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Examining current incidents of forest clearance in Sweden

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Abstract

Forest clearance as a means of gaining agricultural land is associated with nostalgic images of pioneering and expanding frontiers throughout human history, activities that indeed lie behind cultivated landscapes in Europe and elsewhere. Today, deforestation in a global perspective is referred to as coinciding with severe losses of habitats and/or livelihoods. In boreal areas, with a predominance of forest land, the picture of current land use changes is one of passive reforestation and/or active forest plantation, often connected to a concern about the futures of (open) cultural landscapes. Nevertheless, the opposite phenomenon, forest clearance, is existent in the boreal landscapes of northern Europe. The paper analyses the occurrence and reasons motivating current forest clearance activities in Sweden. In the presented study, data derived from national statistics on forest felling, farm specific geographical information, and farmer interviews were utilized. A discussion of the spatial dynamics on farm level is offered connected to intentional intensification of land use and the processes manifested therein. Preliminary results indicate that several spatial limits exist connected to the scales of both current and historical agricultural activities and that these interact pushing clearance of new land at the same time as technology, meaning time& energy constraints, in lesser degree acts as delimitating factor. As an important co-actor on farm level, a profitability discourse appears motivating forest clearance activities. The paper stresses the importance and the different nuances connected to scale as a multidimensional phenomenon, thereby offering possibilities to deepen the social and geographical understandings of the notion of scale.

Keywords: land use change, farmer decision-making, forest clearance, boreal agriculture

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