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A world-leading periphery?

Exploring representations of Northern Sweden
in light of the green transition initiatives

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ABSTRACT

As part of the EU's initiative to become the world's first climate neutral region, Northern Sweden is represented as a centrepiece to the green transition development. Its innovative industries are framed as a key component for a sustainable future – not only for Sweden, but also for Europe as a whole. Yet, previous research describes Norrland as an inner periphery of Sweden that has been subject to colonisation and marginalisation. This thesis thus sets out to explore this paradox by examining the discursive representations of Norrland in light of the green transition narratives. Employing a qualitative research approach, this study utilises critical discourse analysis to systematically examine representations from news media and governance. The results highlight two main themes of how Northern Sweden is reproduced: as *the future* and as *a struggle*. By implementing a Lefebvrian understanding of the production of space, the results suggest that the future-oriented representations dominate the current understanding of Norrland, which risk dismissing local experiences and issues. This research contributes with an updated understanding of the processes of peripheralisation under the guise of a green discourse, suggesting that the development in Norrland is part of construing a broader narrative of Sweden as a world-leading green country.

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Key words: green transition, peripheralisation, rurality, development, Norrland

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1. INTRODUCTION

What comes to mind when you think of 'Norrland'?

Is it desolate and rural grounds, endless country roads, or the summer midnight sun? Is it dark and cold winter months, reindeer or polar bears, the northern lights, wilderness, and an outdoorsy lifestyle? Or a place of depopulation, a giant grey spot on the map, inhabiting people with an interesting accent? Locals who listen to *Hooja* and drink *Norrlands Guld* whilst going fishing in the rivers?

The imagery of Norrland varies greatly – but the common factor is that Norrland tends to be understood as different, as *something other,* from the rest of Sweden (Eriksson, 2010a). These representations of Northern Sweden are not only limited to films, books, or tales; Norrland has consistently been addressed differently by Swedish governance and policy.

Around 150 years ago, Norrland was made out to be the future of Sweden. Its vast natural resources would become a crucial contribution to the construction of the modern country, providing wealth for all of Sweden; Norrland was seen as the national Klondike (Sörlin, 1988). However, the high expectations and visions associated with Norrland were soon to fade. Instead, Norrland has for most of the 20th century been understood as a distant, peripheral region, suffering from depopulation and a lack of modernity (Eriksson, 2010a).

However, perspectives have been starting to change yet again. The world is in a state of climate crisis, placing a demand on new, innovative ways to live, and thereby highlighting the need for fossil free products and development. This process of change towards more sustainable measures is commonly described as the *green transition*. And suddenly, through its unique prevalence of mineral resources, Norrland is yet again seen as filled with potential, as the future. But this time, politicians say, Norrland is expected to bring progress not only to the rest of Sweden – but for the green future of Europe as a whole (Busch et al., 2023).

Although there is existing research covering the earlier representations of Norrland throughout history, few – if any – attempts have yet been made to examine how the new green narrative affects the understanding of the region. At the time of writing, some studies examining specific initiatives and their consequences from an environmental or economical perspective have been published, but there appears to be a gap of research that critically addresses the new discourses and representations on a broader level.

Consequently, there is a need for further understanding of this new enticing discourse surrounding Norrland. The representations of the previous industrialisation of Northern Sweden legitimised the marginalisation and displacement of locals and a rapid exploitation of valuable natural resources (Sörlin, 1988; Lantto, 2000; Labba, 2020). Thereby, it is key to nuance and examine these new representations of the green industrialisation, to avoid repeating similar consequences again. Otherwise, the new narratives pose a risk of legitimising further exploitation of Norrland at the cost of local livelihoods and nature.

1.1 Aim and research questions

This study takes on a conceptual research approach by examining how the understandings of Norrland as an inner periphery of Sweden are being re-imagined through the green transition discourse. The underlying hypothesis of this study is that the recent focus on green transition initiatives opens a new arena for discourses and representations of Norrland.

So, the purpose of this research is to examine the current discursive representations of Norrland in the light of the green transition initiatives. The following research questions guides the study:

◊ Which representations of Northern Sweden are being produced through the perspective of green transition?

◊ How do these representations align with the narratives from previous understandings of Norrland?

◊ How can these representations of Norrland be understood through processes of peripheralisation?

1.2 Delimitations

This research focuses on the representations of Norrland since the new green transition initiatives have started, and is thus based on publicly available texts published by Swedish governance and news media in 2022 and 2023. However, this research does not aim to evaluate the viability of individual projects – nor the feasibility of a green transition in general – as such aims would not be suitable for the chosen scope and methodology of this study. Furthermore, the processes are merely at their start, and so a more evaluative approach would require a much longer period of research. Instead, this research thereby aims to focus on the representations that are currently associated with the green shift, as to create an updated understanding of how Norrland is being produced and understood as a region under these processes of change.

1.3 Disposition

The research is presented through the following disposition. Firstly, in the background chapter, I introduce the broader context and history of both Norrland and the green transition. Following this, the third chapter includes of a literature review that further outlines previous research on periphery as a concept. Furthermore, I also present an overview of previous research regarding the historical representations of Norrland, to provide context and a possibility for comparison with the new narratives. After this, the theoretical framework is introduced in chapter 4, where I present Lefebvre's theory of the production of space as the theoretical outlook for understanding how places are produced and represented. In the fifth chapter the chosen methodology is explained, and the data material that provides the basis for this study is presented. In Chapter 6, the data material is analysed discursively, as I identify the recurring themes of the new discourses in Norrland. Following this, Chapter 7 includes a discussion of my findings, where I interpret the results by connecting them with theory and previous research. Through this, the research questions of this study as well as suggestions for further research are also addressed within the discussion chapter. Finally, the thesis ends with the conclusion chapter, where I highlight the main contributions and implications of the research.

2. BACKGROUND

This section will initially describe the geographical context of Sweden and Norrland as a region, followed by a brief history of Sápmi and the industrial development in Northern Sweden. Lastly, the recent initiatives related to the green transition will be outlined.

2.1 Understanding 'Norrland'

Sweden is a large country; with an area of approximately 450 000 square kilometres, it is the fifth largest country of Europe. It is longitudinally oriented, spanning distances of almost 1600 kilometres between its northernmost and southernmost points, compared to its width of about 500 kilometres in the east-west direction (Sandvik et al., 2023). To illustrate, the distance between Malmö in the south and Kiruna in the north of Sweden (1 411 kilometres) is longer than the distance between Malmö and Bologna, Italy (1 241 kilometres). Similarly, the distance between Kiruna and the Swedish capital of Stockholm is equivalent to the north-south length of the entire country of France. Sweden thereby encompasses large areas of land, with vastly different geographies. Whilst the south of Sweden is characterised of rich plains and lowlands, Northern Sweden encompasses mountainous areas, including glaciers, as well as extensive rivers and woodlands. (Sandvik et al., 2023).

The varying landscapes of Sweden are traditionally divided into the regions of Norrland, Svealand and Götaland. Norrland – sometimes denoted simply as Northern Sweden – is the northernmost region, encompassing about 60% of Sweden's total land area. However, it is sparsely populated as it only inhabits about 11% of the population. Norrland is further divided into the five regions of Norrbotten, Västerbotten, Jämtland, Västernorrland and Gävleborg (see Fig. 2.1). Northern Sweden is especially known for its vast iron ore deposits, as well as woodlands for lumbering. As the Swedish economy is mainly characterised by services, heavy industries and international trade, the production and export of the primary industries of Norrland plays a central economical role (Sandvik et al., 2023). The regions of Norrland thereby grosses the highest GRDP per capita besides Stockholm (SCB, 2021).

Despite its central role for Swedish industry and economy, the long distances and sparse population of Norrland has rendered it as distant from the rest of the country, resulting in

it often understood as a periphery in relation to Sweden. Whilst it encompasses vast and varying areas, Northern Sweden tends to be understood as a homogenous, rural entity (Sjöstedt Landén, 2017). The consistent use of Norrland as a broad term, even when denoting something local, can be seen as one example of this pattern of 'othering' (Eriksson, 2010a). As Öhman (2016) highlights, the other country region names were historically formed as possessive descriptors relating to the tribes of Sweden; Svealand as *Svearnas land*, and Götaland as *Goternas land*. The name Norrland instead simply signifies the *Northern land*, discerning it as passive, peripheral and without ownership. Through this, it is linguistically made to belong to 'no one and everyone' (Öhman, 2016). Even now, 'Norrland' is the established descriptor of Northern Sweden, despite its size and thus the geographical vagueness of the name. Whilst it would be extremely uncommon to see someone mentioning a specific incident as happening "in Svealand", the same form of phrasing is commonly used in relation to Norrland [1].

2.1.1 A brief history of Sápmi

This perceived lack of ownership or presence of historical tribes in Norrland as described above is indeed a simplification; the majority of Norrland is part of Sápmi and has thereby been inhabited by the Sami[2] population since long before formal Swedish settlement. However, as the presence of the vast mineral resources in Norrland was discovered in the 17th century, Swedish rule became increasingly interested in gaining control over the region in order to secure its revenues (Sörlin, 1988). What followed then was the first attempts of colonising Norrland.

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[1] Whilst being critical of the geographical simplification that the term constitutes, this research will use 'Norrland' and 'Northern Sweden' as umbrella terms encompassing the different regions, as most of the material used for the study simply uses these terms and fails to distinguish between, or specify, its regions. However, I will argue that such language use is part of reproducing Norrland as an inner periphery, a concept that will be further developed throughout my thesis.

[2] Other minority groups – tornedalingar, laintalaiset and kväner – were also inhabiting the areas of Tornedalen and Kiruna/Gällivare before Swedish settlement, and have been subject to assimilation politics similar to those of non-reindeer herding Sami people. However, due to the lack of available research on these other groups specifically, this section mainly mentions the Sami. A recent government directive emphasis the need for new research and political acknowledgement of tornedalingar (Kulturdepartementet, 2020).

Despite being inhabited and used by the Sami, the land of Norrland was seen as non-utilised and appropriate for exploitation (Lantto, 2000). Thus, Swedish rule during the 17th and 18th century announced privileges (so called *lappmarksprivilegier*) of lowered tax and freedom from military recruitment for settlers who moved to Northern Sweden. At this time, it was assumed that the Sami only needed the most mountainous areas for their lifestyle, and that the rest of the land could then be subject to settlement and exploitation of its resources.

As a result, Sápmi and Norrland was increasingly colonised during the late 19th and early 20th century, subjecting the Sami to invasive and paternalistic politics, including forced displacement and systematic marginalisation (Lantto, 2000; Labba, 2020). Reindeer herding Sami were seen as the "true" Sami', in need of protection – i.e. segregation – from civilisation as to not change their ascribed, nomadic lifestyle. Simultaneously, by equating the Sami lifestyle with the reindeer herding lifestyle specifically, a majority of the Sami population that were leading a different lifestyle were excluded from Sami-specific policies and instead subject to assimilation politics (Lantto, 2000).

Thus, the treatment of Sápmi and the colonisation of 'Norrland' was simultaneously legitimised by social darwinist and economical reasoning (Lantto, 2000). On the one hand, Sami people were seen only as suitable for the nomadic, reindeer-herding lifestyle, and integration with the rest of society was seen as detrimental. On the other hand, the reindeer herding was also seen as a way to efficiently utilise the mountainous areas that were deemed as not usable for exploitation by settlers anyway (Lantto, 2000).

However, the preconception that the Sami only needed the mountain areas was misguided. And with the following increase of tourism and further mineral exploitation during recent years, even the mountainous areas are becoming increasingly utilised by outside interest, leading to land conflicts that are still prevalent today. Despite having the Sami recognised as indigenous people since 1977, Sweden was recently subject to critique by the UN and human rights organisations for not adequately addressing human rights and land issues of Sápmi (Fröberg, 2020).

2.1.2 Industrialisation – and dismantling – of Norrland

The historical exploitation and industrialisation of Norrland that accelerated the marginalisation of Sápmi was legitimised by the notion that the natural resources of the North would bring development, wealth, and modernity to the whole of Sweden; a narrative that will be further explained in section 3.2.1. Guided by this idea, settlements in Norrland were rapidly expanding during the late 19th and early 20st century (Sörlin, 1988). The timber and mining industries grew exponentially, and hydroelectric plants were built in the rivers. The railway network in Northern Sweden was also developed, becoming central for both the extraction of natural resources as well as for the "civilisation" of Northern Sweden. The population grew rapidly during this period, and whole new societies – such as the city of Kiruna – were built to support the mines (Sörlin, 1988).

However, the unilateral reliance on heavy primary industries made Norrland sensitive to changes in the global economy, and so the Great Depression came to have severe effects on local industries and employment (Eriksson, 2010b; Sörlin, 1988). Thus, the envisioned modernisation was never fully realised, and especially inland areas were left out from the development, creating regional disparities within Norrland. During the 20th century, such disparities were accelerated by politics encouraging centralisation and urbanisation. The structural transformation of industries in combination with localisation policies led to rapid out-migration from the rural inland, as the initiatives failed to acknowledge and compensate for differences between inland and coastal areas of Norrland (Eriksson, 2010a).

Norrland thereby came to be associated with out-migration, relocation policies, and closures of industry, welfare, and services. Even now, the closures of healthcare facilities in Northern Sweden still prevail in the 21st century, with research highlighting how the shutdown of such facilities not only lead to an increased geographical distance between local citizens and societal institutions, but also a perceived social and political distance to the rest of Sweden and its governing (Larsson, 2020).

Through this, the complexity of Norrland's history as a periphery in relation to the rest of Sweden becomes clear; a complex relation that is due to develop in a new direction through the rise of the green transition initiatives, which will be outlined in the following section.
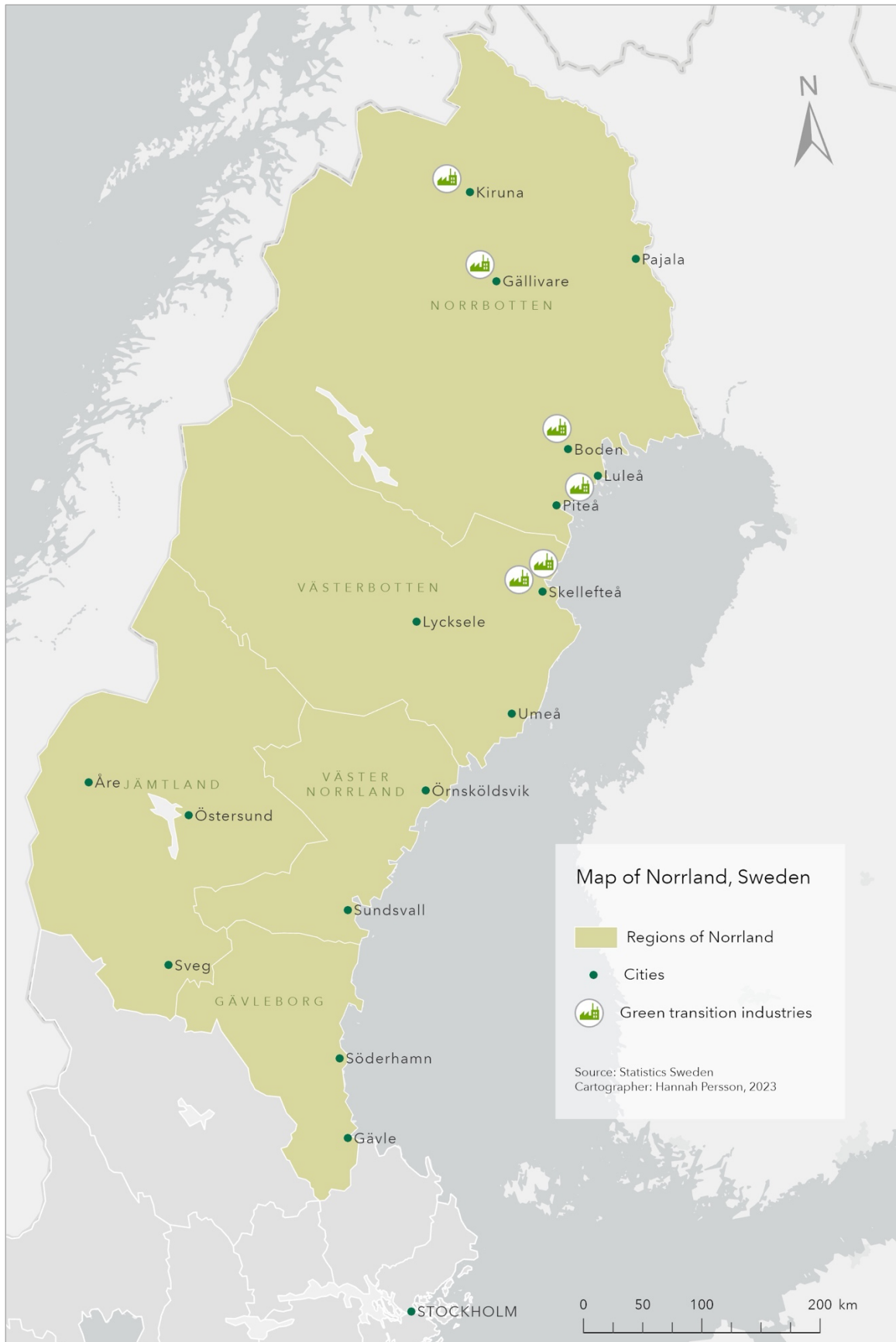
Figure 2.1: *Map of Norrland, with the green transition industries marked out (Persson, 2023).*

2.2 The green transition initiatives

In January 2023, the Swedish government invited the European Commission to visit the mining city of Kiruna, Norrbotten, marking the start of Sweden's new role of presidency in the commission. The choice of Kiruna as the destination, rather than Stockholm or other major cities in the South, aimed to highlight the new potential of Northern Sweden;

> "There is a golden opportunity for Northern Sweden to lead the new industrial revolution, and to become a driving force for green innovations that can benefit the northern regions of Sweden, the whole country and ultimately Europe as a whole. "
>
> (Busch et al., 2023; my translation)

This "new industrial revolution" is guided by the concept of green innovation, strongly connected to recent goals from the European Union. The 'European Green Deal', EU's new growth policy, aims to make Europe carbon neutral by 2050 and thereby become the first climate-neutral continent. The "green transition" thereby denotes the transition of society from its current state to a future, more sustainable and less polluting way of living. This will be achieved by decoupling economic growth from resource use, whilst 'ensuring a fair and just transition leaving no person or place behind' (European Commission, 2023a). Such green innovation that the EU encourages includes fossil-free materials and energy production, where especially iron ore and minerals becomes key components for a sustainable production of wind power plants or batteries for electric cars. For this reason, the EU ensures funding to regions that are undertaking measures that will accelerate the green transition.

Here, the prevalence of unique mineral resources in Northern Sweden thereby becomes central for the EU. Through the recent industrial initiatives, especially within Norrbotten and Västerbotten, the area is taking on a prominent role in transitioning its primary industries to more sustainable measures. As of 2017, Northvolt announced their plans of locating a lithium-ion battery factor in Skellefteå, Västerbotten, marking the start of the new era of green industry developments in Norrland. Following this, LKAB in Kiruna intends to become the world's first fossil free iron ore producer, coupled with an aim to increase

their focus on extracting and refining rare-earth minerals that are becoming crucial for the development of green tech products. Additionally, pilot centres to initiate fossil free steel production have been announced by both H2 Green Steel in Boden, as well as Hybrit in Gällivare/Luleå (see Fig. 2.1.).

These initiatives are not only seen as pivotal for the green development. They also mark a big financial presence in Northern Sweden, through an estimated 1070 billion SEK (approximately 103 billion USD) in current and planned investments (Phillips, 2021). Furthermore, the development has made Norrland eligible for multiple EU projects and funds, such as the 'Just Transition Funding' (European Commission, 2023b) and the 'North Sweden Green Deal' (Utveckla Norrbotten, 2022). The big investments by both the private and the public sector thus sets the route for a rapid transition in Norrland, and it is estimated that 100 000 people will need to move to Norrland within 10 years to satisfy expected work force needs (Larsson, 2022). This would constitute an exponential population growth, considering that the total population of Norrland at the end of 2021 was 1 188 270 inhabitants (SCB, 2022).

2.3 Summary

To conclude, Norrland can be understood as a region with a complex history; often treated as separate or as peripheral in relation to the rest of Sweden. Yet, it is now anticipated to go through major processes of change in the light of the green transition. The planned green initiatives by the primary industries in Norrland leads to big investments by the private and public sector, as well as rendering the region as key for the European Green Deal. Paradoxically, the development anticipates almost a doubling of the population within ten years, whilst the region has been struggling with closure of welfare and services. Simultaneously, the conflicts of interests, especially regarding the land use resulting from the colonisation of Norrland, are still prevalent. These convoluted conditions thereby centers the need for an updated understanding of how Norrland is currently being represented and understood in the light of the recent development.

3. LITERATURE REVIEW

To provide a deeper understanding of the processes in relation to Norrland, this literature review will highlight both peripheralisation as a concept as well as previous studies of representations of Norrland. Through this, academic understandings of peripheries will be introduced to provide a framework for understanding representations of Norrland, and how such discourses have historically contributed to Norrland's role as an inner periphery of Sweden.

3.1 Periphery as a concept

In common parlance, the term 'periphery' is often understood as the outer edge of an area, often associated with the shape of a circle – where the middle of the circle is the centre, and the outer ring is termed as the periphery. However, this concept is riddled with historical ideations and contains many unspoken nuances. This section thereby aims to describe and contextualise previous research that centers a deeper understanding of peripheries as part of socio-spatial processes.

In the 1970s, Marxist inspired sociologists and economists developed theories about what they described as 'dependency' between countries, and the relation between countries labelled as 'core' and 'periphery' (Wallerstein, 1974; Amin, 1974; Frank, 1977). Here, the core countries are understood as economically advanced – and thus "developed" – countries, whilst peripheral countries were those generally understood as less developed. These concepts stemmed from a critique of Western or European ideas of development as the norm, idealising development as inevitably positive, progressive and natural (Chew & Denemark, 1996). Thus, if a country was struggling to live up to such standards of progress – and consequently labelled as undeveloped - it was seen by previous scholars as a temporary and internally rooted phase of lacking the right conditions for "proper" development and modernisation.

As part of their critique, Wallerstein (1974) instead argued that the uneven development across nation-states is not coincidental or temporary, but rather an intrinsic feature of the modern, capitalist economy. This is because of the dependent relationship between core and

peripheral countries; the developed core countries are depending on their exploitation of the periphery to access labour, natural resources, and raw materials to benefit and maintain their own further development. In turn, the peripheral countries become dependent on their export to the core, as well as the financial support often given to peripheral countries from core countries; although this "support" rarely addresses the structural imbalances, but rather sustain these. According to the theory, the development of core countries is thereby happening at the expense of peripheral countries, which instead becomes stuck in the so called 'undevelopment of development' (Amin, 1974; Frank, 1977; Wallerstein, 1974). Thus, dependency theory centers the understanding that the modern prevalence of underdevelopment and disparities between countries is not a form of historical backwardness, but rather the result of the polarising nature of capitalism (Amin, 1974).

Whilst the dependency theory contributed to establishing a deeper understanding of the uneven relationship between centres and peripheries, it has also received some critique for its 'spatial fetichism' as it essentially divided countries into fixed categories (Agnew, 2021). More recent adaptations of the periphery concept have therefore shifted the focus from understandings based on assigned spatial categories, to a focus on the *processes* contributing to *peripheralisation* of any space (Kühn, 2015). The literature on peripheralisation as a process thereby emphasises the relational aspect of peripheries, where peripheries can be formed in any spatial scale or type (Stenbacka & Heldt Cassel, 2020). That is, peripheries should not only be understood from a country level, but peripheralisation processes can instead be attributed to smaller regions or even certain parts of a city.

Thus, peripheries are now understood as the result of socio-spatial processes where economic, social, political, and cultural dimensions interplay and contribute to creating marginalised spaces (Kühn, 2015; Naumann & Fischer-Tahir, 2012). Similar to the early theories, peripheries are seen as derived from the unevenness of capitalist development – but also from social processes of representations through norms and values, technocratic and political processes, and so on (Naumann & Fischer-Tahir, 2012).

This relational understanding of peripheries also allows for the acknowledgement of *inner peripheries*, a term denoting the peripheralisation of places contained within areas normally

considered as centres (Kühn, 2015; Stenbacka & Heldt Cassel, 2020). Inner peripheries are defined by the European research network for territorial cohesion as:

> " (a) enclaves of low economic potential, (b) areas with poor access to services of general interest or (c) areas experiencing a lack of relational proximity. A combination of these is, of course, also possible"

> (ESPON, 2018: 2)

The understanding of inner peripheries thereby exemplifies how social processes, rather than geographical distance, is the main contributor to such peripheralisation. As an example, marginalised suburbs of a city centre can thereby be seen as inner peripheries (Dymitrow, 2020), or regions within a country otherwise seen as central – arguably as seen through the understanding of Norrland as an inner periphery within Sweden as a centre.

Furthermore, Stenbacka and Heldt Cassel (2020) emphasise the understanding of peripheries as subjective perceptions. Since peripheries are formed through socio-spatial processes, understandings of what constitutes a periphery might vary, and a space might be perceived as peripheral in relation to one space, but central to another. Neither should a periphery be seen as a constant state – as different actors and processes interrelate, perceptions of a space as more or less peripheral might change. How a space is understood, or *produced,* is thereby key for whether it will be seen as peripheral. Thus, peripheries are created and reproduced through socio-spatial practice and discourse (Stenbacka & Heldt Cassel, 2020).

This understanding of processes of peripheralisation thus provides an important foundation for my research. Acknowledging that peripheries are formed through processes, and can thereby be subject to change, emphasises the need to understand how the current initiative of green transition affects this process. Additionally, I would also like to emphasise the importance of the relational understanding of peripheries presented above. Whilst the following sections will highlight how Norrland has been produced as an inner periphery in relation to (southern) Sweden, it is also important to be aware of the prevalence of centres and peripheries *within* Norrland, where the more urban, coastal cities tend to be reproduced as central in relation to the peripheral rurality of the inland Norrland.

3.2 Previous representations of Norrland

The following two subsections will outline how Norrland has been reproduced and understood throughout history, by research mainly from Eriksson (2010a) and Sörlin (1988). Whilst Eriksson's research is situated within the field of human geography, the research of Sörlin adheres to the discipline of history of science and ideas. The findings presented below are thereby inherently interwoven with their respective historical processes – most of which I have briefly described within the background chapter of this study for context. This section instead aims to outline the development of political and public narratives that have assigned different meanings to Norrland throughout the years, in order to highlight the socio-spatial processes that has contributed to its peripheralisation.

3.2.1 Colonisation and industrialisation: Norrland as the Land of the Future

The research of Sörlin (1988) traces early understandings and discourses of Norrland, starting in the 16th century and ending in the 1920s; the end of the first peak of the industrialisation. His findings are based on literary works as well as political and ideological discussions about Norrland that took place during this era.

One of the earliest narratives about Norrland can be traced to the work of Olaus Magnus, 1555, where Northern Sweden was portrayed as a distant, mystical, and exotic periphery; a "frosty paradise" with potential for colonisation and agricultural expansion (Sörlin, 1988). Whilst Magnus's stories mixed fiction and reality, this idea of Norrland seemed to prevail. When discoveries of silver were made in Nasafjäll, Norrbotten, in 1634, the potential of Norrland as Sweden's "West Indies" – thus understood as an exotic colony – was further exclaimed (Sörlin, 1988).

As of the late 19th century, as the colonisation had progressed and settlements were initiated throughout Norrland, the narratives were changing. Northern Sweden was gradually reproduced as less of the distant, exotic paradise, and more of a practically realisable, promising future (Sörlin, 1988). The political discourse at this time highlighted how the potential of the natural resources and the industrial development of Norrland would bring wealth and prosperity to Sweden as a country. This discourse, Sörlin argues, produced Norrland as *Framtidslandet* – the 'Land of the Future':

" Norrland had become a promised land, where the 'slumbering millions' were,
that when put into use would grant the motherland its 'second glory days' "

<div align="right">(Sörlin, 1988: 61; my translation)</div>

Through this, his research traces how this discourse of Norrland as the future was recurringly and eagerly reproduced throughout society – framing discussions within political, economic, academic, and journalistic spheres. These social processes were then accompanied by spatial processes, legitimised by the hopeful discourse, as Norrland was drastically and rapidly industrialised. Thus, as described in the background chapter, the primary industries of Norrland soon achieved their prominent role for Swedish development of wealth (Sörlin, 1988).

This discourse about Norrland thereby also became central for guiding broader narratives of the new, modern, and industrial country of Sweden in the early 20th century. Here, Sörlin (1988) connects the discourses to their historical processes; as at this time, a new nation identity was being construed. Sweden, Sörlin argues, was rapidly being reimagined ideologically, moving away from historical narratives of a 'poor farmer society', and instead being construed as democratic, progressive and as 'the world's most modern country' (Sörlin, 1988). Sweden was now described by writers and politicians as a young and forward-looking industrial nation – with the resources and natural landscape of Norrland seen as a key component of this drastic, national reconceptualization. In other terms, the resources and industrialisation of Norrland had 'opened the gates' for the broader modernisation of Sweden (Sörlin, 1988).

Thus, the research of Sörlin underlines how the discourse about 'the Land of the Future' contributed to legitimising the colonisation and exploitation of Norrland, as the processes were described as part of modern development and for the greater good of Sweden as a country. Through this, we can thus see an example of the dependent relation between centre and periphery, where the development of modern Sweden was reliant on the exploitation of Norrland. However, as indicated in the background, these representations were to change. Whilst the modernisation of Sweden continued, the development of Norrland was to cease.

3.2.2. From Land of the Future to Land of Paradoxes?

The research of Eriksson (2010a) instead traces how Norrland has been reproduced after the decline of the first industrialisation. By examining representations of Northern Sweden found in news articles, films, place marketing, politics and everyday life, Eriksson connects these narratives with broader structures of urban and rural hierarchies and peripheralisation.

As outlined in previous chapters, Norrland was subject to a rapid decline following the Great Depression and localisation policies that lead to closure of many industries and an accelerating out-migration from rural areas to cities in the South. These drastic socio-spatial processes were accompanied by public and political discourses about "what to do" with the now less hopeful future of Norrland (Eriksson, 2010a). To compensate for the increasing spatial disparities, Northern Sweden was increasingly seen as in need of financial support and subsidies to counteract the structural injustice. To illustrate, local public opinion grew especially strong in the 1960s-1980s, highlighting how Norrland had been continuously exploited by the rest of Sweden. The movements organised campaigns such as "Hela Sverige ska leva" (transl. 'All of Sweden should thrive') – a narrative that came to be encapsulated into government policy as part of the work by Glesbygdsverket (Government Agency of Rural Areas) (Eriksson, 2010a).

However, in the 1990s, this institutional approach was to change, as focus shifted from the government's role to provide "aid" in form of public investments to exposed regions, to instead encourage regions to attract capital and growth themselves. Marking this shift, Glesbygdsverket was in 2009 replaced by Tillväxtverket (Government Agency of Economic and Regional Growth) (Eriksson, 2010a). Thus, the discourse shifted from that of "All of Sweden should live" to a narrative of "All of Sweden should grow".

According to Eriksson (2010a), this change of narrative can be seen as a way for the governance to take control over the discourse and consequently gain acceptance for spatial disparities as something "natural". Places that do not live up to the expectation of providing growth for themselves are thereby subject to peripheralisation. Norrland, severely affected by the industrial closures and out-migration, were then to be increasingly reproduced

discursively as inherently incapable of providing such growth for themselves (Eriksson, 2010a).

Thus, the research of Eriksson (2010a) highlights how Norrland tends to be portrayed through narratives of 'outdatedness", rendering it as an obsolete inner periphery. Here, the narrative of depopulation thereby becomes key. It underlines the idea of Northern, rural areas as unattractive places of out-migration, unable to provide growth, and encourages young people to move to the perceived attractive, urban South. The out-migration is commonly attributed to Norrland's assumed lack of entrepreneurship, and Norrlandians who want to "become someone" should move South. Contrarily, those who choose to stay are seen as "part of the problem", as leading a lifestyle "supported by subsidies" (Eriksson, 2010a).

As a result, these representations feed into the narratives of *närande* and *tärande* regions (transl. 'contributing' and 'consuming' regions), where growth and progress are associated to the contributions of urban, Southern cities, and degrowth and stagnation with the subsidy consuming Northern inland. Consequently, Eriksson (2010a) emphasises how this narrative contribute to producing Stockholm and Sweden as modern, developed, progressive and creative, by utilising Norrland as a contrasting counternarrative of underdevelopment.

Eriksson (2010a) thereby highlights how the discourse about Norrland plays a continuous role in centering the national narrative of understanding the rest of Sweden as modern and progressive. However, somewhat paradoxically, Norrland is simultaneously portrayed differently, especially on an international level. Through films, place marketing and media, Northern Sweden is produced as authentic and traditional, as a *symbol for Sweden*. This perspective could arguably be seen as an updated version of the exotic narratives that Sörlin described. Here, Norrland tends to be represented through narratives of idyllic wilderness, of traditions and unique nature. For this reason, Sweden is often represented by attributes of the North in tourist shops; images adorned with reindeers, moose and mountains, heaps of snow, alongside Sami handicrafts. Through this, Norrland thereby constitutes an important part of the international marketing of Sweden, playing into foreign stereotypes of polar bears walking on the icy, cold streets (Eriksson, 2010a).

Accordingly, the research highlights how Norrland after the first industrialisation has been reproduced simultaneously as obsolete and as authentic, as outdated but traditional (Eriksson, 2010a). These discourses contribute to the understanding of Northern Sweden as an inner periphery, portraying the region as an area with unique traits – yet incapable to fully administer these.

Similarly, Nilsson and Lundgren (2015) also addresses the paradoxes of political discourse about Norrland. Their research identifies four main themes within political material from 1991 to 2013; Norrland is simultaneously produced as a problem, a resource, a region of growth, and a victim. Norrland is understood as a problem in the regards of its geographical and demographic disadvantages, that makes it lacking in growth and productiveness compared to urban areas. Simultaneously, the resources of Norrland are denoted to its nature, through its "unspoilt wilderness" that makes it suitable for tourism and recreation as well as resource extraction and financial gain. The discursive theme of Norrland as a region of growth underlines the struggles for growth in the region – while at the same time repeatedly highlighting the great potential for future growth. Finally, the political discourse of Norrland as a victim encompasses understandings of the region as underprivileged and exploited, suggesting that it should be more fairly compensated for its exploitation. At the same time, this final narrative contribute to reproducing Norrland as peripheral and weak, as it is once again understood as dependent on decisions by the urban south of Sweden (Nilsson & Lundgren, 2015).

Altogether, the literature presented above highlights how Norrland both historically and more recently is being produced as something 'other' and different to the rest of Sweden. Recurring narratives include understandings of Norrland as outdated and lacking growth, but with potential harboured within its natural resources.

3.2.3 Summary and looking ahead: new representations of Norrland?

As outlined above, existing research thoroughly covers the recent history and understandings of Norrland. However, few, if any, have published research addressing the new path; probably due to it still being in an early phase. As an example, Umeå University have recently got a new research project approved, where twelve researchers of Human Geography will examine the development in Northern Sweden between 2023-2029 (Umeå University, 2023). Besides this, most of the recently published research covering the green transition in relation to Norrland does so from an evaluative environmental or economical perspective.

To exemplify, Karakaya et al. (2018) have studied the green steel initiatives in Luleå amongst other cases, to evaluate the potential future pathways for green steel production from the perspective of sustainability transition studies. Similarly, Johansson and Kriström (2022) have calculated, and partly criticized, the planned green steel initiatives from an economical perspective, raising issues of price increases and a raise in electricity demands. Furthermore, research by Andersen et al. (2022) and Olofsson (2019) examines regional linkages and effects for the biomass and forestry industries.

As a result, most of the current research including the green transition does so from a focus on evaluating and examining the specific industry initiatives – rather than studying it from a societal level. There is thereby a vast literature on previous representations on Norrland – but the context of the new green transition in relation to broader understandings of Norrland has not yet been examined. There is thus a need for a critical, geographical research perspective to situate the previous knowledge within the new, green narrative. This study thereby aims to explore this gap and create further understanding of how Northern Sweden is currently being reimagined and produced.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

As emphasised throughout the literature review, representations and understandings of space is a central concept to processes of peripheralisation. And if peripheralisation is seen as a socio-spatial process, as Kühn (2015) amongst others argues, there is an inherent connection between social processes and spatial outcomes. Thus, *space is socially produced.* This key theoretical approach can be traced to the works of Henri Lefebvre (1991), namely his theory of *The production of space.*

Lefebvre's understanding of space as social, and thus inherently shaped by political and ideological processes, thereby becomes central for this research. As I aim to examine how Norrland is being understood through discursive representations, Lefebvre's theory contributes not only with a framework for analysing the production of spaces, but it also provides a central epistemological basis for my research; I do not attempt to analyse Norrland as a space in itself, as a neutral entity, but rather the representations of the social space – its *production.*

4.1 Production of Space

Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), a French philosopher inspired by the works of Marx, Hegel, and Nietzsche, has played a key role in advocating for the importance of understanding space within social theory. His emphasis on space stems from a broader critique of capitalist development; Lefebvre argued that space, whilst previously overlooked in Marxist theory, plays a pivotal role in the making of capitalism as it requires the structuring of space for its formation. Through this, Lefebvre emphasised the unique qualities of space. Unlike most things, space cannot be 'used up', but is rather continuously developing through the appropriation of new space or by improved use of existing spaces, as interpreted by Zieleniec (2008). Following this, whoever controls and develops spaces thereby also control how such space is represented and perceived (Lefebvre, 1991).

Space, Lefebvre argues, should consequently not be seen *as is*, as neutral or passive – but rather through the lens of the social and political processes that have shaped and produced it, rendering social space strongly connected to ideology and state. As a result, social space

is simultaneously seen as producing, and produced by, social relations, where each society produces their own space inherently shaped by its broader ideological and political processes (Lefebvre, 1991). Whilst describing the unevenness of spatial development in France, Lefebvre exemplifies this way of thought:

> "(…) These spaces are *produced*. The 'raw material' from which they are produced is nature. They are products of an activity which involves the economic and technical realms but which extends well beyond them, for these are also political products, and strategic spaces."
>
> (Lefebvre, 1991: 84)

Thus, the use of a Lefebvrian understanding of space allows this research to approach the production of 'Norrland' as a social space as shaped by, and shaping, wider societal processes. As denoted in the excerpt above, the production of space is here formed through material production, strategic processes of knowledge production, as well as signifying processes. Lefebvre sees these *dimensions* of spatial production in a trialectic relationship to each other; they are not ordered hierarchically but rather interwoven and in tension with one another. Together, these three dimensions form 'the spatial triad' (see Fig. 4.1), which includes the terms of *spatial practice*, *representations of space*, and *representational space* (Lefebvre, 1991).
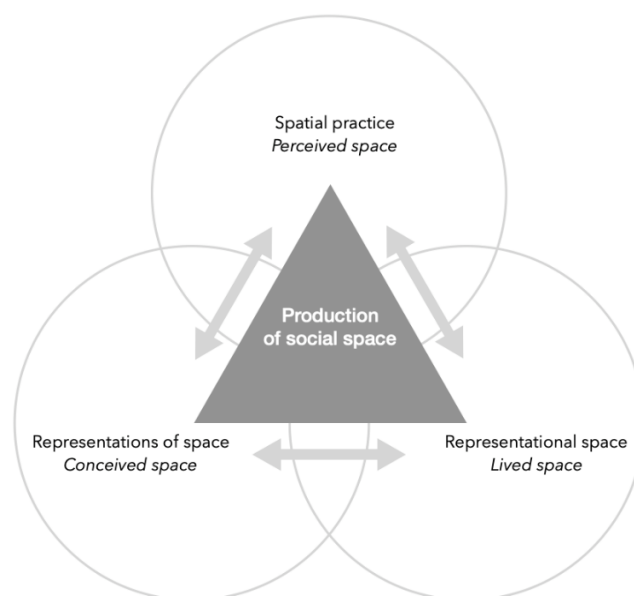

Figure 4.1: Visualisation of Lefebvre's spatial triad (Persson, 2023)

These three dimensions, sometimes denoted as perceived space, conceived space and lived space (Lefebvre, 1991), thereby each contribute with interrelated aspects that are central to producing social spaces. These aspects will be here be further explicated:

Firstly, the spatial practice involves the form and system of the space; it regards the human activity of producing, shaping and appropriating the societal space (Lefebvre, 1991). In other words, Zieleniec interprets the dimension of spatial practices as "*the production of spatial forms and structures and (…) how space is implicated in processes of habituation, of people, places and practices*" (2008: 15). So, the spatial practice can be seen as the material outcomes of social interactions, for instance the built environment and its functions of housing, industry, and commercial estates. In the context of my research, the spatial practice can for instance be understood as the spatial living patterns within Norrland; the localisation of settlements near resources, nature or assets that have contributed to the spatial practice of the region today.

Secondly, representations of space are described as the "*conceptualised space, the space of scientists, planners, urbanists, technocratic subdividers and social engineers (…) all of whom identify what is lived and what is perceived with what is conceived*" (Lefebvre, 1991: 38). Here, space is thereby abstractly conceived through discourses, representations, and knowledge-creation. As the representations of space outlines and rules its technical planning and constructing, and consequently affects the material and social practices within it, Lefebvre understands this dimension as the dominant space of societies. Thus, representations of space become key for this research, as it highlights how a space is conceptually governed and understood, and thereby sets the frame for the socio-spatial processes taking place in relation to it.

Finally, representational spaces are "*space as directly* lived *through its associated images and symbols, and hence the space of 'inhabitants' and 'users' (…). It overlays physical space, making symbolic use of its objects*" (Lefebvre, 1991: 39). Representational space is the lived and used space of everyday, where experiences, actions and feelings contribute to creations of meaning and symbols – resulting in representational spaces being simultaneously concrete and subjective. Following this, the dimension of representational space can in this study contribute to an

understanding of the different spaces of Norrland; how it is constructed and conceptualised by plans through the representations of space, and yet how it is actually experienced and lived in the everyday life through the representational space.

Although the three dimensions of production should be seen as interwoven and fluid, they contribute to producing spaces differently in different contexts:

> "(…) spatial practice, representations of space and representational spaces contribute in different ways to the production of space according to their qualities and attributes, according to the society or mode of production in question, and according to the historical period"
>
> (Lefebvre, 1991: 46)

Within the context of this study, this allows for an understanding of how the different dimensions have previously been attributed within the discursive production of Norrland, which can then be compared to how the dimensions currently interact and contribute to the creation of new discourses in light of the green transition. Consequently, the interactions – or tensions – of the dimensions can contribute to a deeper understanding of its spatial production.

As a result, in order to fully understand the current processes of change in Norrland, the theory of Lefebvre provides a central tool for uncovering and analysing the social production of Norrland as a space over time. Seeing social space as politically and ideologically reproduced through these interlinked dimensions, and not as passive or neutrally existing in itself, thereby becomes a key approach and basis for this study. Without this critical understanding of space, such political or ideological influence might go unnoticed, rendering their impact as naturalised and legitimised. Thus, as Lefebvre argues; "*authentic knowledge of space must address the question of its production*" (Lefebvre, 1991: 388).

5. METHODOLOGY AND DATA MATERIAL

This section aims to outline and describe the methodological considerations that has guided the research process. Initially, the research design and collection of data will be described, followed by an outline of the chosen research method – critical discourse analysis – as well as an explanation on how the method have been operationalised in my analysis. Finally, I will discuss the strengths and limitations of my chosen approach.

5.1 Research design

This study takes on a conceptual approach to the studied subject matter. It aims to combine theoretical and empirical findings to provide a fuller understanding of a certain concept; in this case the concept of *periphery*, as seen in the varying peripheralisation processes of Northern Sweden. With this in mind, I found using a qualitative research strategy most appropriate. According to Bryman (2016), qualitative research strategies aim to create deeper understanding of a subject by drawing on rich data and a focus on meaning. As such, qualitative research tends to provide contextual understanding of the chosen topic – compared to more quantitative research strategies which tend to result in generalisations and evaluations of a phenomena. Furthermore, qualitative research generally emphasises social life through its *processes,* aiming to highlight how social patterns evolve over time (Bryman, 2016). Utilising qualitative research strategies aligns well with the study's aim to understand processes of peripheralisation through representations of Norrland.

In terms of research paradigm, I adopt a social constructionist perspective in this research. Social constructionism holds a critical position to taken-for-granted knowledge (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). From this perspective, there is no objective social reality; social phenomena are constantly being produced and re-produced through social interaction (Bryman, 2016). Our understanding of reality tends to be discerned by categorisation, which are assigned meanings through social practice. As a result, the social constructionist perspective tends to emphasise the study of such categories or representations in order to further understand social phenomena (Bryman, 2016). By focusing on studying *representations* of Norrland (rather than objective materialities) in my research, I acknowledge that the meanings assigned to Norrland as a spatial construct are socially created and should be

interpreted in a context-sensitive, discursive manner rather than seen as literal, absolute meanings.

To discern these current representations for my research, I have chosen to mainly focus on recent (published in 2022 or 2023) written material about the transition in Norrland. The following section will further describe the process of selecting my material, and introduce the final material used for the research.

5.2 Data collection

To collect the data material for the study, I first conducted multiple broad searches online to obtain a rich overview of current discourses about the development in Norrland. Whilst doing so, I made sure to make note of recurring themes or ideas that were found in my readings. As my literature review highlights the previous presence of multiple, simultaneous representations of Norrland, I made sure to not limit my data to cover only a single theme, but rather identify material that provided a variety of representations. Similarly, I decided to use a variety of data sources to account for multiple actors involved in contributing to the narratives about Norrland. As a result, my material encompasses a mix of political opinion, government materials from both national and regional levels, as well as news media articles examined for reliability. Altogether, my process of data collection corresponds to the tenets of purposive sampling (Bryman, 2016), a strategy commonly used for qualitative research which aims to provide the researcher with a variety of material chosen to include key characteristics central for the aim of the research.

Furthermore, I also made the strategic choice to not include material from private companies or NGOs in my research. Whilst such actors – for example mining companies or climate activist groups – might contribute to the shaping of ideas of Norrland, their representations could be seen as more reactive and biased. At the same time, official documents or media should not automatically be seen as neutral and objective. In this sense, I will further describe the context, strengths, and drawbacks of my chosen material in the presentations below, as well as making note of their trustworthiness.

5.2.1 Material

When analysing the trustworthiness of documents as material, Bryman (2016) highlights four criteria: authenticity, credibility, representativeness, and meaning.

For this study, the materials can be interpreted as authentic as they have all been derived from their original sources. The credibility of texts relates to whether or not the information produced in the texts is correct. As the method of analysis in this research will utilise a critical discourse analysis, the information provided in the texts will not be addressed as unbiased factual statements, but rather analysed as discursive arguments. This means that the credibility of individual pieces of information contained in the texts are not seen as central to the outcomes of the study.

The representativeness of the texts should be understood through the purposive sampling explained above as well as the broader aim of this study. As I do not attempt to research *all* representations of Norrland, but rather a chosen sample of examples, my selected material does not aim to achieve full representativeness.

Finally, the criteria of meaning address whether or not the materials are clear and easily understandable. As I have chosen material that is aimed at the wider public, the material is generally free from intrinsic jargon, making it easy to understand. Throughout the results section, I have chosen to include quotes from the material in order to provide transparent examples of the discursive strategies in the texts. It should be noted here that the original material was all written in Swedish and have thereby been translated for this research. Because of this, I made sure to pay attention to achieve a careful and accurate translation that remained close to the original construction of the texts. However, as always with translations, it can sometimes be complicated to fully encapsulate the original linguistic meanings.

The material chosen for the study consists of the following sources, outlined in a table for a quick overview (see Table 5.1). Each actor has been assigned an "actor alias" for easier association with the organisation in the results section.

Table 5.1: Overview of the chosen material and actors. (Persson, 2023)

Actor alias	Reference to source	Type of actor	Type of text	Intended readership
Vinnova	Vinnova (2023)	Government office of innovation	Information on web platform, transcript of short film	Projects applying for funding, research, companies, others interested
Socialdemocratic politicians	Thorwaldsson et al. (2022)	Ministers of previous government	Political opinion (column in DN)	Readers of DN, broader public, actors with interest in Norrland
Liberal-conservative politicians	Busch et al. (2023)	Ministers of current government	Political opinion (column in DN)	Readers of DN, broader public, actors with interest in Norrland
Region Västerbotten	Carstedt and Ågren Wikström (2023)	Regional political governance	Marketing material (paper insert in Di)	Readers of Di, skilled/industry workers, potential in-migrators or investors
	Hultberg (2023)			
Dagens Nyheter	Derland (2022)	Newspaper, liberal	News articles	Broader public (daily national newspaper)
	Haltorp (2022)			
	Isberg (2022)			
	Kejerhag (2022)			
	Kejerhag (2023)			

The actors outlined in the table is further explicated below.

Vinnova:

This material was chosen to represent an example of Swedish governmental view of the development in Northern Sweden. Vinnova, or *verket för innovationssystem* ('The government office of innovation'), aims to increase and support innovation in Sweden to achieve sustainable development in line with Agenda 2030. Vinnova thereby encourages and fund innovative collaboration and research, and has had an active role in projects in Northern

Sweden. For this study, I used their platform *Hållbar expansion i Norr* ('Sustainable expansion in the North'), including a short film presenting future scenarios of Norrbotten and Västerbotten, as my material (Vinnova, 2023).

Political opinion:

As I also wanted to highlight recent political debates about Norrland, I chose to include political columns. To make sure that the material did not only reflect one political perspective, I selected material from ministers of both the previous and the current government. The column by the previous government in 2022 is written by:

Karl-Petter Thorwaldsson, *Minister of Economic Affairs* (S)

Anna Ekström, *Minister of Education* (S)

Eva Nordmark, *Minister of Employment and Equality* (S)

And the column by the current government of 2023 is written by:

Ebba Busch, *Minister of Energy, Business and Industry* and *Deputy Prime Minister* (KD)

Johan Pehrson, *Minister of Employment and Integration* (L)

Andreas Carlson, *Minister of Infrastructure and Housing* (KD)

This material was thereby chosen to exemplify the political visions of Norrland that is easily accessible to the public, as it might contribute to shaping public opinion of the development trajectories in Northern Sweden.

Region Västerbotten:

To include more of a regional perspective of the initiatives, I chose to include narratives from regional governance as well. Here, I chose to use articles from a newspaper insert that was produced by Region Västerbotten as an attachment in Dagens Industri (Di), a liberal-conservative financial newspaper. The material from the region is written in a shorter, more direct format than for example a regional development plan, and as it was published as an insert of Di it seems aimed at the broader, general public. As I am interested in examining the representations and narratives of Norrland on a more everyday level, this seemed like an appropriate choice. However, it should be interpreted more as a marketing material from the region rather than as a strict reflection of their regional development policy.

Dagens Nyheter:

To also include the media perspective of Norrland, Dagens Nyheter (DN) was chosen. DN is commonly described as Sweden's biggest, liberal daily paper, and can thus be argued as having an influential position in the public's perception of places. Another important reason for choosing DN is their self-proclaimed new focus on Northern Sweden. After receiving critique for their Stockholm-centered reports – and being accused of considering Norrland as 'foreign coverage' (Wolodarski, 2021) – DN announced that they as of 2022 would employ journalists in Northern Sweden to report on the new industry initiatives (DN, 2021). Following this, it makes it especially interesting to analyse their representations of Norrland.

To select the specific articles for my research, I searched through all DN articles published under the tag 'Northern Sweden' since early 2022. Whilst doing so, I made note of the common topics that were addressed in the articles about the green transition. I decided to focus on articles concerning land use conflicts (Derland, 2022; Isberg, 2022) and supply of skilled labour (Haltorp, 2022; Kejerhag, 2022; Kejerhag, 2023). These topics were the most extensively covered and seemed to cover wider representations of Norrland – contrary to other short news about the progression of single projects.

5.3 Critical discourse analysis (CDA)

The material presented above have been analysed using critical discourse analysis, CDA, inspired by Norman Fairclough (2010). Here, discourse is understood as a linguistic category that relates to a phenomenon and frames our understanding of it (Bryman, 2016). Discourses are not seen as neutral, but as efforts to frame and prompt a certain understanding of a topic. As Bryman argues, "(p)eople seek to accomplish things when they talk or write; discourse analysis is concerned with the strategies they employ in trying to create different kinds of effect" (2016: 532). Discursive narratives are thus seen as a central contribution to shaping understandings of social reality and can thereby be seen as constitutive of power relations. CDA wants to capture and highlight such structures by analysing why some discourses are being produced as neutral and privileged above others (Bryman, 2016). For example, how discourses on growth sometimes seem privileged above discourses of sustainability.

Whilst other applications of discourse analysis (e.g., Laclau & Moffe) suggest that discourse is the sole force shaping society, Fairclough's critical discourse analysis emphasises the need to understand the interrelations within broader social structures and practices (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). Discourse both forms, and is formed by, social practice. As a result, Fairclough argues that discourse analysis should consider both the text elements and the discursive practice, as well as the social practice (Fairclough, 2010). In other words, the material should be examined for its rhetorical and discursive strategies, as well as how they relate to broader social practices, for example by discerning the actor and their purpose and intended readership of the texts.

Additionally, CDA also focuses greatly on change, or the *intertextuality* of a text (Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000). As most language use expands on previously established meanings, it becomes essential to trace how a discursive event reproduces former discourses or combine new meanings. This could be exemplified through how meanings are developed, and changed, through reproductions in different texts. A certain discourse might originally emanate from a complex, academic understanding, which is then 'translated' with less jargon into a newspaper article, which then leads to public debate – resulting in a similar, but slightly different narrative that is being picked up and reproduced within political documents. Consequently, the intertextuality of the original academic discourse and the reproduced political discourse can be examined.

To summarise, using CDA as a method of analysis contributes with an understanding of language's contribution to social practice. The method can thereby be used in my research to highlight the role of prevalent discourse, as well as the interplay of different or previous discourses, in their contribution to processes of peripheralisation. From this perspective, I do not strive to read the texts *as is,* but rather discern how Northern Sweden is being 'made' through discursive elements and strategies in the texts.

5.3.1 Implementing CDA

Utilising CDA as a method of analysis is sometimes argued to lack preciseness, and thus resulting in a risk of faulty or excessive interpretation. To mitigate these drawbacks of the method, it is important have a systematic approach. Thus, in order to conduct the discursive analysis systematically, I decided on the analytical units I was going to observe in the texts beforehand. I have thereby chosen to analyse the content for the use of buzzwords, especially regarding the green transition, such as 'green innovation'. I have also analysed the vocabulary use in general and made note of key words or words charged with values, such as 'modern', 'entrepreneurship', 'depopulation', 'growth' et cetera.

Furthermore, I have also made note of recurring chains of reasoning – that is, when the presented narrative seemed to favour one topic or explanation whilst ignoring others. By looking at the narrative structure and vocabulary use, I have thereby examined what seems to be made 'natural' or presupposed in the texts.

As described in previous sections, I first conducted a broader search to familiarise myself with the data and to make sure that the chosen material included examples of the most prevalent themes of debate about Norrland. After overviewing the material, the initial themes were then re-evaluated as I was conducting my analysis, further examining my texts for reoccurring themes or patterns of discourse.

Therefore, I used abductive reasoning to derive the themes, as I combined knowledge from the literature review with the new themes identified through my analysis. These were divided into two final themes, which can be understood as discourses competing about the construing the broader meaning of Norrland. These themes – 'Norrland as the future' and 'Norrland as a struggle' – and their corresponding subthemes will be presented in greater detail in the following results and analysis chapter.

5.4 Strengths and limitations

Whilst qualitative research tends to be valued for its ability to provide deep, contextual understandings of the chosen topic, some limitations include its subjectivity, that it can be hard to replicate or generalise, as well as the lack of transparency (Bryman, 2016).

The subjectivity and difficulties of replication can partly be attributed to the central role of the researcher within qualitative research in general and through critical discourse analysis specifically. It can be argued that such research tends to be too reliant on the interpretations of the researcher. A way to reduce, or show awareness of, the researchers role is thereby through reflexivity (Bryman, 2016; Winther Jørgensen & Phillips, 2000), to address and reflect upon the researcher's relation to the topic and potential biases. Following this, it seems appropriate to mention my own positionality as a researcher. I grew up in a small town in Dalarna, making me aware of urban and rural dynamics since teenage years. I also have family that have relocated to Norrbotten in recent years, which gave me a more personal and direct interest in the area. As of this, I would argue that I have somewhat of both an outside and inside perspective; I do not have the same personal bias to Norrland as if it was my own home, yet I have grown increasingly aware of and interested in the conditions there whilst spending time there. Despite my position, some degree of subjectivity will always be inherent to this form of research.

Additionally, I made sure to address the lack of transparency usually associated with qualitative research by emphasising how I have implemented CDA in my research specifically. Some discourse analysists resist the idea of codifying their practices entirely, claiming that discourse analysis is purely a 'mental craft skill' (Bryman, 2016). However, whilst I did not use a strict codifying approach, I did choose to use a thematic and structured analytical approach to make my interpretations more transparent to the reader.

Finally, another limitation of my study is the possibility of generalisation. As I aim to explore the current representations in a deeper context, I make no attempt to produce representative answers to make broader generalisations from. However, I hope that the knowledge provided by the study could be useful as an example of current peripheralisation processes through the perspective of green or sustainable development, which could perhaps prove useful for reflecting on regions in a similar position.

5.4.1 Ethical considerations

The ethical consideration of research includes an understanding of how the conducted study might result in ethical issues for the people or activities related to, or addressed within, the method of research (Bryman, 2016). As the materials included in this study was all publicly accessible and intended for public readership, the study does utilise any confidential or private data. However, some of the material does include quotes from individual people interviewed by the author of the original material. In this case, I have chosen to mostly elicit such quotes, or only address those in general terms, as to not attach the statements to individual people if not necessary. After all, my study aims to create understanding of the representations produced by institutions and media, rather than individual claims or experiences.

6. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

In this chapter, the results of the critical discourse analysis will be presented by analysing the different themes or discourses that have been found in the material. The chapter is thereby divided into the two broader themes, with their correlating subthemes. Within each section I will highlight the key narratives of the discourse and present how these meanings have been produced through the material. At this point, the material will mainly be analysed from a textual, discursive perspective. Following this, the discussion chapter (see Ch. 7) will encompass further theoretical and conceptual interpretations of the results as well as deliberating on their implications.

6.1 Norrland as the future

This theme was derived from the vast material centering Northern Sweden as the future of green development. This discourse was mostly produced in the materials from regional and national governance, but it was also mentioned in the news articles at times. The narrative of 'Norrland as the future' centers the importance of the development in Northern Sweden for achieving a sustainable future. Thus, it produces Norrland as unique, progressive, and world-leading, at once normalising and legitimising the development with the idea of the 'greater good'. I will argue that this discourse is produced through three subthemes, or steps, as the different subthemes interrelate and build upon each other to form the overarching narrative of Norrland as the future. These subthemes are presented below.

6.1.1 Breaking with the old – a new, progressive, and modern region

Central to the discourse of Norrland as the future, is the idea of the green transition as a "fresh start". This narrative is constructed as a contrast against previous discourses; sometimes explicitly referenced to, whilst sometimes implied discursively. As a result, this subtheme highlights the intertextuality of the discourses, as the examples presented below in different ways interact with previous meanings of Northern Sweden.

Throughout the texts, Norrland is repeatedly framed as a place in transition, subtextually understood as the transformation from places of stagnancy to places of growth. For

instance, whilst describing the future scenarios of Norrbotten and Västerbotten in 2032, Vinnova describes how

> "A society in rapid transformation brings new thoughts and ideas with it, and norms are being challenged, and that is perhaps why the entrepreneurship constantly reaches higher levels in Västerbotten and Norrbotten" (Vinnova [3])

This text emphasises the regions anticipated development into forward-thinking, progressive, and entrepreneurial areas. By highlighting the positive influence of new ideas stemming from the transition, and thus the challenging of old norms and patterns, Norrland can become increasingly entrepreneurial; discursively contrasting the previous narratives of Northern Sweden as obsolete and lacking in entrepreneurship and growth. On a similar note, the text later emphasises the importance of local and global collaboration in order to challenge the entrenched, dated systems of society and industry, further framing the transition as a break with the old ideas and progression of the new, modern Norrland. However, some old traits are still being highlighted by Vinnova as needed to be preserved, as the preservation of the genuine and traditional as well as anchoring of the local is also mentioned – although mainly in relation to the construction industry.

Contrasting the break with the old way of living more explicitly, the debate article by the Socialdemocratic politicians [4] retells the history of Northern Sweden as a region associated with unemployment, out-migration, industry closures, and lack of hope for the future. However, the new transition is framed as the inherent solution – it will bring high employment levels, increased in-migration and growth in Norrland, rendering it progressive and modern. This narrative is further emphasised in the text by exemplifying how the transition could bring a change in lifestyle and new opportunities for locals:

> "(…) an engineer who today is working with diesel engines can re-educate themselves to work with the electric vehicles of the future, or a person who has

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[3] Quote from Vinnova (2023), my translation
[4] From Thorwaldsson et al. (2022)

worked within the manufacturing industry can become an operator in the green industry. ” (Socialdemocratic politicians [5])

As of so, the old and new, the outdated and the modern is repeatedly contrasted through the discourse, rhetorically reproducing the narrative of how not only Norrland itself, but the lifestyle of its inhabitants, will get a fresh, new start through the green transition of society.

Whilst the transition from old to new ways of life in society is encouraged, it is also seen as coming with drawbacks. This can be seen in the following excerpt from the text by leaders of the regional development board in Region Västerbotten;

> “If change is not uncomfortable, it probably is not much of a change. (…) There is a historical, green transition going on in Northern Sweden, from old ways of doing to new, sustainable alternatives – and it is of course not without controversies. But all this friction is actually good news, the fact that we have already started this progress of transition.” (Region Västerbotten [6])

This exemplifies a recurring narrative in the material. The change from the old ways of doing to the new, sustainable – and thereby inherently better – way of doing things. Whilst the positive outcomes are repeated, the “friction” or problems are not elaborated further in the text, thus rather portrayed almost as inevitable, as “bumps in the road” needed to pass over in order to achieve the great change. Consequently, the narrative of green transition becomes naturalised and legitimised, as it despite some minor issues is proclaimed as the right way forward.

Furthermore, another article from Region Västerbotten[7] states that the prejudices of Norrland has never been true, and especially not now in the light of the new transition. Through this, the transition seems to become a way to refute previous discourses of

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[5] Quote from Thorwaldsson et al. (2022), my translation
[6] Quote from Carstedt and Ågren Wikström (2023), my translation
[7] From Hultberg (2023)

Norrland, by ascribing new, positive, and modern attributions to the area. By highlighting the positive press that the initiatives have received, the development is described as a " *(…) fantastic story that goes against what many had previously believed*" (Region Västerbotten [8]). Through this, Northern Sweden is portrayed almost as an underdog, ready to prove previous narratives wrong.

Altogether, Norrland is thereby represented through a recurring chain of reasoning as in a process of inevitable transition for the better. Here, by breaking with the old, stagnant patterns, Norrland can now become a new, modern region of (green) growth.

6.1.2 Unique traits and innovation

Drawing on the narrative of the new Norrland, the material consistently emphasises the unique traits making it especially suitable for the transition and new era. These traits refer both to the "lifestyle" of Northern Sweden as well as the natural resources it encompasses.

The mineral, forest and water resources are produced as the foundation for creating job opportunities and competitiveness. The access and quality of such resources are repeatedly emphasised as unique to Norrland, denoted by the Liberal-conservative politicians[9] as something 'other countries could only dream about', thus underlining the potential and importance of the development.

Furthermore, by describing how the region has the 'highest rated levels of trust, equality and life quality', Region Västerbotten[10] attributes Northern Sweden with 'soft' traits, again positioned as unique and especially valuable. In a similar manner, Vinnova emphasises what they describe as the 'human power' of the *nybyggaranda* (roughly translates to 'the spirit of settlers') [11], presumably intended to describe the spirit of seeing new potential in places.

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[8] Quote from Hultberg (2023), my translation
[9] From Busch et. al. (2023)
[10] From Carstedt & Ågren Wikström (2023)
[11] From Vinnova (2023)

Additionally, in another future scenario of 2032, it is suggested that Västerbotten and Norrbotten will become

> "(…) an area for technical development and new innovation which has attracted entrepreneurs from the whole world, and we can now see how a digital start-up mecca is developing" (Vinnova [12])

Accordingly, these narratives produce Norrland as a place with unique conditions; both in terms of natural resources and as an innovative, equal, and forward-thinking region with a high quality of life. Again, this can be seen as a contrast to previous attributions of Norrland.

6.1.3 Norrland as world leading for the greater good

Altogether, the narratives of the new, progressive Norrland with unique qualities seem to come together to contribute to the understanding of Northern Sweden as having a prominent role in the international sustainable transition. This idea is both explicitly stated in across the material, as well as discursively reinforced through the broader structure of narrative, rendering it as the favoured conclusion of the texts.

The investment in Northern Sweden is repeatedly described by both Vinnova as well as national and regional governance [13] as Swedish industries taking a world leading role in the green transition, centering Norrland as one of Europe's driving forces and role models of sustainability. This is further attributed by yet again emphasising the unique traits and resources, here illustrated by excerpts from the Liberal-conservative politicians and from Dagens Nyheter:

> "The green transition is depending on raw material – without iron, copper, and rare-earth elements, we cannot build solar power, wind power or green products which helps us achieve the climate targets. Sweden has a unique position when

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[12] Quote from Vinnova (2023), my translation
[13] From Vinnova (2023), Thorwaldsson et al. (2022) and Hultberg (2023)

it comes to Europe's supply of iron ore, steel, and critical and strategic raw materials" (Liberal-conservative politicians [14])

"The world is yearning for minerals and metals which can be found in the Swedish bedrock (…) that are useful for batteries and wind power. More iron ore will also be needed as the world is to transition and new, fossil free products are to be developed. (…) It is mainly Finland and Sweden who encompass the rich resources. Sweden is often described as Europe's granary for minerals"

(Dagens Nyheter [15])

Despite coming from texts explicitly addressing Norrland, these unique traits are here repeatedly portrayed as assets of *Sweden*. Thus, this places a greater emphasis on the larger scale of these initiatives; the assets of Norrland are central as unique assets of Sweden. Furthermore, the access to such mineral resources is here connected to what is presented as an acute need of exploiting such minerals to produce green, fossil free products. By highlighting the importance of these materials, and simultaneously the rich prevalence of these in 'Sweden', the texts reproduce the inference of (Northern) Sweden's unique position as the best provider of such minerals – beneficial not only for Sweden itself but for the greater good of Europe and the world.

The exploitation of resources in Northern Sweden thereby becomes framed as a key component for a successful green transition. This expectation of Norrland as the provider becomes further stressed as some texts note how a lot of the current production is sourced from China – and the EU wants to make Europe less reliant on Chinese import – as noted both by Region Västerbotten and Dagens Nyheter[16]. As a result, Northern Sweden is further rendered as the prominent, if not only, option for successfully achieving Europe's goal to become the first fossil free region of the world.

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[14] Quote from Busch et al (2023), my translation
[15] Quote from Derland (2022), my translation
[16] From Hultberg (2023) and Isberg (2022)

Finally, the entirely positive expectations connected to this development can be found in this excerpt from the board of regional development of Västerbotten:

> "By investing in green technology and green growth we pursue a leading position in the world, making us useful, competitive, successful, and attractive, for decades ahead. If we can success in the role as a forerunner in transition, we will grant the success and welfare of the country in the future. At the same time as we are making progress for the whole world. " (Region Västerbotten [17])

As seen above, the green transition development – and Norrland's central, leading role in it – is again naturalised and legitimised by the attribution of positive outcomes, not only for the region but also for the greater good of the world. Throughout this discourse, Norrland is then inherently made *as the future*; by at once creating a new future for itself and changing its previous reputation, but also as a key component of the sustainable future of Europe.

6.2 Norrland as a struggle

Contrasting the discourse above, the narrative of Norrland as a struggle encompasses a more critical perspective of the transition – mostly represented through the newspaper articles. Whilst some of the material above briefly and vaguely mentioned 'challenges' or 'frictions', this section will outline the more thorough representations of problems in relation to the green transition in Norrland; namely the conflicts of interest and the demographical struggle.

6.2.1 The conflicts of interest

A key narrative that was recurringly reproduced in Dagens Nyheter is the one of Norrland as a site for conflicts of interest. Here, the conflicts mainly concern land use issues between the reindeer herding and the mining industry. Through, the issue tends to be framed as a struggle between the Sami and environmental movements on the one hand, and the state and the industry on the other[18]. This framing of conflict is further reproduced by the rhetorical choices, illustrated by the use of charged language;

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[17] Quote from Carstedt & Ågren Wikström (2023), my translation
[18] From Derland (2022)

"*the industry has* kidnapped *the words of 'green transition'*" (DN [19]), and: "*in Vittangi, the* battle *between minerals and reindeer herding is at its peak*" (DN [20]).

The articles by Dagens Nyheter highlights arguments of both "sides" of the conflict, with the industries narrative being very similar to the notion above – that Norrland is a key component of green transition and must thereby be further exploited for the global benefit [21]. At the same time, the texts underline the local worry for exploited land and disturbances. An interviewee expresses worry that:

> "if the planned industrialisation progresses, there is nothing left to do but to cancel the reindeer herding. New mines, industries, wind power and solar power has big consequences as the reindeers require large areas of land. (…) Whilst the government and major companies speak fondly about the new industrialisation, the traditional reindeer herding as part of the Sami culture and lifestyle is protected by basic law of Sweden." (Dagens Nyheter [22])

Furthermore, the interviewee emphasises how they have traditionally used the grounds without exploitation, whilst protecting nature and ecosystems. Hence, Norrland is here framed a site of struggle between different lifestyles and ways to address the climate issues. The national, if not international, exploitative interest on the land of Northern Sweden is contrasted against the local, more traditional use of land.

Following this, the potential and visions of the mining industry and the bigger role of Norrland is counteracted within the articles[23] by criticism from locals and environmental activists who question the 'green' aspect of the planned mines, instead proposing that a decreased, not increased, resource consumption is what is needed. As a result, these

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[19] Quote from Derland (2022), my translation
[20] Quote from Isberg (2022), my translation
[21] From Isberg (2022) and Derland (2022)
[22] Quote from Derland (2022), my translation
[23] From Isberg (2022) and Derland (2022)

narratives frames Norrland as a site of current struggle, as the point of intersection of local and transnational interests and sustainability discourses.

6.2.2 The demographical struggle

This narrative of struggle seems less concerned with the idea of the transition, as compared to the conflicts of interests, and instead more with its practical execution. As mentioned previously, the planned initiatives in Northern Sweden are estimated to require an in-migration of 100 000 people in the upcoming years, highlighted by the discourse of areas moving from stagnancy to growth.

However, the supply of skilled labour is narrated as another struggle of Norrland's green transition. In an article from Dagens Nyheter, the previous conditions of the regions are framed as playing a part:

> "Despite the presence of sought after resources, the attractive force for families is not as big. (…) Many of these societies have experienced depopulation and have thereby needed to cut important societal services such as schools. (…) There is also a need for leisurely activities. High salaries are not enough"
>
> (Dagens Nyheter [24])

Through this narrative, the peripherality of many communities in Norrland is posed as a challenge for the possibility of growth. Northern Sweden is rendered as less attractive for in-migration, as it is understood as 'still struggling' with the consequences of previous closures. Similarly, another article from DN[25] highlights the acute lack of dentists and hospital beds, whilst describing the long distances between services in Norrland. Following this, experts are then interviewed, suggesting that the goal of 100 000 new inhabitants will be hard to achieve, due to the lack of attractive factors.

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[24] Quote from Haltorp (2022), my translation
[25] From Kejerhag (2022)

As a way to combat these struggles, initiatives to recruit internationally have started. The article by Dagens Nyheter highlights an initiative by municipalities and industries in Norrbotten to travel to a career fair in the Netherlands:

> "When looking at the Netherlands, they live very cramped, the cost of living is high and the competition for employment is high. What we are travelling to tell them is that there are possibilities for another lifestyle than what they have today, and the advantages of living in Northern Sweden" (Dagens Nyheter [26])

As a result, the narrative structure of these texts suggests that in-migration to Norrland from other parts of Sweden seems hard and unattractive. However, the possibility of framing Norrland in a positive light outside of Sweden is portrayed as a more successful option. This narrative thereby frames Northern Sweden as a site for demographical struggle, highlighting the challenge of the previous out-migration of the periphery as a challenge to achieve the predicted and required in-migration of the future Norrland.

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[26] Quote from Kejerhag (2023), my translation

7. DISCUSSION

Two of the research questions guiding this study was *"Which representations of Northern Sweden are being produced through the perspective of green transition?"* and *"How do these representations align with the narratives from previous understandings of Norrland?"*. Following the results presented in the previous chapter, this study suggests the prevalence of two main themes of discourses of the 'new' Norrland: Norrland as the future and Norrland as a struggle. These identified themes thus align broadly with the previous research of Sörlin (1988) in regards to narratives of the future, as well the findings from Eriksson (2010a) and Nilsson and Lundgren (2015) in regards to narratives that are associating Northern Sweden with problems.

However, the way that these discourses are being (re)produced discursively seems to differ from previous narratives, as highlighted through their different subthemes. These differences will be further interpreted in connection to theories of the production of Norrland as a social space in section 7.1.

Furthermore, the study's final research question of *"How can these representations of Norrland be understood through processes of peripheralisation?"* will be addressed in section, 7.2 whilst discerning the implications of the findings. This chapter aims to interpret and discuss the results in a broader perspective of understanding how socio-spatial processes affect regions under the guise of green development. Finally, this chapter ends with suggestions for further research.

7.1 Producing 'Norrland'

The results indicate the use of two main narratives of future and struggle, that in their different ways contribute to the general understanding of Norrland and its role within the green transition development. These discourses can thus be seen as part of socio-spatial processes that contribute to the understanding – or the *production* – of Norrland as a social space (Lefebvre, 1991; Stenbacka & Heldt Cassel, 2020). As a result, this section will discuss how the results of the study can be interpreted through Lefebvre's dimensions of production of social space, to create a deeper understanding of how Norrland is being reproduced. This study has focused on the discourses about Norrland, which of course is mostly synonymous with the dimension of representations of space. However, through the textual analysis, I

have examined how the discourses utilises attributes of the spatial practice and representational space as discursive strategies. These indications will be discussed below.

Lefebvre understands the dimension of spatial practice as the materialities of space formed by human activity (Lefebvre, 1991). Within this research, the future-oriented discourse especially seems to be utilising few attributes from this dimension. In comparison, the future-oriented discourse of the 19th and 20th century, as described by Sörlin (1988), encompasses a greater emphasis on the material structures of Norrland. In his findings, the spatial practices of the settlements and the growing mining societies were repeatedly attributed, almost materialising as a symbol for the development of the industrial Norrland.

Additionally, another spatial practice that was repeatedly mentioned in the previous narratives is that of the distances across the social space of Norrland. The scattered localisation of communities, vast landscapes, and long distances were central attributes of the previous representations of Norrland – understood as exotic traits of stillness and remoteness, and simultaneously as an issue of the disconnected periphery (Eriksson, 2010a; Sörlin, 1988). Thus, through these previous narratives of a spatial practice characterised by its remoteness, the peripherality of Norrland was reproduced; contributing to an understanding of Northern Sweden as homogenously remote and rural, despites its differences between coastal areas and inlands.

Contrary to the previous research, the spatial practice then appears less prevalent in the discourses found in this study. Here, Norrland seems less characterised by its distances or its material form. Thus, the spatial practice of the current Norrland is rarely addressed within the materials. Whilst the mines are yet again becoming central for the development, there are few descriptions of current mining societies that would mirror the narratives found by Sörlin (1988). Instead, the results of this study indicate the prevalence of rather abstract visions. Norrland is instead mostly attributed with abstract representations of space, envisioned through narratives of the future, innovative, digital, growing societies in Northern Sweden – often characterised by urban traits – as reproduced especially in the material from Vinnova and Region Västerbotten. As a result, if Norrland was previously produced with the *rurality* of the spatial practice as generalised for the whole area, it now

appears to be the opposite – where the *expected (urban) development* of cities in Norrland seems abstractly reproduced through the representations of space and put forward as the ubiquitous future of the whole region. Through this discourse, there are thereby no acknowledgement of spaces that would not fit in to this vision, thus producing Norrland as a homogenous space – with a homogenously green, innovative urban future.

What will happen then to the lived spaces of Norrland, the spaces that does not fit into this all-encompassing future? Shifting the focus to the discourses encompassing attributes of the representational space highlights the presence of experiences that does not align with these visionary representations of space mentioned above. These experiences of the lived spaces are mainly attributed in the newspaper articles, as the journalists includes narratives from locals about their everyday experiences and feelings associated with the green transition development in Norrland. However, the dominant narrative of the future-oriented representation if space is still present within these articles; alongside describing the conflicts of interest and land use – and thereby acknowledging the local worry about the exploitative measures – the recurring narrative of Norrland and its integral potential as part of the green future is yet again restated. Thus, even the discourse of struggle seems to adhere to the narrative that this form of green transition is the only way forward.

As a result, the findings of this study indicate a dominance of the future-oriented discourses through the representations of space which are mainly reproduced by politicians and government. These abstract, visionary narratives of the new Norrland seem to both explicitly and discursively refute previous understandings of Northern Sweden as less innovative or obsolete; yet at the same time repurpose previous narratives of Norrland as the future of Sweden. Through this large focus on the *potential of* Norrland, rather than its present form and conditions, the conceived space can be seen is privileged above attributes of the physical or lived space within the studied material.

Accordingly, the results of this study could be seen as aligning with Lefebvre's (1991) argument that representations of space tend to dominate the production of space within capitalist space, at the expense of the lived space, greatly influencing both the understanding of a space and how it is controlled. According to Lefebvre, the dominating role of the

representations of space, created by government and capital, contributes to what he describes as abstract space – the commodified, homogenous, interchangeable space (Lefebvre, 1991).

Here, on the one hand, the narratives produce Norrland as unique through its resource potential. On the other hand, the same production of Norrland here also seems to remove it from other characteristics, symbols, and history, rendering it as abstract, homogenous and suitable for any form of (green) investments. This attempted abstraction (and its inherent contradictions) is not coincidental, according to Lefebvre, as abstract spaces seek to achieve homogeneity and consensus, in order to present the space as neutral to commodify it.

Thus, the pessimistic could argue that the intentions of the 'new' Norrland could perhaps be less as part of a green agenda, but rather as a new reasoning for legitimising the extraction of resources and growth of industries; after all, as previously described by (Lantto, 2000), the previous industrialisation and colonisation of Norrland 150 years ago was made possible by such economical reasoning of maximising the use of "non-utilised" land and resources. If the new devise is that "All of Sweden should grow", as derived from the findings of Eriksson (2010a), the narrative of a green transition thus seems to provide a suitable narrative to legitimise such economic expansion in Northern Sweden.

7.2 A world-leading periphery?

As discussed above, the studied material seems to indicate that the abstract, future-oriented vision of Norrland tends to dominate its production, centering an understanding of Northern Sweden as intrinsic and key for the green innovative future of Europe. This section will thereby discuss the implications of these results, and how this can be understood in relation to the previous understanding of Norrland as an inner periphery of Sweden.

Arguably, the results might at first glance indicate somewhat of a paradox. Norrland has repeatedly been described as an inner periphery of Sweden, yet it is now instead understood as world-leading and prominent – the opposite of what might be associated with a periphery. Can a place then still be considered as an inner periphery, when it is simultaneously framed

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to by widely acknowledge by international interest? Or is it perhaps so, that Norrland is undergoing a process of becoming less peripheral to Sweden?

Drawing on the aforementioned definition by ESPON (2018), inner peripheries are understood as areas of either low economic potential, low access to service, or a lack of relational proximity. From this study, it seems quite clear that Northern Sweden can be understood as an area with high economic potential, as such narratives are repeatedly emphasised within the future-oriented discourse. However, through the discourse of the demographical struggle of Norrland, it is framed as still suffering from low access to services, rendering it less attractive for in-migration.

Similarly, the lack of relational proximity might be denoted here; within the same discourse, Norrland tends to be framed as too far away from the rest of Sweden to encourage moves across the country. Yet, recruitment for in-migration is also taking place internationally, as with the case of Netherlands shown in the material. Thus, this could be seen as indicative of a further development of the different national and international images of Norrland that Eriksson (2010a) finds in her research. Northern Sweden seems to be far away in relational proximity to the rest of Sweden – but internationally, the distant imageries instead become exotic and attractive traits.

Furthermore, whilst the above argument relates to the relational proximity as understood by potential in-migrators, it could also be understood from the perspective of governance. As emphasised previously, current understandings of peripheralisation underlines social processes, rather than geographical distance, as the main contributor. Thus, as Stenbacka and Heldt Cassel suggests, the concept of an inner periphery *"(…) highlights a power dimension, an area that is denoted as a periphery belongs to a governing centre. A periphery is thereby never 'its own'"* (2020: 11; my translation). In line with this understanding, it could thereby be of interest to consider how the power relation between Norrland and Sweden is being denoted within the studied material.

As shown in the results section, Norrland tends to be made as synonymous with Sweden within the narrative of the region as a world-leader contributing to the greater good. That

is, when ascribing positive attributes and the great potential of the transition in Northern Sweden, the materials textually also connect these attributes to Sweden. This can be seen as contributing to creating an understanding of Sweden as prominent within climate innovation, as a leader, with unique assets beneficial for the whole of Europe.

On the one hand, this discursive strategy could be seen as an attempt to reduce the fragmentation and mental distance between Norrland and the rest of Sweden; to increase the relational proximity of a previous periphery. By equating the progress of Norrland with the progress of Sweden, it can be seen as a way to portray Northern Sweden as more integrated with the rest of the country.

However, on the other hand, the prevalence of the previous research on the imagery of Norrland in relation to the broader understanding of Sweden might suggest otherwise. The exploitation of Norrland during the first industrialisation came to be an important symbol contributing to the understanding of Sweden as the "world's most modern country" (Sörlin, 1988). Similarly, after the industrial decline, the contrast of Norrland as obsolete, traditional and lacking in growth instead contributed to reproducing urban Sweden and Stockholm as progressive, modern, creative and growing (Eriksson, 2010a).

With these findings in mind, Sweden is now then portrayed as world-leading in climate initiatives; yet again a representation constructed through the processes in Norrland. It thereby seems that Northern Sweden repeatedly constitutes a form of symbolism that contributes to the narrative and idea about Sweden as a nation. Thus, aligning with the previous research, it could be argued that Norrland here is *not* produced as 'its own', as Stenbacka and Heldt Cassel denotes, but rather repeatedly produced in relation to its current role for Sweden; again reproduced as an inner periphery within the studied material.

To summarise; what are then the implications of the findings in this study? Firstly, the results underline the focus on *processes* within the concept of peripheralisation. As highlighted through the literature review and the empirical material, Northern Sweden is in a constant process of reimagination and reproducing. However, whilst the narratives of peripheralisation seems to shift, the spatial hierarchies of power seems to remain; perhaps,

as Wallerstein (1974) argued, as spatial disparities can be seen as an intrinsic feature of the modern, capitalist economy.

The results of this study suggests what while Norrland in general has regained a more central role in the Swedish public debate due to the green transition initiatives, there are still remnants of experiences and places that are not included in such visions. By the dominating production of Norrland as an abstract, homogenous space, the everyday life and experiences of the consequences and conflicts arising from the green transition might be dismissed. As a result, this simplified understanding of Norrland produced within the discourse could risk exacerbating spatial disparities for localities that do not fit into the mould of the envisioned green growth.

Thus, whilst this study has focused specifically on the understandings of Norrland, it might provide insights or examples applicable to other peripheral regions currently under interest for similar green transition narratives.

However, as emphasised – peripheralisation is a process; and Norrland is only at the beginning of this current process of change, and the direction might change. Following this, further research to evaluate the bigger processes will be needed.

7.1 Suggestions for future research

This study has covered a limited material of current representations of Northern Sweden. Hence, the reliability of the findings is impacted by the limitations in data material and time frame. Further research on the production of Norrland throughout this process of green transition will be needed to encompass how the narratives change and adjust to the developments. As this process is recently initiated and currently under progress, more comprehensive research encapsulating the bigger processes of change would be suitable in the future. Additionally, the understanding of whether or not Norrland is to remain as an inner periphery of Sweden or not is an interesting avenue for further research.

8. CONCLUSION

Taking on a qualitative approach by critically analysing discursive material, this study set out to create a deeper understanding of the current representations of Norrland in light of the green transition initiatives. As such, the findings of this thesis have identified two main themes: the discourses of Norrland as the future, and Norrland as a struggle. Through this, the findings advance previous research in the field by tracing the reproduction of earlier narratives and how they are being reused or refuted through the current green narrative.

Applying a Lefebvrian understanding of space as inherently political and ideologically produced, it has become evident that the future-oriented discourse of Norrland seems to be dominating current representations, contributing to understandings of Norrland as a homogenous area with great potential for innovation, green exploitation, and a development characterised by urban traits of growth and modernity. The findings suggest that the current narratives seem to favour a specific focus on economic growth and innovation, despite local worry of the consequences for land, people, and environment. Through this, this research suggests that the ubiquitous focus on the potential of Norrland might lead to the dismissal of issues of the present, rendering the current route of development as naturalised and legitimised.

The results of this study further shed light on how this legitimisation of the developments in Norrland is construed through a narrative about the 'greater good'. The green exploitation of Northern Sweden will lead not only to local benefits, but for the whole of Europe, rendering the transition as prominent – even world-leading – and thus acute. Through this, I argue that such narratives can be seen as a continuation of using Norrland as a symbol to create broader narratives of Sweden as a country. The initial colonisation of Northern Sweden contributed to constructing the narrative of Sweden as the world's most modern country – similarly to how the current developments seem to contribute to the image of Sweden as a world leader within climate neutral innovation.

This study has contributed to a deeper understanding of the process of peripheralisation, highlighting how green narratives seem to be utilised by the urban core to uphold structures of spatial disparity. By equating Norrland with innovative industries of growth, the

dominating discourse risk rejecting the variety of lived experiences in Northern Sweden, and thus putting pressure on people and places to fit into the narrow mould of the envisioned form of green growth.

Of course, only time will tell how the envisioned development of Norrland progress. The idea of developing a region suffering from structural marginalisation and peripheralisation is not inherently bad; perhaps this could be the opportunity for Northern Sweden to shift from peripheral attributes to that of a more positive future. Here, the possibilities of green innovation initiatives pose an attractive solution; both for the future of a peripheral region rich in resources, and for combatting the global climate crisis. However, the current abstract, futuristic representations about Norrland associated with such transition, principally emanating from the urban South of Sweden, pose a warning sign. To again draw on the thoughts of Lefebvre: it is only when the lived space gains its dominance that we can create radically equal and fair societies. Until then, the future of the world-leading periphery of Norrland remains a question of uncertainty.

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