms, practices, and relationships are given certain meaning and power, and merged into daily practices. These processes may be conscious or unconscious, but highly present in the reconfigurations of institutional arrangements. Marin and Bjorklund (2015) illustrate this well in their study of reindeer husbandry in Finnmark, Norway. By examining how a conceptualization of commons as well as a tragedy of the commons have been constructed over time by the Norwegian state, the authors demonstrate how a certain institutional design of resource governance have gained predominance over already existing customary practices exercised by reindeer herders. What this and many other critical institutionalists illuminate, is how power and authority in situations of multiple legal, institutional and policy layers generate uneven outcomes (Hall et al., 2014). Ingram, Ros-Tonen and Dietz (2015) phrase this plurality of governance arrangements "a fine mess", showing how forest governance in Camerron, characterized by various forest usage and governance arrangement creates space for different institutional governance models that may function in a specific time and place, but usually with the effect of excluding certain forest users.

2.2 Politicizing resource governance

A common theme that has been present for a long while in the NRM debate is the methodological division between the reductionism of rational choice theory and the interpretivism of historical and anthropological research. Many of the critical voices have pinpointed issues of not including aspects of culture, meaning and

context that directly affects the way people use and manage common recourse systems (Forsyth and Johnson, 2014). These perspectives have contributed to the field by explicitly focusing on issues of social justice (Johnson, 2004; Goldman, 1997), commonly featuring case studies from a development context; and on the political and social conditions present in the management, experiences and causes of resource problems (Forsyth, 2003:2; Blaikie 2006), borrowing from political economy and political ecology.

While mainstream institutionalists have channelized their focus on efforts recognizing and developing rules of the game and principles for institutional design and self-government (Ostrom, 2005;2015) political ecologists have emphasized inequities and power struggles as causes likewise results of institutional performance and resource governance (Osborne, 2015; Robbins, 2019). Hence, the political ecologist would argue that institutional design and rule implementation at the local level are dictated and restricted by the politico-economic structure and the decisions made at the higher governance levels. Influenced by neo-Marxist theory, they consider capitalist economies to be responsible for larger systems of land and resource appropriation, leading to local disempowerment and resource depletion – problems that cannot be solved solely through good governance principles and rule enforcement¹ (Goldman, 1997; Forsyth, 2003:115-117).

Contextualizing decisions and policy outcomes, likewise, placing them in a context of history and power are thus important contributions to the study of NRM; it allows for the analyst to examine policy results through the lens of whose power and which institutions are considered legitimate, why this is so, further how this has shaped outcomes and decisions (Armitage, 2008).

2.3 Decentralize to legitimate...?

Reallocating power over natural resources from central government to communities, local individuals (Ostrom et al., 1994; Ostrom, 2015), as well as governments own subunits (Krott, 2008; Rondinelli et al., 1989) is argued by Ostrom and colleagues to generate more flexible, efficient, participatory, accountable, and equitable outcomes since communities, local individuals and politicians are better acquainted with local needs and their environment (Andersson et al., 2004). However, debates within the approach have highlighted that efforts of decentralization tend to fail due to governments' deficiency in providing appropriate administrative resources and sufficient financial means (Andersson et al., 2006; Andersson and Ostrom, 2008), also in terms of lack of accountability

¹ However, Forsyth also highlights the issue of oversimplifying any causal links between economic growth and environmental degradation. He stresses the complexity underlying environmental factors as well as the possible dismissal of certain forms of economic activity less damaging and even positive for the environment (Forsyth, 2003:118).

(Agrawal and Ribot, 1999; Ribot, et al., 2006). If local actors or authorities constantly need to seek approval from higher governance levels, their downward accountability and legitimacy thus risk being weakened (Ribot et al., 2006).

Notwithstanding trends of decentralization, others contradict a shift from government to governance in forest policy. Sergent et al. (2018) conclude in their study of integrated forest governance in ten European countries that state authorities are still considered the dominant actor in forest decision making, even though this might differ among countries. They maintain that recent modes of governance in European forest policy have to a large degree been influenced by macro political ideas adhering to sustainable development and good governance principles. While the sustainable development discourse has led to the politicization of problems connected to forest management objectives, the good governance debate has put defenders of “command and control” regulation against soft-law proponents. This have according to the authors resulted in a policy trend of increasingly messier policy goals and action, where, despite modes of decentralization and political rhetoric of participation, implementation have tended to fail, leaving state actors the most powerful authorities in forest management (Sergent et al., 2018).

2.4 Multifunctionality and policy integration

Besides discourses of sustainability and good governance principles, the discourse of ‘multifunctionality’ (embracing values of various forest uses and users in harmony) have gained strong policy momentum in forest politics and NRM the last decades (Sergent et al, 2018, Deuffic et al., 2018, Hautdidier et al., 2018). By discarding the one-sided focus on production value and instead multiply forest benefits in terms of economic and environmental gains, society wins. Naturally this approach invites for policy integration. By steering policymaking from sectoral to inter-sectoral coordination to better address intertwined sustainability conflicts, various policy objectives are mashed together (Nijnik et al., 2008). In a special issue on forest policy integration and integrated forest management authors contended that while multifunctionality often is being used as a rhetoric and symbolic tool in forest policy making, it is seldom seen in practice. Although multifunctionality of forests have gained policy ground, various case studies have shown that the discursive shift often comes with the unchanged policy priority on production (Sotirov and Storch; 2018; Sergent, 2018). For example, Sergent et al. (2018) demonstrate that in countries such as Germany, France, Sweden, Portugal and Ireland, these integrative shifts materialize in parallel with an unchanged management and policy focus on increased timber production. Goals of a more balanced forest policy with an integrated focus on biodiversity, ecosystem services and recreation has thus remained weak in relation to the production emphasis.

Additionally, observations of multifunctionality and policy integration in NRM also reveal that the inclusion of various forest objectives have resulted in internal incoherence, characterized with a lack of coordination and capability to deal with

stated policy objectives (Sotirov and Storch, 2018). This resonates well with what Beland Lindahl et al., (2015) phrase as a “more-of-everything” frame, dominating Swedish forest policy. While having multiple objectives must not be an issue per se, attaching forest as the capsulating solution might be.

Because of this, forest policy integration with regards to its integrated governance and management systems are likely to become highly politicized processes. Notably, this politicization occurs since forest governance involves the differential distribution of political authority and decision-making concerning determining policy, practices, and strategies that might exacerbate power struggles between actors involved in the decision-making processes. This may bring about effects with differential impacts on stakeholders as well as ecosystems. Referring to forest governance as a “wicked problem” is therefore not an unusual implication (Sotirov and Arts, 2018).

2.5 Summary

Disregarding the fundamental differences in how and to what extent the different schools view and understand institutions, the reviewed approaches are both necessary, and combined they have the possibility of deepening our understanding of resources governance. While on the one side the importance of acknowledging what criteria and rules effect the efficiency and legitimacy of institutions are recognized, this knowledge will be non-essential until aspects of power and authority are taken into account. Thus, the criteria and rules vital for institutional efficiency need to be coupled with the consideration of actors’ interests and preferences regarding institutional design, likewise the way institutional design influence power distribution (Clement, 2010). Following this and apparent in this thesis is the strong influence of these schools of thought, particularly those adhering to the critical institutionalists. The emphasis on a systematic understanding of resource governance, that not only address perspectives at the top or the bottom, but highlights their interconnectedness as well as their relation to context, power and discourses is considered crucial. It is by moving from linearity to more chaotic and complex systems of thinking that we can grasp and reach a deeper understanding of inherently complex systems, such as forests governance.

3 Theoretical framework

While Ostrom's mainstream institutionalism have generated "concrete" and operational models for resource governance, based on design principles and the notion that institutions can be crafted more efficiently through self-governance (Ostrom, 1999,2005; Dietz et al., 2003), critical institutionalism has contributed by viewing institutions as both complex and embedded, characterized by processes of bricolage, illuminating effects of power and authority (Cleaver, 2000). Yet, critical institutionalists struggle in developing frameworks illustrating its basic tenets and core components, limiting its possibility to articulate substantial, coherent, and appropriate policy recommendations (Whaley, 2018; Neuman, 2005). This have opened for theory development, where hybrid models borrowing from the two schools of thought have surfaced in the last decade (Whaley and Weatherland, 2014, 2015; Brodrechtova et al., 2018). An example of such endeavor can be seen in Clement's (2010) politicized IAD framework, employed in this paper.

Following section will present the basic tenets of the politicized IAD framework used in this thesis to examine to what extent collaborative governance address polarization and sustainability conflicts in the RFP. The framework involves a combination of Elinor Ostrom's IAD framework, presented by Clement, and concepts borrowing from Maarten Hajer's (1995) argumentative discourse analysis (ADA). The section will start by briefly introducing the original IAD framework to subsequently present the politicized version.

3.1 Introducing the IAD framework

The focal level of analysis in the IAD framework is the action arena, in which actors are situated in action situations where external variables influence the structure of the arena as well as the actors participating. This further produces outcomes that again affect the actors as well as the situation (Ostrom, 2005: 13). Action arenas are perceived as a set of dependent variables and can be anything from a home, a neighborhood, a regional, national, or international council to a firm or a market as well as the interactions between these arenas. An action situation describes the social space in which participants with differing interests interact, exchange goods and services, argue and solve problems. Outcomes and patterns of interactions feed back onto the action situation as well and the participants and may transform both over time. Outcomes may also affect, even though slowly, some of the external variables. Depending on whether outcomes are perceived as productive, fruitless, or even unfair, the participants may change their behavior,

increase their commitment to maintain current structure of the situation, or alternatively try to change their strategies or even the structure of the situation. Evaluative criteria are subsequently used to evaluate the performance of the situation by studying the forms of interactions and outcomes (Ostrom, 2005:13-14).

3.1.1 External variables

The external variables affecting the structure of action arenas are (1) biophysical conditions (i.e., the biophysical reality that are acted upon in the arenas), (2) the rules-in-use (that participants use to order their relationships and interactions) (3) and attributes of community (the structure of the community in which action arenas take place) (Ostrom, 2005:15-16). How the biophysical conditions affect the action arena differs depending on the specific setting as well as resources subtractability and exclusiveness. These resources are commonly referred to as “goods and services” by public economist and are analyzed based on how they are produced, consumed, and allocated in a specific situation. The two attributes of subtractability and exclusion can range from low to high and are generally used to define four types of goods: private goods, public goods, toll (club goods) and common-pool resources (CPR) (ibid:22-23). Forests are typically defined as constituting a CPR.

Due to CPRs features of being scarce, non-excludable and subtractable in use, they tend to be rapidly and wastefully exploited by individuals and firms acting based on profit maximization, in which private short-term gains outdo long-term advances such as social benefits and collective interest. The continued use of CPRs will thus provide diminishing returns to all parties involved but also to the larger community and the environment. The inefficiency of this situation is caused by the separation between the private costs captured by the individual users and the social costs caused by their actions. Thus, since users of the resource do not bear the full cost of their actions, the resource risk being overly exploited (Bellanger et al., 2021). This is what Hardin (1968) would term a tragedy, likewise where Ostrom maintain that tragedies can be avoided due to individuals ability to building trust and enforcing collective rules (Ostrom, 2015:211). However, other attributes than subtractability and exclusion might greatly influence resources use, such as their size, uncertainty, abundance, resilience, and vulnerability (Clement, 2010).

The second variable, rules-in-use, can be understood as a set of instructions that creates an action situation in a specific setting. They can be defined as the “shared understandings by participants about *enforced* prescriptions concerning what actions (or outcomes) are *required, prohibited, or permitted*” (Ostrom, 2005:18). Rules are the result of explicit or implicit attempts to attain predictability and order among individuals by establishing what individuals (positions) are required, prohibited, or permitted to take certain actions regarding what outcomes are required, prohibited, or permitted or otherwise meet the consequences of being sanctioned or monitored in a predictable way (ibid). Well-established and understood rules are used to exclude actions and to include others. Their stability is dependent on a shared understanding of their meaning and operability. If this

is not established from the beginning, confusion over what actions is required, prohibited, or permitted will occur (Ostrom, 2005:18-22). Numerous of rules are employed when structuring action arenas. They can be anything from formal to informal prescriptions, such as legal documents published by central governments, informal rules permitting other governance levels to interpret and implement formal documents with relative freedom, and collective rules and norms orally or written within a particular community (Clement, 2010).

Finally, the attributes of a community regarded as important considering their impact on actions arenas, refer to the degree of mutual understandings that actors share (or disagree on) concerning the structure of the specific action arena; behaviors accepted within the community; the size, composition, and level of homogeneity in preferences among those involved; and the level of inequality among those affected (Ostrom, 2005:26-27). The concept of culture is commonly used to describe the values and norms shared within a community. Depending on whether participants within action arenas share or oppose a common set of values, the ability to govern effectively and the cost of sustaining rules will differ and generate different results. Whether actors share ideas, culture, language, norms, and learnings is therefore crucial variables to acknowledge when analyzing actions arenas and situations (ibid:27).

3.2 A politicized IAD framework

In summary, one can say that the three external variables of the IAD framework symbolize nature, society and the rules that govern interaction between nature and society. Due to the breadth of the framework, combining theories and methodological tools as well as adjusting the framework to different biophysical, social, and political contexts is convenient (Ostrom, 2005:28). One of the major strengths with the IAD framework is its ability to break down complex phenomena into several components and see it as an overlapping of systems within a larger system. It allows for a well-refined analysis of human behavior and individual decisions in collective action situations and of institutional performance in an array of settings. However, while the IAD framework allows for the analysis of linkages between policy change and local resource user's decision-making and actions, the application of the framework tend to frequently focus on local situations, with little regards toward policymaking at higher governance levels. This is where Clement (2010) seeks to "politicize" the IAD framework, by developing its ability to study natural resource policy processes, including its ability to assess policy processes across government and governance levels as well as the gaps between policy intentions and outcomes. In doing so, Clement adds the two variables of *politico-economic context* and *discourses*, thus expanding the original IAD framework to also consider power distribution, structure, and context. An overview of the

framework can be seen in Figure 2, where the added variables of politico-economic context and discourse are marked in grey.

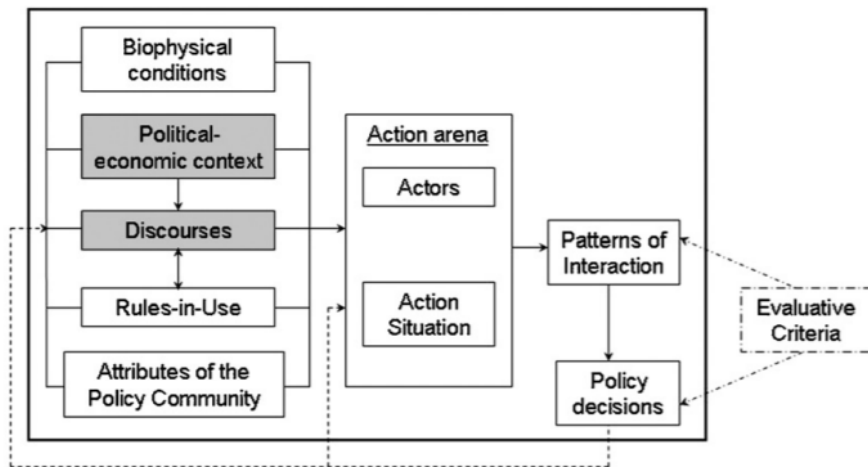


Figure 2. The politicized IAF framework (Clement, 2010).

3.2.1 Institutions, power, and politico-economic context

While Ostrom broadly defines institutions as “[...] the prescriptions that humans use to organize all forms of repetitive and structured interactions including those within families, neighborhoods, markets, firms sports leagues, churches private associations, and governments at all scales” (Ostrom, 2005:3), Clement base his politicized model on this definition, but expands its application by emphasizing that institutions do not solely result from rational decisions. Power and interests shape the construction of institutions, and therefore requires consideration when analyzing actors’ decisions across multiple governance levels.

Power is defined based on Lukes (2005) third dimension of power that emphasizes the “securing of compliance to domination” (Lukes, 2005:109). That is “[...] power manifest itself just by being, it shapes values (as understood as the personal or societal standards of a person or society that define what is valuable in life), norms and preferences by its mere existence” (Clement, 2010:135). It is closely related to the Foucauldian understanding of power, that power is not an instrument used to dominate by the state, but rather something that is part of daily political and social practices. Based on this, power and institutions are closely interconnected; institutions have a direct effect on social practices and power distribution, subsequently power distribution within a group of actors acting at different governance levels affect the institutional design as well as the rules implemented at lower governance levels (Clement, 2010).

The point of expanding the institutional analysis to include concepts of power and contextual complexity have been outlined in previous sections. The inclusion of power-centered approaches is considered crucial in furthering our understanding of institutional performance as well as stakeholders actions. In examining power dynamics and practices, one needs to consider the economic and political structure in which power distribution is being shaped and institutions being formed,

sustained, or ruptured. This is especially important for the analysis of forest governance since, as much literature have pointed out (see previous sections), practices, rule enforcement and institutional design at the local level are restrained by the structure of the politico-economic context as well as the decisions made at higher governance levels. Understanding how and why power has been shaped in specific way, furthermore whose power and what institutions are perceived as fair and legitimate is thus important. Especially so when considering the different meanings forests have for different groups and purposes.

3.2.2 Discourse theory

To include discourse as an additional analytical approach allows us to understand why certain policy options have gained predominance over alternatives and offers the possibility of critically examining the debates related to environmental policies (Clement, 2010). Since environmental politics, and nature in itself, is treated as a contested issue (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005), the IAD framework falls short considering how actors' beliefs develop, sustain and change based on their construction of physical and social reality. This is where the inclusion of discourse analysis adds to the framework, by encouraging the critical examination of language in policy formulation and policy outcomes. I motivate the inclusion of discourse analysis arguing that the way a policy is articulated, understood, and implemented is dependent on the way we conceptualize the world and through the way language is used. Or as Hajer (2005:300) puts it:

Language has the capacity to make politics, to create signs and symbols that can shift power-balances and impacts on institutions and policy-making. It can render events harmless, but it can also create political conflicts. It can suggest that we should discuss the problem in terms of operational solutions, but it might also suggest that this is meaningless, as solutions would require substantial institutional or cultural change.

Concurrent with Hajer (1995:60) I define discourse as “a specific ensemble of ideas, concepts, and categorizations that is produced, reproduced, and transformed in a particular set of practices and through which meaning is given to physical and social realities.” Discourse analysis as articulated by Hajer, is thus the study of “language-in-use” (Hajer and Versteeg, 2005), which is situated within the interpretative or more precisely, the social constructionist practice in social sciences. Hence, discourse analysis adopts a critical position towards “truths” and emphasizes the communicative event where meaning is created, and knowledge is exchanged. Since reality is perceived as socially constructed, the exploration of meaning becomes crucial in making sense of social phenomena. For the interpretative study of environmental politics, it is not the environment or, as in this case, the forest in itself that is of importance, but the way that society make sense of the forest (ibid).

Studying discourses allow for new ways of exploring political processes as mobilizations of bias. This refers to the importance of studying the more subtle

processes in which some problem definitions are being included in politics while others are being left out. Social constructivists have in this respect emphasized the likelihood of different actors holding different views of what the problem really is (Hajer, 1995:42-43). That is, the argumentative turn in policy processes that Hajer speaks of, invites the analysts to go beyond difference in opinion to instead find ways of linking the study of discursive production of reality with the study of social practices. Hajer was here inspired by the work of Billig, who referred to the argumentative turn as the process in which not only the images or the words uttered in specific moment should be the focus of study, but also the positions being criticized or disregarded. Without acknowledging these counter-positions, the argumentative meaning is lost (Billig, 1989:91 in Hajer 1995:53).

3.2.3 Storylines and discourse coalitions

The argumentative discourse analysis (ADA) developed by Hajer, allows for the combined analysis of the production of meaning together with the examination of socio-political practices in which social constructs develop and where actors are active participants engaging by making statements about the social reality (Hajer, 2005:300). Thus, the ADA treats agency and structure as equally important in cocreating social reality; social action originates in human agency, but whether their agency is being enabled or restrained is dependent on the context of social structures (Hajer:1995:58). The ADA concentrates on the level of discursive interaction (language in use) that has the ability to create new meanings and identities that may change “cognitive patterns” and generate new positionings. Placing language as an integral part of social reality indicates that it is an active practice influencing preferences as well as interests. Hence, discourses play a crucial part in processes of political change and allows for the critical investigation of political controversies, not in terms of discussions or rational argumentation, but with regards to the argumentative rationality actors employ in a discussion (Hajer, 2005:301).

Politics, following this, is defined as the “...struggle for discursive hegemony in which actors try to secure support for their definition of reality” (Hajer, 1995:59). These struggles do not occur in a social vacuum but in the context of institutional practices, which are seen as preconditions for the formation of discourses. In the process of conceptualizing the world, actors compete in arriving at a final definition of contested problem, that is, *discursive closure*. Reaching discursive closure thus means the realization of erasing other definitions and meanings of the phenomena (ibid:22-23). Reaching discursive closure is however still quite abstract. In order to overcome detachment, the important “middle-range” concepts of *storylines* and *discourse coalitions* are employed to connect discourse to individual agency (Hajer, 1995:52).

A storyline is defined as “...a generative sort of narrative that allows actors to draw upon various discursive categories to give meaning to specific physical or

social phenomena”² (Hajer, 1995:56). It offers a compelling story that can unify actors within a certain domain, given a specific problem. As important political devices and tools for agency, storylines suggest a common understanding in the discursive complexity of problem definitions. In their essence, they are the prime vehicles of political change, as they not only help to construct a problem, but also play a crucial part in maintaining or challenging a social and moral order within a given domain (ibid:63-65). A group of actors, that within a context of a specific set of practices share and utter a particular set of storylines, over a certain period of time, construct a *discourse coalition* (Hajer, 2005:302). Practices here refers to specific situations in which storylines are uttered and discourses are brought into play. They can be anything from writing policy papers to participating in local meetings, they represent routines, and mutually shared norms and rules that provide structure and unity to social life (ibid). Thus, discourse coalitions are defined as “...the ensemble of (1) a set of story-lines; (2) the actors who utter these story-lines; and (3) the practices in which this discursive activity is based.” (Hajer, 1995:65) We can make sense of storylines as the glue keeping the coalition together. They are created if former, separate practices are being connected to one another, that is, if a shared discourse is being established in which these now connected practices, gain meaning in a common political endeavor (ibid).

² Storylines and narratives are commonly used interchangeably, however some would pinpoint their difference, in which narratives are viewed as superior to storylines, as a collection of “systematically interconnected storylines” (see Keypour and Ahmadzada, 2021).

4 Methodology

Combining theories and perspectives in this manner might seem an incoherent approach with low explanatory power. I argue the opposite and defend this procedure by reconciling the theoretical perspectives through an ontological standing of critical realism. Developed by Bhaskar (1975) and Harré (1972) it assumes that positivists' conceptualization of "reality as reality" is just one way amongst many of knowing that reality. While the "real" world is out there, our understanding or perception of it highly depends on political and social framings influencing the researcher (Bryman, 2012:29). Critical realism thus offers a coherent ontological foundation for applying the politicized IAD framework, since it appreciates both realist and constructivist approaches. By using empirical data to assess the specific setting as well as actors' incentives and behaviors in a certain institutional practice, it also allows for the critical examination of how incentives and behaviors are constructed through discourse and politico-economic context. The presented framework thus borrows but also differentiates from deductive and inductive theory in the sense that it is rather being used as a way of structuring the analysis, by applying adopted definitions and categorizations of key variables and in examining their relationship, but also seeks to inform theory.

This follows a retroductive logic in which the researcher is working back from what is known to the unknown (Blaikie and Priest, 2017:161). The basic task of social research is to explain puzzling, socially important regularities. In this case, increased polarization and sustainability conflicts present in Swedish forest governance is treated as such a regularity. In aiming to investigate and seek explanation for this, a "generative mechanism", that is a hypothetical entity accounting for the regularity is examined. This entity or process (here treated as collaborative governance) is constitutive of the phenomena of interests. Additionally important for this logic is the identification of context which interacts with the mechanism to produce the regularity in the social world (Bryman, 2012:29). Context in this sense is treated as the external variables presented in the framework. An appreciation of these is important to understand how they interact with collaborative governance to produce certain outcomes or causal mechanism which might explain the regularity. Concurrent with Blaikie and Priest (2017:161), suggesting a mechanism's appearance and behavior requires building a model of it, additionally, a level of creative imagination. This is where I motivate my application of the politicized framework. This section will continue by introducing and motivating case selection, and subsequently describe the process of data analysis.

4.1 Case selection

This case study explores forest governance in a Swedish policy setting. Since Norrbotten is characterized by multiple stakeholders involved in a variety of forest-based activities which many times are in conflict, I found it particularly significant to explore the application of collaborative governance in dealing with issues of forest conflicts and polarization. For example, while Norrbotten forest is considered a crucial employment provider, an essential contributor to the regional as well as the national economy (Näringsdepartementet 2018a; Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten, 2020), it is also considered a key resource in mitigating climate change (Sandström et al., 2020), in storing economic, environmental values, and as vital for the survival of reindeer husbandry practiced by the Sami³ (Widmark, 2019). There is thus a strong emphasis on forests' multifunctionality, both in terms of what forests can give, but also in terms of how forest issues can be solved. Understanding the function and effects of collaborative governance in dealing with conflicts of interests in settings of multiple conflicting usage areas is thus important for future research and policy. While much of previous studies have focused on principles for the collaborative process to be successful, far fewer have explored real life effects of the collaborative processes in action. By exploring policy intentions and how they play out, this study contributes with knowledge on the possibilities and limitations of collaboration in real life settings. With emphasis on power, context, and institutions I further investigate to what extent contextual conditions shape the conditions and outcomes of collaborative governance, a dimension that yet stands rather unexplored.

Additionally, and by broadening the picture; while the Swedish line focuses more on how an active forestry can reduce emissions by replacing fossil fuels and fossil dependent products, the EU tends to push harder on preservation values and stresses the role of forest in terms of climate change mitigation, specifically in its role of storing carbon (Köhl et al., 2021). Thus, opinions considering the current state, future role and the management of forests differ to large degree between the EU and the Swedish state. This also makes this case particularly interesting for future research.

4.2 Framework in action

The first step to be taken when employing the politicized IAD framework is to define the action arena and situation. The action arena will in this case refer to the regional level. The action situation is identified as the RFP in Norrbotten, defined as a meeting point, political arena and forum for dialogue and development (Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten, 2020). In analyzing this action situation, several variables have been considered as structuring the situation (Ostrom, 2005:32), these are "(1) the set of participants, (2) positions held by participants, (3) the potential outcomes, (4), the set of allowable actions and the function that maps

³ The indigenous people and one of Sweden's official national minorities (Sametinget, 2022)

actions into realized outcomes, (5) the control that an individual has in regard to this function, (6) the information available to participants about actions and outcomes of their linkages, and (7) the costs and benefits – which serve as incentives deterrent – assigned to actions and outcomes” (ibid:32). The structure of

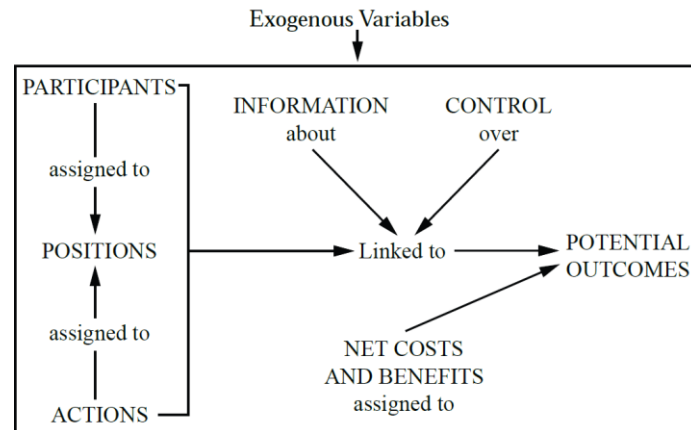


Figure 3. Structure of action situation (Ostrom, 2005:33).

the action situation can be seen in Figure 3.

Subsequently the analysis continues by identifying what aspects of the biophysical, politico-economic, institutional (that is rules-in-use), discursive and community setting impact on the various elements of the action arena. Specifically, how do the exogenous variables influence stakeholders’ participation in the situation, what actions can they take, what are the costs associated with those actions, what outcomes can they affect, how are actions linked to outcomes, what information do they have access to, and to what extent do they control outcomes (Ostrom, 2005). In doing so, this part of the analysis will start by considering the biophysical conditions of the resource. The “forest setting” is analyzed against attributes such as its size, uncertainty, abundance, resilience, and vulnerability, to better understand limits and possibilities of collaborative governance.

Analysis of the second variable, the politico-economic context, reveals the economic and political structure in which power distribution is shaped and provides a critical appreciation of how local practices and decision-making at the regional level are shaped by the structure of the politico-economic context and decisions made at higher governance levels. This part specifically concentrates on a national policy level and its integration into regional practices and policy responses.

Adding discourse analysis as the third variable, allows for a critical examination of language and argumentation within as well as around the RFP, deepening our understanding of why certain policy options have gained predominance over others and enables the examination of how different conceptualizations of the world have formed the incentives and beliefs shaping the RFP. By identifying and examining discourses we can better understand how social and physical phenomena is being conceptualized, what is considered relevant or irrelevant to think, decide and act upon. From this perspective, discourses constitute an important factor in the examination of how policies are being interpreted, implemented as well as configured as a tool of policy change.

The fourth variable, the analysis of rules-in-use provides an appreciation of the incentives stakeholders face in the given action situation. Actors make decisions within a system of rules and realizing how such rules constrain or enable collaborative governance in the RFP is therefore highly important, since it determines the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the situation. Finally, the study of attributes of the community refer to the degree of shared understandings among actors concerning the structure of the action arena; the size, composition, and level of homogeneity in preferences among those involved; and the level of inequality among the participants (Ostrom, 2005:26-27). They are particularly important since collaboration in essence is based on individuals coming together despite different cultural, political, and economic viewpoints.

4.3 Data collection and material

This study is a single case in-depth study limited to Norrbotten. Data collected primarily consists of fifteen semi-structured interviews and approximately 90 official memos and policy papers. To explore the research question, semi-structured interviews with fifteen relevant researchers and RFP stakeholders were undertaken between February and -April 2022 via Zoom-meetings. The interview guide was designed to encourage a conversation and allow participants to give their own account of collaborative governance and the RFP. Questions remained open-ended to provide the interviewee with freedom in answering them (Leech et al., 2013:210). Although questions for interviews as well as themes for coding have been constructed in a deductive manner, with categories derived from the theoretical framework, data analysis has followed a more inductive approach to explain how experiences of the RFP interact with external variables in creating certain outcomes.

All interviews have been anonymized out of respect for each participant's integrity and privacy, especially since many of them are still active participants in the RFP. The group interviewed consists of three experts and researchers knowledgeable in Swedish forest management as well as in collaborative governance and dialogue as steering mechanisms; together with twelve stakeholders participating in the RFP, with representatives from each decision-making level, except for the governor who was unable to participate. Out of the 23 stakeholders part of the RFP, 12 were able to participate. Even though all stakeholders were not able to participate, most interests and perspectives were considered represented, except for the Swedish Sami Association and the Swedish Lapland Visitor's Board. However, these perspectives together with other stakeholders not able to participate were covered through the examination of written comments and opinions expressed in memos and policy papers part of the inner workings of the RFP. All official papers and documentations adhering to the RFP were requested from the County Administrative Board in Norrbotten and gathered in March 2022. In total they account for 89 documents covering the

timeframe between the initiation of the RFP in 2018 and up to date when material was collected.

The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. The transcriptions together with official documents were thematically coded and analyzed using the qualitative data analysis software NVivo. The theme-based coding was initially based on predetermined categories, resembling the variables found in the politicized IAD framework such as (1) actors and (2) roles, followed by the set of external variables, that is (3) biophysical conditions, (4) politico-economic context, (5) discourses, (6), rules and (7) attributes of the community. However, as with much interview research within qualitative studies, new and unpredicted themes emerged during the analysis (Vromen, 2018: 247). New codes that emerged were (8), definitions, with two subcategories capsulating “collaborative governance” and “sustainable forestry”. During the initial coding of interviews and documents it became apparent that these themes required exclusive codes with their own sub-themes to systematically grasp the inherent complexity and the various perceptions. Two other subthemes that emerged were “role description” connected to roles, and “power” connected to politico-economic context. Due to many inconsistencies and divergent understandings of actors and their roles, sub-themes dividing these proved fruitful in the final examination. Adding power as a sub-theme to politico-economic context became important, not to separate the obvious connection between the two, but to specifically unmask power relations within the RFP.

4.4 Analytical procedure

Based on the critical realist paradigm and the approach of retroduction, the central process has been characterized by the interplay between theory and data, combining approaches from institutional, political, and discursive analysis. Insight guiding the analysis have been derived from Clement (2010), and the 10-step methodological guideline presented by Hajer (2005). (1), The process was initiated by sketching the field, examining, and categorizing relevant policy documents, academic journals, and articles; (2) interviews with experts familiar with the topic were conducted to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter; (3) a document analysis was conducted, mainly consisting of policy paper related to the NFP and the RFP; (4) interviews were conducted with key stakeholders part of, and affected by action situation. The interviews were used for the institutional analysis as well as for the discourse analysis. Stage four and five served two purposes; (I) together with information collected at the two first step, to explore the action situation, actors and their roles as well as a getting deeper understanding of the exogenous variables; (II) to search for specific concepts, ideas and employment of storylines defining the discussion on the RFP. Following this I comprised some of Hajer’s stages into one, in which the focus of analysis is on the argumentative exchange (RFP); key incidents (i.e., in the forest debate, changes in rules, events affecting the politico-economic context as well as the biophysical conditions); and the practices in which argumentation, debates and decisions happen; (5) an

interpretation of collected data was made to search for discursive structuration and institutionalization to examine discourse influence. This was done to understand how discourses affect power distribution and policy outcomes.

Coding of the empirical material was inspired by a mix of deductive and inductive logic. An initial coding was carried out based on the deduction described above, where data from the semi-structured interviews and official documents were assigned to the predetermined variables in the framework. This first phase was particularly appropriate in ordering and structuring the material, and provided an overview of the actors, action situation, and the context (exogenous variables). As mentioned above, this initial coding also provided new themes and categories, as already established categories were not sufficient. The second step, inspired by grounded theory, involved the systematic coding of categories, meaning the process of “deriving and developing concept form data” (Corbin and Strauss, 2008:65). Concepts were derived using a combination of actual words articulated by participants and my own suggestions, and later aggravated into higher-level categories. The gradual procedure of establishing coding principles, deriving, and developing concepts, and incorporating them under higher aggregate categories was performed for each category in the framework. The loop of retrodution occurred through the interaction between the framework and concepts derived from the empirical data. The result of this procedure has been illustrated in Figure 4, where the extracted core categories are presented under each variable.

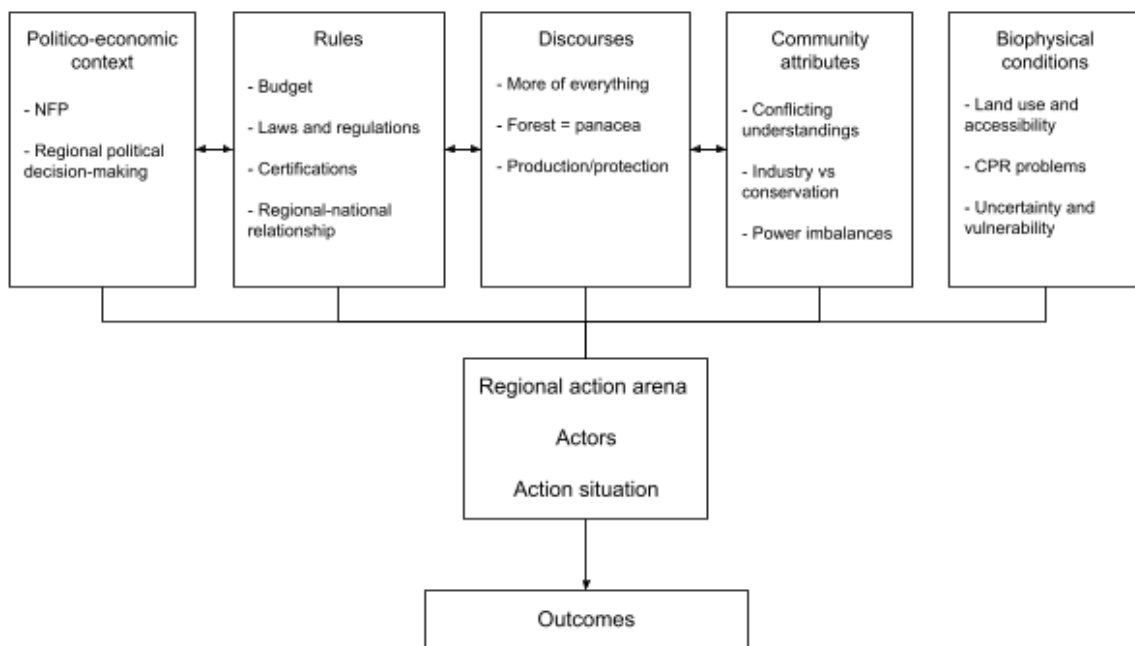


Figure 4. Critical IAD framework based on Clement (2010) outlining the context specific drivers for the decisions of actors regarding the RFP.

4.5 Limitations

The analysis targets the regional level since this is considered the decision-making level in which the RFP is decided upon. Comparing Norrbotten's RFP to other RFPs across the country is however an important call for future research, as well as comparing it to local governance decision-making procedures. Attributes of the community will be restricted to the regional level and the participants taking part in the RFP. The local level has not been the focus of the study and is thus disregarded in this paper, however that is delimitation of the study, not a suggestion of lack of importance.

4.6 Ethical considerations

This thesis does not aim to generalize based on collective data but emphasize the specific nature of the chosen case. A fundamental methodological consideration in this study has been to ensure minimal risk to stakeholders participating, which have bearing on the level of transparency of interview data, and the ability to duplicate this study. Specifically, the thesis initially included an appendix where information on interviewees were outlined, this appendix was later removed since it risked exposing informants' identity. Considering that stakeholders are still participating in the program, making it a sensitive issue, and the fact that the study involves a small group of informants which, combined with quoted statements, makes it possible to identify participating individuals. Accordingly, all quotations have been anonymized and only referred to in terms of stakeholder interests or representation. The quotations included in the analysis represents the average direction of responses, with regards to its representativeness, aiming to exemplify findings in the data. However, some quotations that distills more unique responses have been referred with e.g., "one person expressed it as". This in order to highlight diverging perspectives and insights to nuance findings.

Saturation was reached among and across all categories when stakeholders confirmed what already had been said, and when no new information emerged. One exception to this process was the perspectives of the Swedish Sami Association and the Swedish Lapland Visitor's Board since they were not interviewed. The absence of interview data from these stakeholders was compensated by written comments and opinions expressed in memos and other official documents as part of the inner workings of the program. These accounts cannot be independently verified, but I am confident that missing information does not exceedingly bias stated findings given the merging of information and saturation acquired from other sources.

5 Analysis

The following chapter features the thesis' empirical analysis. It is structured around two sections. The first section (5.1-5.3) introduces the policy objectives of the RFP and the initial analysis of the action situation (actors and roles), and stakeholders experiences. The first research question – *What does collaborative governance mean and how does it play out?* – is addressed in this section. The two other research questions of – *To what extent does collaborative governance address the economic, social, and environmental sustainability conflicts within Swedish forest policy, and how can this be improved?* and *In what way does collaborative governance affect polarization, and why?* – are addressed in the second section (5.4) in which outcomes of initial analysis are connected to the exogenous variables.

5.1 Policy objectives

A forest program is described [...] as a participatory, holistic, inter-sectoral and iterative process of policy planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation [...]
A forest program covers everyone in society (MCPFE, 2005).

In the autumn 2020, Norrbotten county adopted their first RFP strategy and in 2021, an attached action plan was decided upon (Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten, 2020; 2021). The RFP strategy is the policy document serving as the framework for actions and areas of development for the RFP in working towards the goals set out in the NFP. Measures and actions described mirror regional conditions and needs and is a co-owned product between the steering committee and the program council. Norrbotten's RFP is part of a larger cooperation involving the four northern regions in Sweden. Within this cooperation, Norrbotten's RFP have been assigned the responsibility of questions adhering to innovation, development, and research which, within the larger frame of contributing to the NFP should be the guiding theme when designing the strategy and action plan. As stated in the strategy, these two policy papers are intended to provide a guiding tool for government agencies, companies, and organization to prioritize future measures to be taken regarding the forest on a local, regional, national as well as EU-level. The NFP's goal of a "growing bioeconomy" is in the RFP strategy referred to as "building on the ability of the forestry to in a sustainable way, appropriate forest products". However, as stated in the preface to the strategy, the forest should cover many aspects and interest and is therefore filled with areas of conflicting interests and goals. Finding

solutions accepted by everyone involved is therefore a difficult task. The strategy therefore has the ambition of creating space for interaction and dialogue between concerned actors and to formulate a level playing field for those intending to use the forest in different ways.

The RFP has five focus areas that are understood as part of a process in constant change and renewal. Reindeer husbandry is within the RFP considered an industry with strong traditions and rights in Norrbotten and is therefore integrated in all five focus areas. An overview of the five focus areas with reference to the stated national goals which the RFP should structure their strategy and action plan on, as well as the proposed actions and measures to be taken between 2021-2023 can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Overview of goals and objectives in the NFP and Norrbotten's RFP

<i>Focus area 1: Sustainable forest management with greater climate benefits</i>	
National objective:	Proposed actions and measures to be taken in the RFP between 2021-2023
<p>“Sustainable forest growth, including good and assured access to domestic biomass resources from Swedish forests, within the context of achieving the national environmental objectives” (Näringsdepartementet, 2018c).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • investigate to what extent the demand for forest products will be affected in the transition to a biobased economy; • collaborate for increased growth, cultural environment and consideration for nature in forests and identifying common goals; • prevent land and forest damage; • work for a varied forest landscape with a diversity of cultural environments, functional ecosystems, green infrastructure, conservation of forest with high nature values and conservation of forest landscapes; • allowing the RFP to be an arena for longstanding dialogue on trade-offs and synergies to prevent conflict; • increase growth, production, quality and biodiversity by increasing the knowledge on economy, management, cultural and environmental consideration and nature- and hunting matters⁴ (Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten, 2021:5)
<i>Focus area 2: Multiple uses of forest resources for more jobs and sustainable growth throughout the country.</i>	
National objective:	Proposed actions and measures to be taken in the RFP between 2021-2023
<p>“Increased employment, strengthened sustainable growth and rural development, taking into account the social values of forests. The skills and expertise of both women and men will be</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • implement the proposed measures in gender equality analysis developed for the forest sector in Norrbotten; • stimulate increased multiple uses of forests in Norrbotten;

⁴ Personal translation from Swedish to English

<p>harnessed in these efforts including those of newly arrived immigrants” (Näringsdepartementet, 2018c).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • create forums and arenas to discuss trade-offs and land use issues as well as for dialogue on property rights, reindeer husbandry rights, public access rights and business practices; • ensure the possibility to support business development, education and entrepreneurship with forest as basis in future regional development strategies; • point at opportunities and create conditions for protected nature to contribute to local and regional development; • develop work related to forest as an arena for integration; • support and strengthen forest ownership as a modern and sustainable business; • involve more stakeholders in the forest dialogue⁵ (Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten, 2021:6-7)
<p>Focus area 3: <i>World-class innovation and processed forest products</i></p>	
<p>National objective:</p>	<p>Proposed actions and measures to be taken in the RFP between 2021-2023</p>
<p>“Sweden’s forest industry will be a world leader in creating and utilizing innovation, sustainable producing processed forest products for a growing bioeconomy, and satisfying the demand for sustainable, fossil-free products and services in global markets” (Näringsdepartementet, 2018c).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • take on the role as collaborative leader to contribute to the exchange of experiences between counties, thereby increasing knowledge and understanding of how research, development- and innovation initiatives can be utilized in the forest sector in the four counties of Norrland; • work for increased investments in research and development throughout the forest value chain and coordinated efforts to attract growth capital; • investigate conditions needed to enable a regional transition to a biobased economy; • create forums and arenas for discussion on how access to raw material should be optimized and secured; • ensure the possibility to support innovation and R&D efforts with forests as base in future structural funds programs⁶ (Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten, 2021:8).
<p>Focus area 4: <i>Sustainable use and conservation of forests as a profile issue in Sweden’s international cooperation</i></p>	
<p>National objective:</p>	<p>Proposed actions and measures to be taken in the RFP between 2021-2023</p>
<p>“For forests and their value chain to contribute to global sustainable development and the implementation of</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • safeguard an active Norrland forestry in a European policy context;

⁵ Personal translation from Swedish to English

⁶ Personal translation from Swedish to English

<p>the 2030 Agenda. Forest will be included as a profile issue in Sweden's international cooperation. Export and investment promotion will be strengthened and synergies between development cooperation and forest issues will be harnessed, where appropriate. The right of national self-determination over forest issues will be safeguarded in relation to the EU (Näringsdepartementet, 2018c).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • highlight innovative and highly processed forest products on an international market; • highlight northern Sweden as a hub for research, innovation and production of processed forest materials; • work for international cooperation on sustainable forestry and multiple uses of forest resources; • highlight innovative projects, initiatives and measures; • conduct screenings of all forest value chains with reference to Agenda 2030 and the global goals for sustainable development⁷ (Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten, 2021:8-9).
<p>Focus area 5: <i>A knowledge leap to ensure the sustainable use and conservation of forests</i></p>	
<p>National objective:</p>	<p>Proposed actions and measures to be taken in the RFP between 2021-2023</p>
<p>“To increase knowledge about and innovation for all the values that forest offer and the entire value chain to ensure a sustainable growing bioeconomy” (Näringsdepartementet, 2018c).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • highlight innovations, actors and their contributions; • work for enhanced dialogue on forest and its values with the aim of increasing knowledge and understanding for each other's needs and interests with a specific focus on biobased economics; • promote close cooperation between universities, forestry, business, government authorities and civil society; work to increase the attractiveness of the industry through initiatives that contribute to increased gender equality and integration; • map and evaluate natural and cultural environments of importance for outdoor life and tourism to strike a balance between different interests; • integrate climate knowledge and adaptation into existing knowledge initiatives⁸ (Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten, 2021:9).

5.2 Actors and roles

⁷ Personal translation from Swedish to English

⁸ Personal translation from Swedish to English

Actors involved in the RFP can be divided into three groups and in a hierarchical order, (1) the *steering committee*, consisting of representatives from the three head organization owning the program, the Swedish forest agency (SFA), the county administrative board of Norrbotten (CAB), and Region Norrbotten. These actors have the decisive role and are tasked with the continuous monitoring and follow-up of the strategy until 2030, they meet approximately once a month; (2) the *secretariat*, consisting of the same organizations, but with different representatives. This group are tasked with everything that has to do with planning, preparation, and execution of the RFP, they get their directives and mandate to act from the steering committee, to whom they also report back to. They meet approximately two times a month; (3) the *program council*, consisting of 23 actors representing various forest interest in the county, their foremost role is acting as reference group and as a forum for dialogue throughout the process. The governor is the chairman of these meetings and together with the secretariat and steering committee, they call for meetings with the program council approximately four times a year.

According to the appropriation directions issued by the government, specifically the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation (MEI), in 2018, the SFA where tasked with allocating resources and supporting the initiation of the regional forest programs across the country. The forest agency is tasked with reporting back to the MEI, the responsible ministry for the NFP.

The CAB is a government authority that is responsible for ensuring that government and parliament decisions are implemented in the county and to coordinate government activities (Länsstyreslen Norrbotten, 2022). The CAB of Norrbotten is the “owner” or leading actor of the process. When the appropriation directions were issued in 2018 and the SFA where tasked with catalyzing the processes of initiating RFPs across the country, the CAB assumed the responsibility of initiating and coordinating the process. In contrast to the CAB and the SFA which are both government agencies, Region Norrbotten is a political organization, whose decision-makers are directly elected by the people of the county. The Region is responsible for the regional development in the county, which in large means a responsibility to contribute to a sustainable growth based on regional conditions. In summary, these are the three key actors, co-owning the RFP in Norrbotten. They all have different interest in the process and the way they are steered and governed differs. They all answer to different entities, which means that accountability and legitimacy is divided between various levels as well as various recipients.

Data collected based on interviews and official documents reveals a high uncertainty concerning roles and responsibilities between key actors. For example, as one of the informants expressed it, “*while the SFA receives their instructions and budget in their appropriation directions on a yearly basis, the CAB receives no such directions, but are still expected to lead and coordinate the process, without any well-defined tasks*”.

The idea to involve the Region in this process seems to partly be a matter of project funding. While strengthening the relationship between the CAB and the Region is the major (official) reason for their involvement, the financial aspect plays a crucial part. Since the Region hold the responsibility and the means for

regional development, there is an opportunity for the CAB to apply for project funding. I will return to this matter later.

The leadership role of the CAB is accepted by all, but its responsibilities seem to be a conflicted issue, which mainly is a result of unclear directions coming from a national level. Their role is described by stakeholders as a “coordinating one”, a cohesive force that can offer a somewhat neutral platform for stakeholder to meet and discuss. However, their “neutrality” can be further discussed since the RFP is placed at the department of enterprise and innovation, and on a national level, the MEI. It is however important to differentiate between the interest of the CAB in general, and the interest that lies at the department of enterprise and innovation owning the RFP. Naturally, there are various interest within the larger government authority working with forest issues based on different appropriation directions. For the sake of clarity, when referring to the CAB, it is particularly the interest of the department of enterprise and innovation I refer to. With that said, the RFP naturally involves a focus on growth.

5.3 Outcomes: the RFP, for who and for what?

Having reviewed the major policy goals of the RFP, the context in which it operates and key actors owning and participating in the program, I now examine the prominent outcomes gathered from interviews and official documents. Concurrent with the aim of this paper, the analysis focuses on examining what collaborative governance in this specific context means, and to what extent it can answer to polarization and the sustainability conflicts forest management stores.

5.3.1 Collaborative governance...or confusion and polarization?

Although collaborative governance is described as the centerpiece of the RFP, there is no clear definition or description of what it actually means, entails or should accomplish. It is stated that the actions and measures are designed in “broad collaboration within Norbotten’s RFP” and that the steering committee has decided on “*establishing a longstanding collaborative governance in developing the RFP*”. The core of the RFP lies in the “*collaboration and progressive dialogue process*” between the key actors and forest stakeholders that together compose the program council. However, results from data analysis show a high uncertainty concerning the purpose and aim of collaborative governance as policy instrument in the RFP. As one of the stakeholders expressed it: “*I feel that collaboration, dialogue, and things like that, are a bit of a buzzword that has to be done for the sake of it, by ticking a box, but I do not feel that it directs the issue ahead, that is at least how I experience it*”. Others have stated that: *it is difficult to say where we are headed and what the purpose of the program is*, and “*it has not been clear what collaborative governance should lead to, what we would gain from it*”.

Most of the stakeholders understand and view collaborative governance as a means in reaching a stated goal or a vision. That said, a few would also say that it can be goal in itself, meaning that the purpose of collaborative governance would be to improve collaboration. Regardless of it being perceived as a means or a goal, expert interviews have emphasized the importance of defining this in the initial part of the process, when goals are being articulated and working structure is being outlined. Otherwise, the process risks exacerbating confusion and distrust. For example, those who would say that collaborative governance is a means in reaching a common set goal also articulate that *“while it has been clear from the beginning that the process should be structured around collaboration, to what purpose or in reaching what goal has been uncertain”*. The ambiguity around this issue is also highlighted by stakeholders with reference to the RFP strategy and action plan. While some of the action points are based on authorizing collaboration to work on specific issues, some actions points highlight collaboration as the solution. Almost all stakeholders emphasize the lack of clarity around goals, to the extent that it becomes a questioning of the purpose of the program. “Collaboration for the sake of collaboration”, seems to be a mutual feeling among various stakeholders, or as one of the stakeholders phrased it, *“just another coffee klatch”*.

Those viewing collaborative governance as a goal in itself, mainly consider it *“as an arena for exchanging information and knowledge”*. The collaboration process following this logic is described as a forum to meet, exchange experiences, and listen to understand stakeholders’ different perspectives and interests. To be able to express one’s opinion and to improve mutual understanding and cooperation is emphasized. In this sense, collaborative governance is not understood as a policy instrument as compared with laws and regulation, but rather as a softer instrument in which dialogue and interaction are stressed. However, while stakeholders emphasize the importance of mutual sharing of knowledge and experiences, there seems to be a tendency for the process to stop at this point. *“Although forums for interaction facilitate discussions and increase mutual understandings, it does not transform into action or practice”*. Some stakeholders would even say that collaborative governance, as organized now, might increase polarization among the stakeholders. This connects to the view of “collaboration for the sake of collaboration”, in which collaboration is promoted because it sounds good, to increase legitimacy, or because it is the way one should go about these kinds of processes. For some, this have resulted in experiencing the mechanism as a *“pseudo-democratic measure”*.

5.3.2 Experiences of the action arena, action situation and actors

Looking at participation, specifically considering the quarterly program meetings, participation differ to a large degree between stakeholders. While forestry is to a large degree represented at most of the meetings, stakeholders representing other forest interest such as tourism, nature preservation, outdoor activities and reindeer herding have to a lesser degree participated. There is also the numerical aspect to be considered. As can be seen in Table 2, of the 23 actors

a majority represent forestry and production or in general terms, an economic interest. Naturskyddsföreningen (The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SSNC)) is the only organization representing environmental preservation, even though conservation and environmental consideration usually are important aspects part of companies' production strategies and visions. The Swedish Sami association (SSR) only have one representative, even though they represent 44 Sami villages and 17 Sami associations (SSR, 2022). Same goes for Svenska Jägarförbundet (Swedish Hunter's association), Friluftsförbundet (the Outdoor association), and the Swedish Lapland Visitors board, which all represent different social interests in the forests. Data gathered from interviews suggest that stakeholders representing forestry to a large degree align in their interests and beliefs, and therefore perceive to have their interest represented, even though one of them would miss a program meeting. On the contrary, stakeholders such as the SSR, SSNC, Swedish Hunter's associations, the Outdoor association and the

Table 2: Stakeholders and interest in the RFP

Stakeholders	Organization	Interest
Billerud Korsnäs AB	Forestry	Production/economic
Swedish Fortifications Agency	Government	-
Outdoor Association North	NGO	Social
Swedish Hunter's association	Member org.	Social
Federation of Swedish farmer (LRF)	Interest/business org.	Economic
Lindbäcks Group AB	Wood construction company	Production/economic
Luleå diocese	Swedish church, forestry	Production/economic
Luleå University of Technology	University	Research and development
County administrative board of Norrbotten	Government	Economic/social/environmental
Swedish Society for nature conservation	NGO	Environmental
Norra Skog	Member org.	Production/economic
Association of Norrbotten's commons	NGO	Production/economic
Norrbotten's municipalities	Government	Economic/social/environmental
Piteå Science Park	University	Research and development
Norrbotten Region	Government	Economic
SCA Skog AB	Forestry	Production/economic
Forest Agency	Government	Economic/social/environmental
National Property Board	Government/forestry	Production/economic
SunPine AB	Forestry/biomass	Production/economic
Sveaskog AB	Gov/Forestry	Production/economic
Swedish Lapland Visitors Board	Member org.	Social
Swedish Samí Association	NGO	Social/economic
Sågab	Forestry	Production/economic

Swedish Lapland Visitors board are more vulnerable since they are unaided in representing their specific interest against numerous forestry stakeholders.

To what extent stakeholders comments have been considered in the final policy papers seems to differ between stakeholders. While some actors emphasize that *“there has definitely been participation and the opportunity to influence, but it has also been clear that it is the steering committee that has the final say”* others would have wished for *“more of an interactive process and more co-ownership”*. More

critical voices contended that *“there has been a lower level of participation than I had expected. The secretariat has been the one writing everything and we have responded to referrals, but we have not been involved in the writing. My participation does not feel significant for the final result”* and *“I think perhaps one of the most negative aspects, apart from the fact that we have not been able to meet, is that you do not really consider other points of view than those coherent with the mainstream thinking, you’re not really open to finding new solutions based on other ideas, it is rather that everything has to go according to the stream originally decided on, which is very focused on production”*. However, various stakeholders also realize that more participation and collaboration would require extensively more time and resources, due to the many conflicting interests and aims.

During the RFP, it has been highlighted that the process of broad engagement has been insufficient. Sickness and changes in personnel have been the major cause for this. For example, since the program start in 2018, the process leader as well as the governor have been changed several times. COVID also seem to play a major role in this. Since the beginning of 2020, almost all meetings on all levels have been held online. While online meetings have contributed with an increased possibility to participate, since it avoids commuting time and absence of work, the negative aspects seem to overpower. Discussions do not come naturally, and most of the meetings end up in straightforward presentations. Having the time and possibility to participate seems to be as much of an issue as it was before COVID for most of the NGOs. While many of the forestry officials are assigned by their offices to participate in the RFP, most of the NGOs must take from their spare time. One of the stakeholders representing an NGO explained their struggle in finding time for contributing with input to the RFP as: *“it is hard enough going through all material, thus there is no time for sitting for hours and days coming up with input. It is a shame because there is such an imbalance in the group in terms of representatives and it doesn’t make it better having the industry doing all the work on paid working hours”*. The numerical imbalance between stakeholders representing forestry versus social, cultural, and environmental interests is recognized by the leading parties, and NGOs are reimbursed for their travels. However, not much have been done concerning these power imbalances.

These stakeholders thus experience that the major focus of the RFP circle around production. Nevertheless, stakeholders representing forestry and industry as well as some of the government agencies would argue the opposite. They maintain that *“the RFP is heavily inclined towards nature conservations”*, and that *“questions of forestry and economic interests are deliberately avoided, due to fear of conflict between different stakeholders”*. Trade-offs and interests of conflicts have to some degree been discussed, but rarely contributed with any constructive results or concrete outcomes. There is a discrepancy between forestry actors experiencing their input to be endorsed in the final policy papers, and those experiencing the opposite, mainly the ones representing forest conservation and other social and cultural forest interests. One of the initial stakeholders refused to participate since they experienced the whole set-up as too inclined towards production and forestry interests. Another stakeholder has threatened to leave the program because they have experienced the process as unfair, badly balanced, and

as not contributing with any reasonable results, however chosen to stay to monitor the process and articulate their opinions.

For most of the stakeholders, collaborative governance in its true sense occurs on a local level, between two or more parties involved in a project. When collaboration reaches the regional level, it becomes “*too political, too broad, and too vague*”. Questions such as “*what will it lead to?*”, “*what are the gains?*” and “*what’s in it for me*” are frequently mentioned by stakeholders.

5.4 Combining outcomes with external variables

The analysis of the action arena suggested that there are important discrepancies between policy intentions on a national level, their operationalization on regional level and the final outcomes (or what is expected to be outcomes). What is intended with collaborative governance have been an open question since the beginning of the program. There are gaps between the national and regional level, in terms of clear directions and support to initiate the RFP; what objectives it should reach, except from supporting collaboration and decrease polarization, have been unsatisfied. The initial analysis exploring stakeholders experiences of the action situation indicate that collaborative governance has failed in its own structure, likewise in the way it was supposed to play out. Following sections thus presents an examination of the external variables in seeking to understand these discrepancies.

5.4.1 Biophysical conditions

The Norrbotten forest is varied and stores productive, cultural, and environmental values. Out of Sweden’s 27,9 million hectare (ha) forestland, Norrbotten county comprises 5,6 million ha, in which 3,9 million ha is considered productive forestland⁹, (Riksskogstaxeringen, 2021). Most of the productive forest in the county is owned by the Swedish state (21%) and state-owned companies (33%). Pine trees are dominating at 57 percent (Axelsson, 2019), and approximately 5 percent of the forest is protected from logging (Eriksson and Lundmark, 2020).

The multi-use of forest plays a central role in the county’s circular and biobased economy. While wood volume is increasing on a yearly basis, since forest growth exceeds total logging, forests largely consist of young and middle-aged woodlands, which to this day, do not reach the logging standards of the sawmill industries. In addition, new plants have low survival rate and are vulnerable to insect attacks and fungus decay. Multi-damaged pine forests in combination with damages brought

⁹ Productive forest land is land that according to accepted criteria can produce at least one cubic meter timbre per hectare and year in average. Formally protected forest land are not part of this percentage (Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten, 2020).

by wild pastures are some of the issues facing the forest industry in Norrbotten. As a result, there is a high pressure to increase harvesting levels of old-growth forests¹⁰ in the county. During the 20th century land areas covering old-growth forest drastically decreased which has had negative effects on biodiversity¹¹ (ibid).

The RFP strategy define forest management based on commercial, non-commercial, and semi-commercial forest activities¹². While the forest industry mainly operates to meet the demands of wood products, paper and mass, biofuels and other biobased material and products, other industries and activities compete over the very same forestland. Another commercial interest is reindeer husbandry, dependent on large forestland areas¹³. While forest owners such as Sveaskog or SCA usually hold the formal ownership of most forestland, the same forestland is to a large degree used for reindeer husbandry, where Sami villages hold the usufructuary right based on immemorial right¹⁴, that is, the right to use the land (Widmark, 2019). Reindeer husbandry is a crucial part of the Sami culture, while commonplace referred to as an industry, reindeer husbandry involves cultural, social, and environmental values that cannot be monetized.

As mentioned above, one of the core issues with the Norrbotten forest is the skewed age distribution¹⁵. Old-growth forests have high nature and cultural values and are imperative for the survival of reindeer husbandry since they are rich in lichen areas¹⁶. Reindeer husbandry requires large areas of forest land, and particularly high-lichen forests. However, over the last 60 years, lichen forests have drastically declined at an estimation of 70-80%, which is a serious threat for the very survival of reindeer husbandry (Sandström et al., 2016.).

The semi- and non-commercial interest cannot be monetized or measured in same way as the commercial activities. The forest is used for outdoor and recreational activities, and residents have a strong traditional connection to it. According to the right of public access or “*Allemansrätten*”, everyone has the right to reside in the Swedish forest (Fredman et al., 2019). There are also ancient remains, archeological and cultural sites representing historical lifestyles, traditions and biological heritage protected by the law. According to the forest agency, up to

¹⁰ Old-growth forests are natural habitats with high natural and cultural values. According to the environmental goal’s definition, an old-growth forest is a forest older than 140 years. The definition does however not state how long the forest have been left untouched and grown on specific place or how large area of forestland should be older than 140 years.

¹¹ Even though the last decades have seen improvement regarding forestry’s efforts in nature conservation, this is still an issue (Axelsson, 2019). The challenge lies in balancing high production levels of renewable forest commodities with protection of biodiversity, land, water, cultural environments, and other ecosystem services that society requires.

¹² Commercial activities include forestry, forest industry, reindeer husbandry and forest tourism. Non-commercial activities cover everything from recreation, biodiversity, carbon sinks to archeological and cultural sites as well as Sami culture. Semi-commercial activities include hunting and mushroom and berry picking (RFP strategy:9).

¹³ There are around 4 600 reindeer herders in Sweden, of which 85 percent live in Norrbotten county.

¹⁴ The right to reindeer husbandry is held by the *sameby* (Sami village) and is based on prescription from time immemorial, which is a legal right, not given by the state, but a legal right acquired because one has always used or cultivated the land (Sametinget, 2022, website: Renskötselsetten).

¹⁵ On one side you have large areas of forest that are not “mature enough” for logging, on the other side you have areas with old-growth forests.

¹⁶ Important food for reindeers

30 percent of Sweden's famous archeological and cultural sites have been damaged or negatively affected due to forestry operations (Länsstyrelsen Norrbotten, 2020).

In conclusion, competition over forest land is increasing due to the growing bioeconomy and the increased demand of renewable forest raw material. Forest should meet the demands of production for timber, paper, mass, biofuels, bioliquids, biobased materials and products. The forest should also be the source for recreation, wellbeing, tourism, for the survival of reindeer husbandry as well as for forest-based foodstuff. Besides, biodiversity should be protected and preserved, ecosystem services should be maintained, climate goals should be reached, and cultural environments should be safeguarded.

5.4.2 Political economic context

One might find it surprising that even though the RFPs have been charged with carrying out and fulfilling the goals set out in the NFP, appropriate resources and funds required seems to be lacking. The annual budget for the RFPs across the country differs from year to year depending on government decisions, which makes predicting and planning a hard task. For the fiscal year of 2022, the budget for the RFP in Norrbotten was 190 000 SEK, which according to one of the leading stakeholders has resulted in reductions in staff. The participant further argues, *“you can't do much with that, partly because it needs to cover working hours, then if you want to do something special, like an activity, that costs as well”*. Thus, as of now, the only one officially employed is the process leader of the RFP, which is hired on a 15% contract.

This issue connects to a larger regional-national divide involving lack of competence, time, and resources. A long-term perspective is missing at the national level, which makes it difficult for the RFP to structure their work. The same participant continues, *“the NFP aims at 2030, and thus so do we, the action plan is based on 3 years aiming at 2030 and to be revised afterwards, but that is a too uncertain base for the RFP to really contribute. We as public authorities do not get a clear assignment, it sorts of varies from year to year, and it is also up to the CAB to decide if they should seek funding at all”*.

There has also been a low degree of support concerning how to guide the RFP, how to handle conflicting goals, trade-offs as well as how to ensure positive feedback loops, and avoid an escalation of conflicts and polarization. The leading organizations have emphasized that even though the RFP strategy and action plan being developed through broad collaboration and dialogue is a *“pretty picture”*, it does not translate into equal influence for everyone involved. The need for specific competence in leading these kinds of processes has been underestimated. One of the process leaders expressed it as *“as it is stated now, one of the purposes is to shed light on conflict of interests, but then you also need to know how to handle those conflicts, otherwise you will end up in a situation where you have opened pandoras box and have no clue of how to handle the situation, thus leaves it like that, open, with conflicts growing even bigger”*. According to the interviewee, when complexities are not fully understood, stakeholders participating in the

program risk feeling trapped, or as hostages in the process, they can no longer stand for what is being decided upon in the RFP. This issue resulted in a role reformulation of the program council, from initially being treated as *“involved co-owners”* to instead being described as *“contributing to the RFP’s way forward”*.

The issue of time is also connected to financing. RFPs financing is a political budget question, decided on a yearly basis, which means there is little possibility for long-term planning. As one of the informants expressed it *“it is a too uncertain ground for government authorities to act on”*. With every new budget year, new directives follow for the CAB as well as for the SFA. As expressed by stakeholders, there is a lack of stability and long-term objectives, which collaborative governance requires. Informants also question the seriousness in implementing national and regional forest programs without the guarantee of longstanding funding, or as one of the informants expressed it *“legitimizing the process just because it has been launched and then believe it will unfold naturally is wrong, it won’t”*. Thus, there is an ambiguity amongst stakeholders regarding implementation and what will come next.

Unlike other policies or strategies, the RFP has no articulated measurable goals to meet; there is the national vision and the five focus areas, which are formulated more in terms of guidelines. Besides, the national vision of contributing to a growing bioeconomy is not accepted by all stakeholders in the RFP. The disconnection lies in the autonomy of the regional level to develop their own RFP, but their lack of political power and resourcefulness regarding its implementation: *“first and foremost, you are quite limited in your power since you are not starting from scratch but very tightly controlled by the NFP. You cannot ‘run off’ and do something else with Norrbotten, you must stick to the NFP which means that the possibilities of doing something of your own, for Norrbotten is almost non-existent. This make the dialogue process and collaborative governance difficult to push forward, because you are tied to what you can and cannot say, do, and agree on”*. This seems to be connected to what many of the informants have referred to as a general feeling of *“what’s in it for me?”*. Many experience that discussions, seminars, and workshops held at the RFP, mainly have resulted in two paper products, with no receiving party. Neither the CAB, the SFA or the Region has the kind of political power to implement what has been decided upon in the RFP, that power rests at the national policy level.

The lack of connection between the regional and national level also highlights the issue of bad management at the national level. Issues and conflicting goals experienced on a regional level have not been dealt with on a national level, clarifications on what is meant by collaborative governance is missing, and how and to what extent the regional forest programs should contribute to the national goals is unclear. Policy suggestions coming from the regional level and the RFP have no recipient on the national policy level and the national interest is experienced as low. Some stakeholders described it as a way for national politicians to *“save their own skin, by passing down the problem to the regional level”*, but as one of the informants articulated it *“if it is unclear on a national level, they cannot expect it to be solved on a regional level”*.

5.4.3 Conflicts and power

Data reveals a clear division between production and preservation values. While some informants would argue that the entire purpose of the RFP is fixed at production, others would argue the opposite. Besides the conflicting interest between actors in the steering committee, making the RFP a case of much political compromises, stakeholders participating in the program council view the process as lacking broad cooperation, endangering the legitimacy of the program. Collaborative governance seems to only happen between the three leading organizations and as one informant expressed it *“we have received little response on our input, and we do not experience the program as a collaborative process, but rather as being spectators in a process where you cannot affect the outcome”*. The issue of representation and participation is mentioned by many. Besides the numerical imbalance, informants perceive the RFP as lacking important representation from different Sami communities as well as from the nature tourism.

Polarization, conflicts of interests and power imbalances are major things to handle. There are clear discrepancies between the way collaborative governance is intended to work as described in the NFP and the way it plays out in the RFP. Regarding this, how and to what extent collaboration is supposed to deal with these major issues is hard to tell. As of now, collaboration seems to exclusively be about shallow discussions and stakeholder presentations, *“at the most recent meetings various actors have presented what it (sustainable forestry) means for them and after that you can ask questions. But the focus is still on individual interests, I don’t think you can manage to create a discussion about different perspectives since everyone experiences positions being locked and the discussion predetermined”*. These issues also seem to connect with the routinized knowing of who usually talks during meetings and what interest they represent. Even though everyone has the same opportunity to speak, stakeholders have expressed it as *“it is more or less the same people who articulate their opinion, some who clearly have power in the region, who are well known, experienced speakers who are used to behaving in these kinds of contexts. There are so many aspects resulting in the desired dialogue not materializing, one of them is power, because in some strange way it also happens that whoever has a lot of power automatically gets credibility, while those who don’t have as much power may have to provide evidence for their claims in a completely different way”*. Another stakeholder highlighted another aspect, that is the power of knowledge, *“the questions are quite complex; you need to have a thorough knowledge to be able to contribute”*.

In this sense, the RFP and the mechanism of collaborative governance struggle in dealing with power asymmetries, and in managing important sustainability conflicts and perspectives. Stakeholders are perceived as bound to their specific interests, with limited space or willingness to compromise. Regarding the way collaborative governance is employed at moment, one stakeholder even expressed it as *“those who have a different view than the mainstream idea, and raised it during several occasion have had a low impact, it is possible that interests are too different between various stakeholders which hinders the ability to reach any*

greater acceptance, but the way it is laid out now, and as tightly controlled as it is, the chance of reaching that acceptance has decreased even more”.

5.4.4 Discourses

Discourses and associated storylines have reinforced the production rationale as the logical solution. One of the dominating storylines in Swedish politics frame the role and use of forests in terms of its exceptional position in transitioning the fossil-based society into a modern green one. An example of that can be seen in the NFP vision stated in the introduction as well as the statement below.

Sweden requires forest and forestry in order to transition from an oil-based to a fossil free society and for creating jobs and sustainable growth throughout the country. A long-term forest strategy is crucial in encouraging sustainable competitive and biobased industries with forest as basis, within the framework that the national environmental objectives are met (Press release, ministry of innovation and development, 2018).

The positive synergies forests can contribute with in terms of its potential of substituting fossil fuels, accelerating the green transition by committing to bioenergy and biobased industries as well as its role in creating jobs and provide for a sustainable growth are all compelling storylines part of larger production discourse. This production discourse is present in the NFP as well as in the RFP. Even though nature preservation and other social and cultural values are highlighted and underlined in the RFP, interviews as well as text analysis reveals that forests are mainly discussed and framed in terms of its production value. For example: *“We are convinced that together, through dialogue and collaborative governance, we can develop and create more values in the forest without the biological diversity being negatively affected”.*

In that sense, forests are boiled down to merely a question of resources, something to be used, something usually associated with an economic function. Forest utility are commonly discussed in terms of its development potential for the region and in the larger perspective, the whole nation. One of the researchers interviewed commented on this larger trend saying that there are a diverse set of ideas on the input side, but when you study the implementation part, production is the prevailing discourse. According to her, this has been especially so the last couple of years, as the issue of climate change has become an integrated part of Swedish forest politics. As she argues, *“there are several popular synergies that have received attention lately, such as bioenergy, the green transition, wood constructions and the gradual phase out of fossil fuels – that is, ideas of substitution. Additionally, you have the increasing role of forest in climate politics, even though opinions vary amongst researchers, there is a quite dominant view that the best way to use the forest is to increase its production since this leads to increased assimilation of carbon dioxide. Thus, the strong and unilateral focus on these substitution synergies within Swedish politics have contributed to making the production discourse even more dominant”.*

Although the encompassing production discourse that can be seen in national as well as regional policy making, there is also a challenging discourse, practicing

storylines focused on preservation and environmental protection. This deviating storyline, often uttered by environmental NGOs and parts of the scientific community centers around issues of greenwashing, a similar politics but with a new greener look. The popular synergies are framed as false solutions, since substituting fossil fuels with biofuels still means an equal amount of carbon emissions being released into the atmosphere. Thus, focus should not be on how to improve production or make it more sustainable and greener, but rather how we can move away from production as norm, use the forest as carbon sinks and improve efficiency within non-burning energy systems. As one informant expressed it, *“sooner or later, we need to adjust and adapt to the tougher demands expressed by the EU-level, participating in forest programs can no longer be an excuse for forestry to clean their conscious and green their operations”*.

In addition to the objectives of production and preservation, the RFP aims to achieve a variety of objectives accounted for in section 5.1. Similar to what Lindahl et al. (2015) discovered in their study of the Swedish forestry model, a so-called “more-of-everything” pathway guiding Swedish forest governance can also be seen in current case. That is, besides the classic production and preservation discourses, new storylines have emerged, addressing forests in terms of cultural practices and social values, circular economy, biodiversity loss, a growing bioeconomy, increased demand of biobased products and energy, ecosystem services, and a tool in mitigating risks connected to climate change. One of the stakeholders phrased it as, *“there is a lot of focus on production and continued production, it’s almost like wishful thinking regarding how many different things and volumes that should be extracted from the forest, at the same time as it should be protected and contribute with a variety of other objectives”*.

As argued by Lindahl et al. the multiplicity of objectives must not be an issue per se but attaching “forest” as the capsulating solution that automatically will fulfill all of these objectives might be problematic, also one of the reasons why most of the stakeholders experience the RFP as characterized by “colliding goals” where forests are treated as the panacea. The “more-of-everything” storyline is present to a large degree in the two RFP policy papers and confirmed by stakeholders. What is often mentioned is to increase production and increase protection, besides that, increase on all other levels of forest interest and usages areas. The multifunctionality of forests is perceived as an environmental and economic win-win. Making the “more-of-everything” storyline part of the larger production discourse, in which environmental preservation and economic growth goes hand in hand, reinforcing one another. This also connects to the idea of forests as crucial resources in the transition into a fossil-free society, to preserve nature by using the nature.

5.4.5 Rules-in-use

Well-defined rules of the RFP are lacking. This lack of clarity is further reinforced by different laws, legal rights and certifications that may collide. During interviews, informants describe the RFP process as *“lacking clarity and*

longsightedness". Clarity meaning explanation regarding the purpose of the program, coming from the national to the regional level, the connection between the NFP and the RFP. Most of the interviewees express an ambiguity regarding what the program should and can accomplish, what the intended goals are and to what extent collaborative governance as a policy instrument should be used, reaching what goal. This relates back to what many highlighted as lack of power, resourcefulness and a clear recipient, *"of course you can influence to some extent what happens in the RFP, for example what should be put on the agenda, but to influence political decisions on the national level, that is the important connection that is missing, then we can start talking about 'what's in it for me', that what we do in Norrbotten can affect the 'wisdom' of national politics"*.

A clear distribution of tasks and responsibilities is also missing. While the RFP is based on national regulations and frameworks, bound to national funding and in reaching national goals, it also promotes regional self-determination in designing the RFP. However, a concrete idea of how this should play out is non-existent. One of the former process leaders described it as, *"the set-up was clear and it was decided that an action plan would be drawn up, but how it should be done, or how it should materialize wasn't clear"*, she continues, *"It would have been desirable if the government had supported the CAB more clearly, to give their full confidence to the CAB in handling this task, but it feels like they just delegated this mission and stopped caring in that moment"*.

Collected data also reveals a high ambiguity concerning implementation and follow-up. As it looks now, the closest we get when discussing implementation is that the RFP strategy and action plan have been written and published. Follow-ups happen in the way that the county administrative board report activities carried out based on the funding received. Again, the ambiguity regarding implementation and follow-up seems to be connected to the lack of clarity as well as power and resourcefulness. Since the RFP action plan does not possess any actual political directives or regulations, implementation need to happen on a voluntary basis by all forest stakeholders. Implementation thus depends on actors' "goodwill" *"[...] since there are no repercussions if you choose not to follow the RFP strategy or action plan"*. According to expert interviews, the uncertainty concerning implementation is highly connected to issues of funding. While the RFP could file for additional funding from the Region, that funding needs to be connected to the regional development plans with clear stated goals and outcomes. Regional funding also requires a 50% co-funding, which in this case would be 190 000 from the county administrative board, that in the end would land on 380 000 SEK in total, still a quite low amount to finance a regional forest program.

Finally, when zooming in on the RFP in Norrbotten, most stakeholders experience the RFP as top-down. The majority emphasize that this has been clear since the beginning of the process as well as what the limitations have been regarding the possibility to influence certain questions. Including the program council in the decision-making process would have required another type of process, a more generous budget and much more time due to the many discrepancies. The lack of clarity and sharpness in the RFP strategy and action plan also seem to be connected to three leading organizations' inconsistencies. With

their different goals and interest in the forest, many of the actions points have ended up in vague compromises, and measures to be taken are often formulated as “*spreading knowledge, educate and building relations*”. More critical voices experience the RFP as “pseudo-democratic”, as having a process to legitimize the process. According to stakeholders, the RFP is too disconnected from actors’ own operations and activities. Engagement has been low, and the RFP have not been able to contribute with any real progress or gain for the forest actors. While it from a stakeholder’s perspective might look good on paper to have participated, gathering all stakeholders to jointly develop the action plan have been difficult and as one of the leading actors described it “*the process has been badly steered, and it has been difficult legitimizing it*”.

The major focus has been on finalizing the two policy papers, but what will follow is unclear. The idea has been to create teams working on the focus areas, but this process has been slow and short on engagement. There is also a widespread worry concerning financing and follow-up. Stakeholders representing social and conservation values experiences the outcomes of the process as “paper products”, mainly because their interests are represented to a small degree. Committing to the program becomes difficult to motivate since they experience no gain in participating. On the other side, forestry actors are more positive towards the strategy and the action plan, but skeptical towards its capacity and usefulness. Their criticism, (backed up by others) are directed at the scale and breadth of the program, “*Instead of choosing all five focus areas, it would have been preferable to settle for two or three. This could have contributed with a clearer focus and motivated for more cooperation and discussion*”.

5.4.6 Attributes of the community

Data collected shows that on a personal level, all stakeholders express a strong connection to forests. All actors emphasize the recreational value of forests in terms of outdoor activities such as hunting, fishing, walking, berry picking as well as spending time with families and friends. The aspect of one’s mental and social wellbeing was also highlighted. Several actors are small-scale forest owners, which means that forests also can play an important role concerning economic security, as well as in terms of preserving a family legacy. When looking at the role forest play for the specific industry or organization actors represents, data reveals less homogeneous results, as can be seen in figure 5. For most actors, all three objectives of social, environmental, and economic are important. For example, the diocese highlights the social importance forest have had historically on a local level, while at the same time many parishes today depend on the profits gained from managing their forest. Forestry can cover up to 50 percent of a parish’s total income and is thus a crucial economic security.

For the outdoor association, forest mainly have a social role, but within that, a forest’s appearance is also highlighted as important, for example a diverse forest is much more preferred to clear-cuts. The Hunter’s association would stress a balance between production and conservation. Their interest lies in the social sphere, but

their activities are highly dependent on how forests are managed. An overly exploited forest creates conflicts between hunters and landowners, on the other side, leaving forests untouched can also generate issues for hunting activities. SSNC's main interest is conservation, preservation, protection of biodiversity and ecosystems, but also emphasizes social aspects such as people-nature relationship. Those representing the main forestry actors, such as SCA, Sveaskog and Norra Skog naturally have production and the economic interest at their core when valuing forests. However, both Sveaskog and SCA emphasizes environmental and conservation values as important. For them, the environmental perspective is mostly discussed in terms of win-win scenarios. That is, forests can be a tool in mitigating climate change and in transitioning into a circular economy, replacing fossil fuels. A longstanding and sustainable appropriation of forests thus suggest a dependency between environmental preservation and economic growth. Norra Skog representing large and small forest owners in Norrbotten county views forests

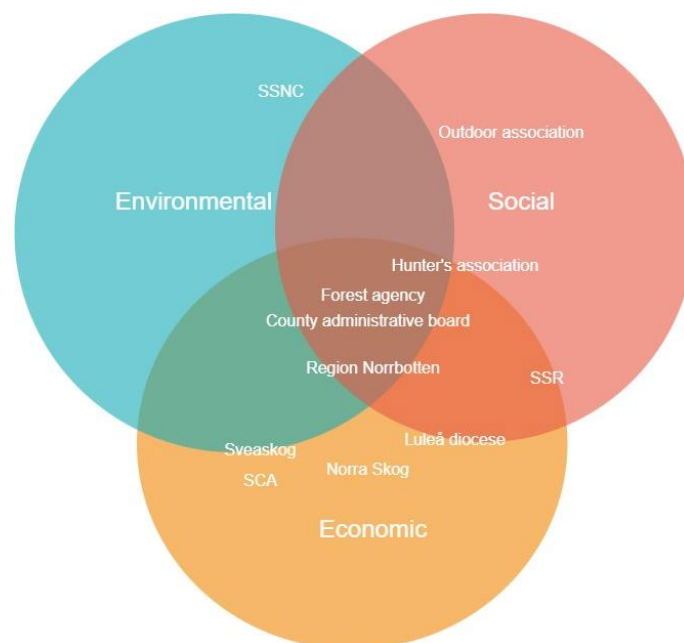


Figure 5. Actors and forest interest

as a workplace and a livelihood in first place, their member's economic interest is their main goal. Finally, we have the three government agencies. While the Forest agency and the County administrative board would stress the three sustainability objectives as equally important, Region Norrbotten align more towards the economic interest, due to their responsibility of regional development.

We also see these kinds of variations and discrepancies when we look at definitions of 'sustainable forestry' as can be seen in Table 3.

Table 3: Stakeholder's definition of 'sustainable forestry'

Stakeholder	Definition 'Sustainable forestry'
Luleå diocese	No right or wrong answer, whether it is sustainable or not is something that we will be aware of when it is too late. We

	trust in certifications and in continuous dialogues with agencies on this matter. Perceives conducting a sustainable forestry today.
Outdoor association	The environmental and social aspects. Forestry only values it in terms of production and processing.
Hunter's association	Focus on natural habitats. Finding a balance and a management model that is sustainable for the future and for all living things. Sustainability does not abstain from cultivating, but carefully and with a longstanding perspective produce new forests in a decent way, for production but also for the survival of wildlife and natural habitats.
SSNC	To a greater degree consider nature values before economic values in the forest.
Sveaskog	At every given point consider every little aspect that is being affected and make sure to do what it takes. If we focus on logging processes, they should be longstanding and resistant and neither exceed what is possible, but neither be too low, especially if we consider forest products as key in mitigating climate change. It is a balance that needs to be considered at every step of the forest ladder. It is a wide concept, and as of now it is up to each one to define it, maybe that is why we would need more steering. But social cohesion is also crucial, you need to have everyone onboard. If stop logging means sustainability and decreased welfare, but everyone is fine with that, that's excellent.
Norra Skog	Managing forests without destroying natural resources, to be sustainable over time would mean to continue with an active forestry, to phase out fossil fuels and at the same time preserve biodiversity as well as respecting social values. It's the three legs of economy, ecology and social values that are important.
County administrative board	Person 1: since researcher can't agree, I cannot define it. Depends on who you ask. At the level we are now, there is no common accepted definition. Person 2: quite comprehensive. Dependent on the situation and context. Important to preserve and protect those forests with preservation value, and that we try to find other ways and methods to manage forest, now it is quite one-sided with clear-cutting as the only model. Try to have a more varied and diversified forestry. Economic and social aspect also important.
Forest agency	It is more of a development issue. You cannot say that this is sustainable forestry, you always need to update with new knowledge and new prerequisites.

Region Norrbotten	The forests should be enough for everyone, it should meet everyone's needs and wishes, but that won't work. We should have provisions and protected forests to such an extent that we can protect biodiversity and a green infrastructure. We also need to have productive forests to log and ensure that we have enough forests for the substitution of fossil fuels in different ways. Personally, I'm a bit divided. I wish it was conducted less invasively than it is done today
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To conclude, the initiative of installing RFPs across the country contributed to gathering forest stakeholders with conflicting interests and goals to discuss and collaborate about its future management, however the process of developing the RFP in Norrbotten have been characterized by a low level of homogeneity and cohesion amongst the stakeholders. While all stakeholders share the same appreciation and notion of what forests mean for them personally, they differ to a great degree when we reach the level of professional representation. As can be read from the table, they all emphasize different values and perspectives when defining 'sustainable forestry'.

Finally, the fact that most of the RFPs working years have been active during a pandemic seem to have contributed to the low cohesion and participation. With only four meetings a year and the majority held online, stakeholders have not been able to meet face to face. As one of the stakeholders expressed it "*in order to have a functional collaborative governance you need to feel safe*", something that requires time and a continuous process of building relationships and trust. This has been especially problematic for those actors representing other interest and values than forestry since they are unaided in that position.

6 Discussion

In answering to the first research question *What does collaborative governance mean and how does it play out?* the analysis shows quite deviating results. Some perceive it as a means of reaching certain objectives, others view meeting, discussing, and improving collaboration more as an objective in itself. While stakeholders understand collaboration and dialogue as important instruments in dealing with forest issues, to what extent and in what way it should be ‘guiding’ the RFP is ambiguous. Stakeholders experience that conflicts of interests are being brought up, but rarely with constructive, or concrete outcomes. Thus, there is a general frustration considering what it will lead to, how it should push the process forward and to what extent stakeholders will benefit from it. Lack of clarity in program purposes, goal setting and implementation have resulted in “collaborative fatigue” and lack of faith in the process. Some would even phrase it as pseudo-democratic process, highlighting issues of “collaboration for the sake of collaboration”, as shortcuts to legitimize the process.

Results from the action arena also highlight issues of representation, power inequities and lack of broad engagement. The numerical imbalance has left stakeholders feeling undermined or disadvantaged in several ways. There is a discrepancy between those experiencing their input to be endorsed (mainly forestry actors), and those experiencing the opposite (mainly the ones representing forest conservation and other social and cultural interests). For some this has resulted in a feeling of passivity and dejection, as their contribution has no bearing on the final results. These findings seem to correlate with what both previous research as well as expert interviews have underlined as pitfalls in collaborative processes (Johansson, 2018). Specifically, the process has failed in providing an arena where stakeholders feel motivated to participate, committed to the cause, as participating on equal terms, and as giving them something in return.

To explore gaps between policy intentions and outcomes the politicized IAD framework proved useful in highlighting external variables and their interactions contributing to identified policy discrepancies. In answering the research questions, *To what extent does collaborative governance address the economic, social and environmental sustainability conflicts within Swedish forest policy, and how can this be improved?* and *In what way does collaborative governance affect polarization, and why?* this section will be followed by a discussion of the “what and why questions” and end with a section on the “how-question”, with the aim of informing policy recommendations.

6.1 Exploring policy gaps

Exploring the sustainability conflicts in the RFP revealed a high level of complexity. While stakeholders hold fundamentally different views on what sustainable means in the context of the RFP and Norrbotten forest, the collaborative process has fallen short on how to address these differences in a constructive way. Stakeholders are perceived as bound to their specific interest, with little interest in compromise. The political discrepancies between the leading organizations have resulted in a lack of sharpness in specifying what collaborative governance should entail and result in. Furthermore, conflict management has mainly resulted in shallow discussions and stakeholder presentation, characterized by fear of having to deal with conflicts. This has reinforced existing tensions and to some extent increased polarization amongst stakeholders. While differences in opinions form the essence of collaborative governance, the process seems to have triggered conflicts instead of having them as a baseline to work from. As articulated by one of the experts, this usually results in an unwillingness to compromise, with stakeholders getting stuck in defending one's position. Leaving disputed topics unresolved has thus increased polarization amongst stakeholders.

The framework also highlighted how the co-action of institutions, power and discourses has led to observed outcomes. The national and regional disconnection specifically stands out when exploring these inconsistencies. Concurrent with what previous literature have shown, the government has failed to provide appropriate administrative resources and sufficient financial means (Andersson et al., 2006; Andersson and Ostrom, 2008). With lack of clear directives, long-term perspective, funding and support from the national level, the CAB together with its co-owners have been left unaided in structuring the RFP and in trying to find ways of dealing with conflicts of interests. This occurs in a biophysical reality of increased pressure on various forest uses and a dominating production discourse requiring 'more of everything'. The fact that the RFP lacks political power and resourcefulness in making and implementing decisions has negatively affected its downward accountability and legitimacy, much what Ribot et al., (2006) have pinpointed as dangers in efforts of decentralization. Fundamentally, what this boils down to is what Ostrom emphasizes as (lack of) well-established and understood rules-in-use. To what extent the NFP should be operationalized in the RFP is uncertain, as is the way collaborative governance should be employed to address conflicts and polarization. Rules governing implementation 'on the ground' are currently dependent on stakeholders voluntarism, goodwill, and spare time.

Thus, as emphasized by political ecologists, the institutional design and rule implementation have largely been restricted by the politico-economic structure and decisions made at the national level. While the RFP is comprised by various actors representing different, often conflicting interests, the emphasis lies on continued production. Much in line with Beland Lindahl (2015), the RFP can be considered guided by a "more-of-everything" idea, adopting storylines that frame forests as multifunctional and as the capsulating solution to various societal issues. These storylines are part of a larger production discourse, based on popular substitution synergies and a strong belief that the best way to preserve nature is by using it, that is, a continued emphasis on production. The use of multifunctionality thus becomes a leeway for politicians and forestry actors to ease environmental pressure on

production-oriented policy and management, mirroring core assumptions of ecological modernization (Hajer, 1995; Edwards et al., 2022).

The collaborative process thus seems to have benefitted economic claims while sidelining environmental and social sustainability issues. Lack of broad engagement and equal representation in terms of numbers as well as interest are important factors contributing to this. This seems to be connected to the general trend where attempts at broadening participation in forest governance result in reinforcing the already established power residing with forestry actors, leaving a large group of local actors and forest users in the margins, with little possibility to influence policy directions and outcomes. Additionally, processes of policy integration and framings of multifunctionality have resulted in internal incoherence, characterized by a lack of coordination and capacity to deal with stated policy objectives (Sotirov and Storch, 2018).

6.2 Points for policy recommendations

One of the core assumptions in Ostrom's institutional approach is that actors' behavior can be altered by changing the rules-in-use, and thereby the incentives and constraints facing them. However, the adoption of the politicized version disclose that this is not sufficient. It is not enough to change the rules without acknowledging the politico-economic context in which they operate and the discourses that sustain and legitimate them. The institutional analysis has enabled exploration of what rules constrain or facilitate collaborative governance and provided an understanding of the incentives stakeholders face within the RFP. Outcomes of rules-in-use determines the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the situation.

As clearly demonstrated in this analysis, there is a lack of well-defined rules between the national and regional level. For collaborative governance to function as intended, and for the RFP to be able to operationalize the goals set out in the NFP, changes need to be done. A clear-stated purpose of the NFP, with connection to RFP, and how this relationship should be operationalized need to be articulated. Similarly, a clarification of what collaborative governance should encompass, and result in, is needed. Crucially, state authorities must provide clear-stated directives to local authorities, and illustrate how progress and outcomes of the RFPs will be received and followed-up. Decentralization requires the ensuring of regional self-determination, as well as the power and resourcefulness to decide and implement collective decision. Regionally, the RFP should reconsider rules for participation and representation in order to balance power between different actors and interest, ensuring a levelled playing field, and participation on equal terms.

Secondly, the extended framework allowed for the critical appreciation of how practices and decision-making at the regional level are shaped by the politico-economic context and decisions made at the national level. What have become particularly apparent is that state authorities need to provide the RFPs with appropriate resources, in terms of support and competence. The issues of providing

sufficient funding for the RFP to be able to design and implement their programs have also been highlighted. Adding discourse to the framework further enabled the analysis of how the role of forest and forest management have been framed in the policy-making arena, as well as in understanding how current policies and strategies have emerged as rational solutions to these discursive framings. Thus, to provide for policy change one should consider how storylines part of the larger dominant discourse result in certain problem formulations and solutions. It is particularly important to consider how the framing of forest in terms of production, multifunctional, and as the capsulating solution to current crises inform policy decisions.

All in all, and perhaps most importantly, passing down conflicts from the national to the regional level is not a way of legitimizing or broadening decision-making. It is a nonchalant way of avoiding issues, that in effect, might exacerbate policy conflicts and polarization.

7 Conclusion

Designing sound natural resource policies is increasingly crucial due to an escalating climate crisis and a growing bioeconomy. This especially requires well-tailored governance systems that address complexity and diversity of social and ecological settings and ensure fair and accountable institutions. By studying a recent attempt of decentralization in Swedish forest policy, this thesis explored the use of collaborative governance in the Regional Forest Program of Norrbotten. By applying the politicized IAD framework developed by Clement (2010) an institutional approach coupled with a discourse and power-centered approach was applied to explore collaboration's ability in dealing with sustainability conflicts and polarization, characterizing forest management. The framework was particularly useful in highlighting factors contributing to policy discrepancies. Particularly, due to a national-regional disconnection, the program's downward legitimacy and accountability has been negatively affected. Several issues arise from this, such as lack of clarity in rules-in-use, program purposes, roles, financing, and implementation. The program also struggles with power imbalances that are reinforced through discourses on production and multifunctionality. These intertwined processes have contributed to a fortification of conflicts and polarization amongst forest stakeholders. This thesis contributes by highlighting ways of dealing with current collaborative pitfalls, most importantly by not legitimizing the passing down of problems from national to regional level. While collaborative governance in forest management holds many possibilities, the limitations currently seem to overshadow them. It is therefore imperative for future policy making to review the rules of the process, ensuring that qualities of a decentralization are fulfilled, and understand the politico-economic context in which collaboration take place, and what factors might obstruct or facilitate the process. This is also a topic for future research. Trends of framing forests in terms of 'multifunctional' and as the 'capsulating solution' to current crisis, call for research to enquire to what extent collaborative forms of forest governance manage to undertake stated issues. Particularly, under what circumstances is collaborative governance appropriate.

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