DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES (CES)

Is the EU barking up the wrong tree?

A study on Swedish stakeholders' perspectives on the means and conditions for establishing a more coordinated European agenda on forests

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Master's Thesis: 30 Credits
Program/course: MAES – Master's Programme in European Studies
Semester/year: Spring 2022
Supervisor: Frida Boräng
Words: 21 454

Abstract

Forests are becoming an increasingly important tool for the EU in its fight against climate change following the introduction of the Union's Green Deal and the recent Forest Strategy for 2030. However, since forest policy in itself is not an EU competence, but instead a national competence decided and managed by the individual Member States, this makes any attempts from Brussels to shape forest policies in a certain direction a sensitive matter, not least for forest-rich Sweden. Given this background, this study set out to explore what attitudes and positions exist among different interest groups within the Swedish forest community toward the creation of a more harmonized forest agenda in the EU and the policy instruments by which such an agenda should be formulated. In doing so, a qualitative study was conducted through a total of 7 online, semi-structured interviews with a selection of both forest owner interest groups of varying size and environmental interest groups. The results of this study illustrate both important differences as well as similarities between the interest groups interviewed. Forest owners emphasized values related to the substitution of fossil material and social sustainability to be better considered under an EU forest agenda, while the environmental groups instead pushed for aspects such as biodiversity, democratic ownership of forests, and/or recreation. However, both sides agreed that a harmonized EU forest agenda must allow for separate solutions based on each Member State's national context. In terms of what practical instruments different interests preferred, a clear preference for soft policy instruments could be seen among the forest owner interest groups Mellanskog, Södra and SCA, while the government-owned forest company Sveaskog instead preferred a mixture of soft and hard policy instrument in line with the collective opinion of the environmental groups Greenpeace, Naturskyddsföreningen and WWF.

Keywords: forest policy, EU, Green Deal, Sweden, interest groups.

Acknowledgements

First, I would like to thank all the respondents from the forest owner organisations and the environmental organizations who agreed to participate in this study and be interviewed by myself. Your unique inputs and different perspectives have been highly valuable, and I truly appreciate your constructive dialogue with me during the course of this research project!

Second, I want to express my profound gratitude to my supervisor Frida Boräng who have provided me with both excellent advice and guidance, as well as a warm mentorship throughout this process. Without her careful reading and flexible cooperation, this study would not have been possible to accomplish. Thank you very much for all the time you invested in my Master's thesis!

Last but not least, I would also like to thank my family for supporting me on a personal level through this semester by being patient and lightening my mood when needed during the most intense part of the thesis writing. I really appreciate it!

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Abbreviations

CEPI Confederation of European Paper Industries

CO2 Carbon dioxide

EU European Union

LRF Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund

NGOs Non-governmental organizations

R1 Respondent 1

R2 Respondent 2

R3 Respondent 3

R4 Respondent 4

R5 Respondent 5

R6 Respondent 6

R7 Respondent 7

SFIF Swedish Forest Industries Federation

WWF World Wildlife Fund

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Figure 1: Analytical framework developed from the theoretical expectations

Table 1: List of respondents and their organizations

1. Introduction and General Aim

With the introduction of the European Green Deal, the European Union (EU) has in recent years shown that it wants to take the lead on the global political arena when it comes to cutting down its CO2 emissions and fighting climate change. In doing so, the EU has highlighted the increasingly important role of forests as natural carbon sinks needed in achieving the long term of goal of making Europe net-emission free by 2050. Consequently, the Deal was also accompanied by a new EU Forest Strategy for 2030 setting up clear environmental objectives for the Member States to, amongst other things, plant 3 billion additional trees to promote biodiverse forests, ensure the sustainable use of wood-based resources for bioenergy, and protect Europe's last remaining primary and old-growth forests (European Commission, 2021). In addition, the Commission also launched a Biodiversity strategy for 2030 to accompany the new Forest Strategy. (European Commission, 2021). Although forest policy itself is currently not a competence of the EU but instead a national competence of the Member States under the principle of subsidiarity (Edwards and Kleinschmit, 2012), the design of the Forest Strategy for 2030 is a clear sign that the Union now wants to more actively shape and influence national forest policy decisions in the Member States in accordance with the ambitious environmental objectives set up in the Green Deal.

However, the new Strategy has been subject to fierce criticism from some of the EU's most forest-rich Member States and not least from Sweden, where both the political establishment as well as representatives of large forest corporations are calling the policy objectives outlined in the Strategy a "threat" to Sweden's national forestry and its traditional practices (Duxbury, 2021; Sanchez-Nicolas, 2021). Given that the Forest Strategy is considered to be one of the cornerstones of the EU's Green Deal framework, and that Sweden is one of the biggest and most important forest nations in Europe, this level of resistance raises the question of what should be done to achieve sufficient policy agreement and support on forest policy matters at the European level going ahead, as this will be key for the Union in order to pursue its long-term goal of making Europe climate neutral by 2050. Adding to this dilemma, when looking at the existing academic literature, earlier studies have indicated that many forest industry representatives in Europe have long asked for a more diverse and clear definition from Brussels on what a European forest policy agenda should entail (Aggestam and Pülzl, 2018; Winkel and Sotirov, 2016). This gap is a recurring one in the forest policy academia that has not yet been properly answered. Within the Swedish context, there is also research that suggests that there may even be a cleavage between public and private forest owner in their attitude toward the development of a more clearly defined forest policy agenda in the EU, with private ones being traditionally more positive to this than public, government-run forest corporations (Bjärstig, 2012), something which needs to be explored further.

Furthermore, previous studies on forest interest groups' approach to the European policymaking process indicate that environmental groups generally play an active and influential role in shaping policy decisions in Brussels, while from the forest owners' side this influencing campaign is primarily conducted through the agency of large multinational or national industry associations such as CEPI or SFFI considering the large financial and organizational resources often needed to effectively access the European policymaking process (Berny and Moore, 2021, In: Gravey and Jordan, 2021; Angelstam, Lazdinis and Lazdinis, 2009; Juerges and Newig, 2015). As a result, the interests and opinions of small and medium-sized forest owners risk being neglected in the actual policy formulation phase at the EU level. However, this exclusion of less-resource intense forest interests is not only a problem in the actual policymaking process in Brussels but also visible in much of the forest policy research, in which the interests of small and medium-sized forest owners are often either completely absent (Bärstig, 2012; Bjärstig and Keskitalo; 2013) or, when included, not clearly specified with respect to the EU policymaking process (Angelstam, Lazdinis and Lazdinis, 2009; Juerges and Newig, 2015). Hence, their perspectives become even more important to include as well in order to get a more well-balanced overview of what kind of policy should be developed to create a more well-defined European forest policy agenda.

Lastly, the literature also points to a recurring dilemma related to various forest policy initiatives taken by the EU over the years, that almost all of them have been dependent on soft policy (voluntary) compliance by the Member States given that forest policy, as mentioned earlier, remains a national competence and not an EU competence, thus effectively forcing the Union to use non-binding policy documents such as strategies and action plans as its main tool for steering and coordinating the forest management policies in the different Member States. Consequently, the effectiveness of previous forest strategies and action plans on the actual implementation at the national level has usually been very low. This in turn raises another important question to study, namely what means for formulating a European forest policy agenda should then be aspired for going ahead according to various forest interest groups. Should such an agenda be based primarily on soft policy instruments through voluntary compliance as has been the case so far, or more of hard policy instruments (regulations, legislation), or perhaps a combination of both?

For the above reasons, the general aim of this thesis is to look more closely at a broader spectrum of different forest interest groups/stakeholders in Sweden involved in the policymaking process around forest management in Europe, and to explore what kinds of ideas and opinions they have to the formulation of a more collective forest policy agenda in the EU, as the formation of such an agenda could be potentially crucial for the Union's ability to reach its ambitious climate targets for 2030 and 2050. In doing so, the issue of whether to use soft and/or hard policy instruments to more effectively create this kind of collective forest policy agenda in Europe will also be

examined, given that the EU today faces the dilemma of not having direct legislative authority over forests while at the same time pursuing various ambitious environmental objectives that are dependent on forests.

In terms of structure, this thesis will be divided into six separate chapters starting in chronological order with a literature review summarizing the most important previous research on forest policymaking in Europe in relation to interest groups/stakeholders. Then, a short theoretical discussion will be presented that will expand on some of the most important insights from the literature, leading up to the specified aim of this study and subsequent research questions that will be investigated. Next, the selected methodology and research design will be outlined and discussed, before moving on to the actual analysis part, where the results observed and collected from this study will be analyzed in detail. Finally, the thesis will end with a concluding discussion about the different results that were found and what the implications of these findings will be for the future research on this topic.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Local forest governance and stakeholder's role in implementation

Similar to the aim of this thesis, an important part of the previous academic research on forest policy in Europe has been curious into investigating what perceptions and perspectives different forest stakeholders/interests at the national level have in relation to an established forest policy agenda, although most of these studies focus almost exclusively on aspects such as decision-making in local forest governance and the stakeholder/citizen experiences of participation during the national implementation process in different European countries. The empirical nature of these studies is often constructive and solution-seeking, with a clear focus on understanding what elements in the participatory process are necessary for ensuring that forest-related policies and decisions are successfully supported and implemented by the local forest owners and civil society affected by them. For instance, Kangas et al (2010) point to the importance of framing the participatory process in ways that can create an interest and motivate different stakeholders of opposing views (for instance, forest owners and environmentalist groups) to become more engaged in the process, which could then open up for a more constructive dialogue. This, they suggested, could be done by for example framing forestry as a matter of nature resource management and thus relevant for various stakeholders regardless of their special interests, as well as by pushing the stakeholders to set more realistic and feasible goals for the implementation of forest policy decisions (Kangas et al, 2010).

Other scholars point to the complicated group dynamics often involved in local forest governance that make this a difficult process to manage. The perhaps most extensive study on this issue is that of Kleinschmit et al (2018) in which the researchers examined the involvement of experts, citizens, and participatory professionals in national

forest policy decision-making processes by analysing 81 research articles between 1998 and 2015. Their study included a wide range of important actors in the forest sector, including actors such as forest owners of varying size, forest product associations, private citizens, technical experts, environmentalist groups and forest researchers. Looking specifically at the level of interaction and representation of these different actors in the decision-making process, Kleinschmit et al (2018) observed that participatory professionals (most notably forest owners and experts) to this day seem to dominate the decision-making process in local forest governance, while the perspective of private citizens is often neglected or at least clearly downplayed in terms of its relevance for the process, not seldomly by the experts themselves arguing that it is "difficult" to pursue (Kleinschmit et al, 2018, p. 9).

Instead, the role of citizens in many local forest governance processes so far has mainly been limited to, as the authors describe, "listening (to), applauding and heckling" decisions taken on forest policy matters (Kleinschmit et al, 2018, p. 14) Hence, the authors suggest that future participatory processes on forest policy should be more well-balanced in terms of what stakeholders are represented and more open to opinions and scrutiny from local citizens (Kleinschmit et al, 2018). Similarly, other studies on this issue point to the same lack of inclusion of private citizens in local participatory processes on forest policy, seemingly regardless of the national or regional context (Maier, Lindner and Winkel, 2014; Teder and Kaimre, 2018). Moreover, some forest scholars also refer to the transformation of the national administrative culture from closed state governing to more of community governance and deliberation on forest-related policies that has taken place in various countries in Europe in recent years as being an important factor in explaining why decision-making processes on forest policy are more complex than before (Secco, Pettenella, Gatto, 2011; Maier, Lindner and Winkel, 2014).

Last but not least, there is a large amount of studies that have focused on the stakeholders' role in the more practical implementation phase of local forest governance, especially with regard to the implementation of the EU's Natura 2000 framework and the associated European Habitats Directive. Here the geographic variation between the countries/regions analysed from one study to another is significant, stretching from Western Europe and countries like the UK, France, the Netherlands and Germany (Blondet et al, 2017), Spain and Italy in the South (Di Gregorio, Paavola and Pecurul-Botines, 2019; Blondet et al, 2017), to Poland and Slovakia in the East (Chmielewski and Glogowska, 2015; Brescancin, 2018). Common for all these studies is that they have not only investigated how effective and successful the implementation process has been in different countries in terms of including and engaging forest stakeholders and civil society, but also in what way this has had an impact on the final output/implementation of the framework.

In this way these kinds of studies are more result-oriented in nature than those studies mentioned earlier on local forest governance, in which the focus is instead on finding solutions to problems deriving from the decision-making process itself without looking at the actual output side. Amongst other things, the research on the Natura 2000 framework indicates that local implementation of it at the municipal or regional level has generally been rather slow and ineffective, but that the increased use of participatory processes in recent years has helped boost the level of acceptance for the framework among local farmers, forest owners and citizens living in Natura 2000-areas (Blondet et al, 2017; Chmielewski and Glogowska, 2015). In addition, scholars have noticed that the initial critique from many local stakeholders against the Framework's perceived restrictions on economic activity in Natura 2000 areas has gradually become less prominent, with more and more stakeholders instead discovering various forms of economic potential related to Natura 2000-areas such as for example ecotourism and branding opportunities for their products (Brescancin, 2018; Di Gregorio, Paavola and Pecurul-Botines, 2019; Chmielewski and Glogowska, 2015).

All in all, this line of scholarship provides a comprehensive and valuable overview of the different challenges and past experiences of participatory processes among forest stakeholders in Europe, both from a decision-making perspective as well as from a practical implementation perspective in the form of the recurring Natura 2000 example. Some shared patterns can be detected in the articles examined, not least when it comes to the poor inclusion of private citizen's in different national forest policy processes and regarding the slow implementation rate of the Natura 2000 framework at the municipal or regional level. Still, since this line of scholarship is so clearly process-oriented, it can at best only provide a limited understanding of the role of stakeholders and other forest interests involved in forest policy-making. Moreover, with regard to the issue of implementation, I would argue that the Natura 2000 framework, given that it is a biproduct of the supranational European Habitats Directive and as such is designed to promote "the conservation of natural habitats and species of community interest through the maintenance or restoration of a favourable conservation status" (Blondet et al, 2017, p. 346), should be seen as an environmental regulation aimed at protecting biodiversity first and foremost, and not necessarily as a forest policy regulation per se. Hence, I believe a clearer empirical focus on various forest stakeholders' perspectives in the development of actual forest policy content, rather than on how well they implement environmental regulations, needs to be considered. In addition, I find it peculiar that one of the most forest-rich European nations, Sweden, seems to be so scarcely researched with regard to the issue of local forest governance through the inclusion of forest stakeholders.

2.2. The effectiveness of previous EU policy documents on forests

Another relevant line of scholarship to this thesis is the literature that exists on how earlier EU- initiated policy documents and instruments on forests have been received by the national Member States. What is important to note from this academic theme though is that it focuses on the soft (i.e. voluntary) policy measures through which the Union has attempted to harmonize forest policy consensus and practices between the Member States. The reason for this is the fact that forest policy itself as a policy area remains a national competence vested in the respective governments of the Member States under the principle of subsidiarity, meaning that the EU cannot force or regulate strictly forest policy matters at the supranational level. Thus, any centralized policy efforts made by the EU on issues such as for instance forest management and forestry practices must be carried out carefully together with (and not against) the different national governments (Edwards and Kleinschmit, 2012).

More concretely, the researchers involved in this theme has devoted a lot of attention to studying the effectiveness of soft policy documents such as strategies and action plans in achieving compliance with and coordination of forest policy objectives at the national state level within Europe. Examples of policy documents that were analysed include both the EU's Forest Action Plan from 2007-2011 (Aggestam and Pülzl, 2020) as well as the second EU Forest Strategy from 2013 (Aggestam and Pülzl, 2018). In addition, a review article of the most recent EU Forest Strategy for 2030 has also been produced lately (Aggestam and Giurca, 2021). The methodology applied on these different studies has consisted of a mixture of interviews with EU officials, industry representatives and Member State officials, surveys and review papers. In terms of results, their studies all point to a recurring issue in the EU's formulation of forest policy objectives that is a lack of interest and commitment from the Member States in the implementation phase.

In the case of the Forest Action Plan, this soft policy document was actually designed to act as a tool for speeding up the implementation and compliance with the EU's first Forest Strategy from 2007 (Aggestam and Pülzl, 2020). However, the Strategy and associated Action Plan failed to make a significant mark at the implementation phase in most Member States, and a big reason for this could perhaps be the scattered attitudes towards it that Aggestam and Pülzl observed in their study. For instance, some of the most forest-rich nations Sweden and Finland stated that they did not attribute any real value to the content of the Action Plan, referring to it as "of no importance" to their national forest management practices (Aggestam and Pülzl, 2020, p. 5). Meanwhile, respondents from other forest-rich Member States such as Austria and Spain stated that they in fact did attribute a significant degree of relevance to the Forest Action Plan since it helped guide them in the development of their domestic forest management practices. At the same time, the Plan was only ascribed medium significance to the domestic forest management practices by the respondents from several forest-rich nations in Eastern Europe such as Poland and the Baltic countries (Aggestam and Pülzl, 2020).

Similarly, in the authors' 2018 study on the policy effects of the second Forest Strategy, it too indicated that the objectives and ambitions set in the Strategy had in many ways failed to be implemented or reached at the national level, but argued that this failure was the result of lacking consensus and communication between the Member States and the EU on how to properly define and formulate what a European forest policy agenda actually is. To illustrate, after the second Forest Strategy was presented, it soon became clear that while the Strategy largely focused on strictly forest-related policies, many forest industry representatives were concerned with policies and policy instruments relevant to the entire forest value chain (such as packaging, transportations, working hours etc.) and that have a direct or indirect impact on the industry. Since the Strategy failed to address such policies, it then fell flat in the eyes of the forest industry representatives who perceived its content as insufficient and not coordinated well enough, which in turn affected the implementation of the Strategy's forest objectives in a negative way (Aggestam and Pülzl, 2018). This problem of defining and formulating a shared European perception of what should constitute as forest policy has also been observed by other scholars (Winkel and Sotirov, 2016). Moreover, Aggestam and Giurca (2021) state that this issue poses a potential risk for the future implementation of the most recent Forest Strategy for 2030 as well, assuming that Member States and EU policymakers continue to argue and disagree on what exactly a shared EU forest policy agenda should entail (Aggestam and Giurca, 2021).

Evidently, this particular line of scholarship is quite narrow and thin when it comes the amount of research that has been produced so far, yet at the same time it brings up important aspects to think about on why earlier EU-initiated (soft) documents on forests have not been very successful. Given that several scholars have noticed a continuous lack of unity between Member States and forest industry representatives on how to define and formulate a more harmonized EU agenda on forest policy, it is perhaps here that the core obstacle for implementing EU forest policy ambitions at the national level lies, indicating that this ineffective implementation cannot merely be explained by the simple fact that Member States and forest stakeholders don't want to nor need to implement soft policy documents that are based on voluntary compliance. Thus, the part about how to define and construct a more uniform forest policy agenda in the EU becomes a recurring gap in this literature theme and it appears to not have been answered properly in these earlier studies. Moreover, this theme also illustrates the overarching dilemma that the Union faces with regard to forest policy formulation at the European level; that it has to rely so heavily on quite ineffective soft policy instruments (i.e. strategies and action plans) to push its agenda on forests forward, while at the same time also trying to reach several policy objectives in other important areas that are dependent on a more collective approach to forest management in order to be successfully achieved (e.g. the environmental goals for 2030 and 2050). For this reason, it becomes clear that also the practical means and the specific conditions around these (i.e. soft or hard policy instruments) most appropriate for creating a more

harmonized European forest agenda moving forward is a question that need to be explored in a way that previous studies have failed to do.

2.3. Forest interest groups' approach to the European policymaking process

When doing a study that involves the perspectives of forest stakeholders/interests as this thesis aims to do, it is of course essential to also be familiar with the literature that exists on how these groups act and position themselves to the EU. To understand how this relationship between forest interests and the EU can take form, it is wise to start off by looking at similar research that has been done on environmental interest groups' access to the policymaking process in Brussels.

Berny and Moore (2021) describe how the EU policymaking system as a whole is centred around the idea of multi-level governance and to consider the conflicting interests of many different groups affected by a certain policy domain/area prior to formulating its objectives and decisions. The presence and active lobbying of interest groups, especially business interest groups, has been a natural part of the EU for decades, stretching as far back as to the 1960s and the representation of iron, steel and agriculture interest groups in the early policymaking era. Although business interest groups have remained a powerful advocacy group in the policymaking process ever since, they have in recent decades experienced fierce competition from the large number of environmentalist interest groups that have started to appear in Brussels. Moreover, as the Union's competencies and powers have gradually increased over time parallel to the growing responsibilities placed under the umbrella of the European Community, its institutions have become more dependent on active deliberation and input from experts in different policy fields, and this expert role is something that the environmental interest groups have been particularly skilful in taking on and use as a platform for influencing various decisions related to climate protection and environmental regulation at the supranational level. The most recent example of this influence is the European Green Deal that was introduced in 2019 (Berny and Moore, 2021, In: Gravey and Jordan, 2021)

Forest-related interest groups also regularly participate in the EU's policymaking process and have clear strategies for how to gain access to decision-makers and influence decisions in a more favourable direction for their members. For instance, when examining the ways in which Swedish forest industry businesses acted in its lobbying toward the EU, Bjärstig and Keskitalo (2013) found that these businesses, through their membership in the Swedish Forest Industries Federation (SFIF), placed a high degree of trust and agency into the hands of their pan-European lobbying organization the Confederation of European Paper Industries (CEPI), who is indirectly in charge of representing the interests of the national pulp and paper industries in the different Member States. For this reason, the Swedish forest businesses emphasized the importance of ensuring a broad consensus and

coordination of policy positions within the CEPI community ahead of lobbying campaigns in order to gain, from a Swedish forest industry perspective, a more favourable output in terms of a less regulated forest policy agenda. Like many other interest groups, they also preferred early access through informal contacts with people inside the EU institutions (Bjärstig and Keskitalo, 2013).

However, a common obstacle expressed by many of the respondents in the study is the large amount of financial resources as well as organizational capacity often required for operating in the EU's multi-level governance system, thus preventing most Swedish forest companies and forest owners of smaller size from fully accessing the European policymaking process, and this dilemma for interest groups in influencing the policy formulation in the EU is an important argument that has been highlighted also by other scholars in the field (Angelstam, Lazdinis and Lazdinis, 2009; Juerges and Newig, 2015). Moreover, Bjärstig and Keskitalo (2013) make the argument that in centralized, collective lobbying campaigns, there is always a risk that unexpected internal division between the members of that interest group/sector may appear in the final positioning, and result in a negative policy output for one or several members (Bjärstig and Keskitalo, 2013). A good example of this kind of internal division can be seen in an earlier study on the Swedish forest sector's approach to a formalized forest policy agenda in the EU, in which Bjärstig (2012) interviewed representatives from large Swedish forest corporations and detected a cleavage between public and private forest industry interests. The study showed that the private forest corporations were generally more open and positive toward the development of a more horizontally regulated forest policy framework than the government owned forest corporations, although both sides shared the same viewpoint that such a framework should not jeopardize the national sovereignty on forest policy matters too much (Bjärstig, 2012).

To conclude, this third and final academic theme in the literature review offers important insights into how certain interest groups (i.e. environmental interest groups and forest industry groups) approach and try to influence the multi-level system of policymaking that characterizes the EU. Nevertheless, given that the research on this field has also shed light on the inevitable correlation between financial resources and level of influence/access to the policymaking system that you get as an interest group, it is natural to assume that the perspectives of large forest interests are not seldomly prioritized at the expense of smaller, less resource-intense forest interest groups. Furthermore, it is important to note that many of the above studies don't just point to a lack of access for small or medium-sized forest owners in the actual policymaking process in Brussels, but the vast majority of these studies themselves also either completely lack the inclusion of small or medium-sized forest owners as respondents in the interviews (Bjärstig, 2012), or at least don't specify clearly enough what are the perspectives of smaller, less resource-intense forest interests with respect to the EU policymaking process (Angelstam, Lazdinis and Lazdinis, 2009; Juerges and Newig, 2015). For this reason, I believe more knowledge on the interests of small and medium-

sized forest owners is needed to be able to give this line of scholarship a broader perspective. This could be especially interesting to study from a Swedish perspective, as earlier research by Bjärstig seems to suggest that there are conflicting interests on forest policy in the EU also within parts of the Swedish forest sector.

2.4. Research gap and Contribution

When summarizing the different problems and weaknesses observed in each line of scholarship/theme covered in this literature review, a puzzle begins to slowly emerge. From the first theme on local forest governance and participation of stakeholders in implementation, it is clear that much emphasis in the research has been put on understanding what elements are needed in decision-making processes for ensuring a successful engagement of local forest stakeholders, but that the stakeholder's interests in the development of actual forest policy content is most often neglected. Thus, this needs to be explored further. Interestingly enough, barely any research on Sweden was found under this theme. Furthermore, concerning the role of stakeholders in the implementation side, studies on different countries' experiences with implementing the Natura 2000 framework dominate the literature, despite the fact that Natura 2000 in many ways can be seen as more of an environmental regulation rather than a pure forest regulation or policy.

Moving over to the second theme on EU-initiated policy documents on forests in the past, it points to a recurring problem with compliance and interest from the national Member States in achieving the objectives set out in soft power (voluntary) documents on forest management, but that this problem is not only due to the fact that these documents are simply voluntary in nature, but also connected to a long tradition of disagreement and lack of unity between the Member States about how a European forest policy agenda should be defined and harmonized. As several scholars repeatedly come back to this issue of defining what a European forest policy agenda could entail, and given that no proper academic answer to this question appears to exist yet in the literature, this issue in itself becomes an interesting and important gap to dig deeper into. Moreover, this theme inevitably touches upon the important of question of whether soft power or hard power is the right way forward for creating a more collective European forest policy agenda, as this particular policy area (forests) today faces the dilemma of being constitutionally dependent primarily on soft (voluntary) policy compliance at the national level from its Members, while at the same time having a big influence over the possibility for the EU to successfully pursue other important policy objectives that it has set out to achieve at the supranational level, not least environmental ones.

Finally, from the third line of scholarship, that on interest groups and the European policymaking process, the existing research indicate that there are limited opportunities for small and medium-sized interest groups (including forest-related ones) to effectively access and influence policies at the EU level as this process is first

and foremost designed for large lobbying organizations with greater financial resources and organizational capacity. For this reason, I believe it could be valuable to instead do a study in which smaller and medium-sized forest interest groups are included on equal terms as larger forest interests, unlike what is usually the case in Brussels. In this regard Sweden is an especially interesting case, since previous research on their national forest sector also suggest that there may be a division between private forest corporations/owners and government owned forest corporations in how positive they are to a more harmonized forest policy agenda in the EU.

Hence, this thesis aims to contribute to the existing gaps in the forest policy academia mentioned above, by conducting a limited study focusing on various Swedish forest stakeholders' perspectives in the development and shaping of forest policy content. More concretely, the study intends to investigate the perceptions and ideas of different Swedish forest interest groups on how a more collective and coordinated European forest policy agenda could be defined and formulated. These interest groups/stakeholders will represent different interests within the Swedish forest community, and to ensure a diverse spectrum of respondents, I intend to include stakeholders of varying size and influence over the supranational and national policymaking process, including small and medium-sized forest companies/owners, large forest companies/owners as well as environmental NGOs. In connection, this study will also examine how these different stakeholders view the issue of soft vs. hard policy instruments as necessary means for constructing a more well-defined and harmonized EU agenda on forests.

3. Specified Aim and Research Questions

The specific aim of this study is to investigate what policies and priorities Swedish forest owners of varying size (large, medium-sized and small), as well environmental interest groups operating in Sweden, believe should be considered by EU policymakers in order to create a more collectively defined and harmonized European agenda on forest policy matters. In addition, the study will also examine what attitudes and positions that these different forest interests have toward the usage of soft policy instruments (strategies, action plans etc.) and/or hard policy instruments (regulations, directives etc.) as preferred means for achieving such an agenda on forests in the EU. Hence, this study aims to answer the following questions:

- *Q1) How do different interest groups in the Swedish forest community believe a more harmonized European forest policy agenda could be defined and formulated?*

- *(Q2) What is their position to using soft and/or hard policy instruments for achieving such an agenda, and what differences in positions can be observed between different interests?*

4. Theoretical Approach

In this chapter, a general theoretical discussion will be carried out to illustrate in what ways the different forest interest groups analysed in this study may think about and position themselves to the formulation of a more common EU forest policy agenda (Q1), as well as what policy methods (soft or hard power instruments) they may favour in the process towards constructing such an agenda (Q2). This theoretical reasoning and discussion will primarily be based on existing academic knowledge about the different types of interest groups subject to this study with regard to some of the most important insights found in the literature outlined in the literature review. At the end of this chapter, an analytical framework with key concepts and insights picked up from the theoretical discussion will be presented to illustrate more clearly how the different forest interest groups may position themselves to each research question.

4.1. The forest owner position to the formulation of an EU agenda on forests

From the literature, it was visible that getting the forest owners and industry on board with forest-related policy initiatives decided at the national or supranational level is often a challenging endeavour, not just with regard to the practical implementation of them, but also regarding the formulation of what policy objectives and priorities should guide these initiatives. Aspects such as mutual trust, clear incentives, and personal motivation for the participating stakeholders were all decisive factors for ensuring that local forest governance schemes could be successfully developed (Kangas et al, 2010). Similarly, it is reasonable to assume that these kinds of aspects will also be of importance to forest stakeholders in Sweden that are participating in a European forest governance or policymaking context. If so, this would then imply that any policy framework on forests formulated by the EU must at the same time be seen as trustworthy and important in the eyes of the Swedish forest sector in order to gather sufficient support from the sector's stakeholders.

Considering also the fact that Sweden has not only been a strong opponent to the recent Forest Strategy for 2030 as mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, but also against other forest policy initiatives at the supranational level in the past (Edwards and Kleinschmit, 2012), it is easy to argue that formulating such a European policy framework on forests will almost certainly require a greater level of responsiveness from the Union towards the Swedish forest industry's specific needs and opinions than what has been the case in previous forest policy processes. Hence, it can be expected that the forest owners interviewed in this study will want to push for the creation of a European forest policy agenda that pays greater respect to, for example, the professional practices and knowledge vested in the forest owners themselves, and for this agenda to emphasise policy areas more directly

related to the management and economic utilization of forests than anything else. Still, it is difficult to know what the scope of this agenda should then be like according to the different forest owners and it remains to be seen whether any differences or similarities can be found between for instance the small /medium-scale forest owners and the large forest owners in their perceptions on a more common forest policy agenda in Europe, given that previous research (Bjärstig, 2012; Bjärstig and Keskitalo, 2013), as mentioned, gives little to no guidance regarding what to expect about the positions of small- and medium-scale forest interests on this issue.

4.2. The environmentalist groups' position to the formulation of an EU agenda on forests

As indicated by the literature, environmental interest groups and NGOs have long been known for being skilful and influential actors in the multi-level governance system that characterizes the EU. Thanks to the great plurality and lobbying efforts of environmental interest groups active in Brussels, many environmental regulations and investments have become reality over the years within the Union. Examples include the Natura 2000 Framework as well as the European Green Deal package (Berny and Moore, 2021, In: Gravey and Jordan, 2021). The main purpose and goal of these interest groups is in many ways more obvious than in the case of the forest owner community; to push policymakers both at the national and supranational level to act more forcefully in cutting down CO2 emissions, promoting sustainable energy sources, preventing biodiversity loss and other important measures designed to help fight climate change (See for example Greenpeace: https://www.greenpeace.org/international/explore/about/values and WWF: https://explore.panda.org/climate).

Consequently, a central part of their lobbying campaign is to be able to shape the EU's priorities and decisions on forests into a greener and environmentally friendly direction. For this reason, regarding the issue of how environmental interest groups would potentially position themselves to the formulation of a more harmonized and collective European forest policy agenda, it is highly likely that these groups will approach this issue from a more "protective" policy standpoint, in which forests are seen as valuable natural resources for biodiversity, carbon storing, human life and wellbeing rather than as something that shall be commercially utilized to a great extent. In this way, one can expect that their position to a more European forest agenda will have a stronger focus on the inclusion of forest-related policies that can ensure both environmental sustainability and quality of life for the individual from a recreational point of view. However, exactly what this green forest policy agenda might entail of course remains to be investigated in the actual analysis, as different environmental groups may make different interpretations of how such an agenda should best be constructed.

4.3. Hard or soft policy preference? - forest owners

From a forest owner perspective, given that they have both clear economic as well as professional incentives to continue to have the freedom to manage forest resources more independently, it would be logical for them to then promote a system of policy instruments that do not contribute to drastically changing or affecting the self-governing of their national forestry. This was also a stand that both local and national forest owners in Sweden have more or less agreed upon in the past (Bjärstig, 2012). In light of this knowledge, any shift in the future toward more of hard policy (directives, regulations etc.) measures on forests in the EU would likely be seen as a breach of power from the forest owner and industry point of view, and risk leading to more opposition and dissatisfaction with how Brussels handles forest policy matters. To avoid this scenario, the Union may want to consider taking on a more delicate approach to its forest policy formulation process, in which the forest owners themselves may be more actively included in the dialogue on whether there is a need for developing hard policy instruments as well on certain forest-related areas affecting their businesses.

Regarding the issue of small-and medium-scale forest owners, considering that barely any research exists on their potential position to this issue of what means should be used to construct a more collective European forest agenda, it remains to be investigated in the analysis of this study what preferences they might have in comparison to large forest owners. However, it is not unlikely that these smaller forest practitioners, since they operate with less resources at a more local level than the big industry corporations, will want to see a European forest agenda that is based on more of a "bottom-up" perspective with soft policy instruments being developed together with local authorities and officials at the regional level that make the policymaking process more attainable and concrete for them in their forest management.

4.4. Hard or soft policy preference? -environmental interest groups

Given the very ambitious objectives and calls for action on legislators and policymakers that environmental interest groups typically display in the policymaking process, it will most likely be difficult for them to motivate the use of any policy instruments that risk halting or slowing down the future implementation of the policies decided upon. In addition, it can be argued that from their perspective, a regulated forest policy is a pre-requisite for more effectively fighting climate change in the EU. Hence, it is reasonable to assume that they will favour more of hard policy instruments (e.g. directives, regulations etc.) that can make a more significant difference on the management of forest matters quickly.

Still, one should not rule out the possibility that even environmental interest groups may be positive to certain soft policy instruments on some forest-related policies, especially if these instruments can lead to a positive environmental impact and increased policy cooperation with the forest owners. For example, soft policy instruments that have been developed jointly together with the inputs of local forest owner representatives in the different Member States and which the stakeholders are more committed to from a practical implementation perspective might in fact be something that could also gain policy support from environmental interest groups if it is believed that these softer instruments would more effectively help to reach one or several environmental objectives on Europe's forests.

4.5. Analytical Framework

Based on the preceding theoretical discussion on what we know about the different forest interest groups in Sweden and how they could potentially reason with respect to the two research questions in this study, the following theoretical expectations can then be outlined to visualize more clearly what we can expect according to each actor/group:

Figure 1:

Forest interest group	**Q1: Formulating an EU agenda on forest**	**Q2: Means/instruments for creating this agenda**
Large forest owners	*Emphasize the economic values of forest resources and/or knowledge of forest practitioners*	*Soft policy instruments preferably, but open to some kind of limited hard policy*
Medium-scale forest owners	*Less clear theoretical expectations*	*Soft policy instruments developed through a "bottom-up" perspective rather than "top-down"*

Small-scale forest owners	*Less clear theoretical expectations*	*Soft policy instruments developed through a "bottom-up" perspective rather than "top-down"*
Environmental groups	*Emphasize ecological values such as carbon storing, biodiversity, and recreation*	*Stronger preference for hard policy instruments to allow for more concrete environmental policy action*

Important to note though is that the above positions from figure 1 are all merely hypotheses derived from the theoretical discussion, and as such might be debunked or challenged in different ways in the upcoming analysis of this thesis.

5. Research Design and Methods

The purpose of this methods chapter is to illustrate the various choices and motivations related to the operationalization of my study. Starting with the issue of research design, my choice to apply a qualitative case study for this thesis will be motivated under the first subchapter, followed by a thorough discussion on the selection of respondents for the interviews of this study. Then, what methods have been applied for collecting the data and analyzing it will be presented in the third subchapter, before moving over to a discussion on the various opportunities and limitations that come with the methodological approach chosen for this study. Finally, in the last two subchapters, other important issues within the research process such as ethical consideration and validity and reliability will be touched upon in relation to the methodology selected in this thesis.

5.1. Case study design

In terms of research design, this study is carried out in the form of a case study where the case in focus is the Swedish forest community and its different interest groups' approach to how and with what means a more uniform and coordinated forest policy agenda at the EU-level could be developed. The advantages of deploying a case study design for this kind of study are many.

First, according to Yin (1994), a case study, "investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not readily visible" (Yin, 1994, p. 13).

From this view, the issue of forest policy in the EU certainly qualifies as a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. Moreover, as the intention of this study is to also be able to do a more in-depth investigation into this issue, using a case study design is a very suitable choice since it provides the researcher with the possibility to do just that, namely dig deeper into a particular issue/case (Bryman, 2016; Halperin and Heath, 2017).
Second, as illustrated by Halperin and Heath (2017), good case studies "are nearly always situated in a comparative context" (Halperin and Heath, 2017, p. 214). In this thesis, it takes the form of a comparison between Swedish forest owner interests on the one hand, and environmental interests on the other.

5.2. Selection of respondents

For this study, a broad selection of different relevant forest owner organizations and environmental NGOs were selected as respondents. For simplicity, these different interest groups have then been represented by one employee each in the actual interview, and in terms of the design of the interviews in this study, I decided to conduct informant/expert interviews in a semi-structed manner. This meant that the employees or representatives were then chosen under the condition that they all should possess some sort of formal position providing them with the kind of expertise deemed necessary for answering my questions on their respective organization's interests on the issue of forest policy in the EU. Examples of positions held by the respondents selected for this study included board member, senior forest advisor, head of communication/public affairs, forest researcher and policy officer. A close dialogue with the organizations was established at an early stage, either by phone or e-mail, to identify which people of relevant expertise they found most suitable for participating in my proposed interviews.

Regarding the profile of the actual organizations that were selected for this study, the aim was to find a diverse spectrum of interest groups in Sweden from both the forest owner side as well as from the environmentalist perspective that could represent the different kinds of interests that I wanted to explore within the Swedish forest community (e.g. not least small, medium-sized and large forest owners, as stated in the specified aim chapter). Given also that the number of forest owner associations and environmental NGOs in Sweden is not very big, I decide to reach out to primarily well-established and well-known organizations that regularly participate in and share opinions on forest policymaking procedures in Swedish politics. However, in doing so, it was nonetheless important to not forget about the small and medium-sized forest owner perspective that, as mentioned, is an integral part to look at in this study and that could otherwise risk being neglected in the selection. To overcome this issue, I reached out to two of the biggest regional forest owner interest groups known for representing small- and medium-sized forest owners in the policymaking process. These two interest groups were Södra and

Mellanskog, both of which are members of the main national organization for forest owners in Sweden, LRF Skogsägarna.

Similarly, in order to include the large forest owner interest for this study, I decided to contact one of the largest and most well-known forest corporations in Sweden, SCA. The selection of this corporation was simply based on their large ownership of forest areal and production facilities in Sweden and abroad. As an interesting contrast to the privately owned SCA, another large and well-known forest industry corporation was selected for this study, namely the publicly-owned company Sveaskog. By including Sveaskog as respondents, it allowed me to add another interesting dimension (government forest owner interest vs. private forest owner interest) into the comparison of where different interests within the Swedish forest owner spectrum stand with respect to my research questions. Concerning the selection of organizations to represent the environmentalist perspective, the limited number of such NGOs operating within both a Swedish and European forest policymaking context meant that it became even more important to select those that could adequately represent the environmental movement's interests on forest policy. Hence, I reached out to three of the most active ones in the Swedish forest debate: Naturskyddsföreningen, Greenpeace and World Wildlife Fund (WWF). A total of 7 interviews were carried out for this study. In table 1 below, a list of the different types of respondents from each interest group/organization selected and interviewed can be seen:

Table 1

Respondent	Organization	Title	Type of interest representation
Respondent 1 (R1)	Greenpeace	Forest researcher and campaigner	Environmental interest group
Respondent 2 (R2)	SCA	Head of communications	Large, (private) forest owner
Respondent 3 (R3)	World Wildlife Fund Sweden (WWF)	Senior forest advisor	Environmental interest group
Respondent 4 (R4)	LRF Mellanskog	Board member	Small-scale and medium-sized forest owners

Respondent 5 (R5)	LRF Södra	Head of public affairs	Small-scale and medium-sized forest owners
Respondent 6 (R6)	Naturskyddsföreningen	Policy officer	Environmental interest group
Respondent 7 (R7)	Sveaskog	Head of forest policy	Large, (public) forest owner

5.3. Method of collecting & analyzing data

The main source of data for this thesis were the various interviews conducted with the selected interest groups from the Swedish forest owner sector as well as environmental movement. Due to practical reasons such as the great geographic distance between myself and the respondents and costs for travelling, I found it more appropriate and convenient to conduct solely online interviews using digital meeting platforms such as Zoom or Microsoft Teams. Furthermore, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the structural design of these interviews was informant/expert interviews, followed by a deliberate selection of suitable respondents on formal positions representing a certain level of expertise necessary for answering the kinds of research questions outlined in this thesis (see page 12). Another important structural element to these interviews was that I chose to conduct them in a more semi-structured way in order to get more rich answers/data from the respondents, and why this interview approach is useful will be explained further down in this chapter. Subsequently, an interview guide was constructed with a set of sub-questions dedicated to each research question (see Appendix I and II).

More concretely, these sub-questions were part of two separate themes/topics designed to represent the two specified research questions of the thesis, with theme one being about "the conditions and challenges for formulating a more harmonized forest agenda in the EU". This theme was then designed to answer the first specified research question. The second theme was titled "practical means, instruments and documents for creating a more harmonized forest agenda in the EU". Hence, it was designed to answer the second specified research question. Most of the interviews (6 out of 7) were conducted in Swedish given that both the respondents and the geographical context of this study were Swedish. Only the first interview with the respondent from Greenpeace (R1) was carried out in English as this respondent preferred to speak English. Nevertheless, two separate interview guides in Swedish and English became necessary to create.

During the actual interviews, in accordance with their semi-structured design, sub-questions from the interview guide were not seldomly asked in a more mixed order than how they were originally listed in the guide. By doing so, I wanted to allow for the interviewee to elaborate on his/her organization's arguments and positions more freely and for the questions to come in a more natural order depending on what topic the interviewee decided to bring up. However, for

the most part, the interviews were conducted in a more organized order beginning with the listed questions under theme one and going forward. Lastly, in a few of the interviews, not all sub-questions included in the interview guide had to be asked since the respondents/interviewees themselves managed to answer them while discussing or answering another sub-question under that theme.

When analyzing the data collected, I began by printing out the transcriptions of the interviews and then starting to look for patterns in responses between them according to the different themes designed to represent the two research questions in this thesis. To make the analyzing process less complicated, I decided to not only compare answers "theme by theme" but also to divide the respondents/interviewees according to what type of forest interest group they represented. As a result, I created a first category of responses under theme 1/research question 1 that was devoted to the environmental interest groups (Greenpeace Sweden, WWF Sweden and Naturskyddsföreningen), and then vice versa for the forest owner groups (SCA, LRF Södra, LRF Mellanskog and Sveaskog) From there, I analyzed their answers and highlighted them manually using different color markings. The same approach was also applied when creating the second category of responses under theme 2/research question 2, with the responses from the environmental interest groups being a category of their own and the forest owner interest groups the other.

Supplementary materials

Apart from the transcripts of the online interviews conducted for answering the specified research questions of this thesis, also supporting material such as annual reports and position papers were analyzed prior to each interview in order to gain a better general perception of where the respective interest group stands on forest issues in Sweden and in Europe (if found). By including such supporting material, this then also allowed for a better understanding of, for example, which recent debates on forest policy the organization/interest group has been most active in, what ideas & ambitions on forests it is promoting to the public, what conflicts it has with others etc. These reports and/or position papers were collected from all 7 interest groups included in this study, and will be discussed in more detail in the results and analysis chapter.

5.4. Opportunities and limitations

One of the biggest advantages about doing online interviews is that they provide a quick and effective tool for reaching geographically dispersed respondents, as was the case with most of the respondents participating in this study. Moreover, considering that these interviews were also conducted in a more semi-structured way for this study than what is perhaps usually the case with online interviews, I was able to draw use of the different advantages that come with the principles of semi-structured interviews. For instance, one such advantage was the possibility to use a mixture of both prepared questions and improvised supplementary questions during the actual interview to explore other aspects of the responses to each question asked. This enabled me to get more extensive answers and thus a richer set of data from each interview. In addition, a semi-structured approach allows for a smoother and more flexible interview where the questions do not always necessarily have to come in a certain order, but can instead be brought up when and if needed in a more natural manner according to the interviewer and respondent's conversation. (Halperin and Heath, 2017).

However, as with any type of methodology, there are of course also shortcomings and limitations with the usage of online semi-structured interviews. First, online interviews are a far less personal way of collecting data. Emotions and body language reactions, which can sometimes be important to observe in order to understand how a respondent truly feels about a certain question or topic, are often difficult to see when the interview takes place online. Second, doing these interviews in a more semi-structured manner means that you do not only get a more flexible conversation and richer answers from the respondent, but you also get the problem that answers from same or similar respondents will vary a lot depending on what structure you applied for that specific interview. In other words, it becomes difficult to compare the responses of different or similar groups over time since each interviewee/respondent has been asked slightly different questions than the one before, or to put it in Halperin and Heath's (2017) own words: "The data are not standardized and are thus hard to generalize from and, as the results cannot be quantified and retested, less reliable" (Halperin and Heath, 2017, p. 289).

5.5. Ethical consideration

As in every research project, it is important as a researcher to also consider any ethical issues that may arise from one´s choice of research design and to what extent these issues could

potentially affect the interviewees/respondents personally. Thus, it is important that participation is based on informed consent about, for instance, the purpose of the study and how the respondents were selected is key for ensuring that your study is being conducted in accordance with good research ethics. In doing so, it should also be clear to the respondents that their participation in the study is completely voluntary and that they can withdraw from the study at any time if they wish to do so without any risk of penalty or consequences on their side (de Vaus, 2001: In Halperin and Heath, 2017). Other relevant ethical issues to consider as a researcher are the right to privacy (anonymity) and whether the study might risk inflicting any physical or mental harm on the respondents (Halperin and Heath, 2017). In this particular study, all the respondents were contacted via email and/or by phone, where I explained both the purpose and aim of my intended study as well as why I chose to select their organization. From the tone of the e-mails and phone calls, it was clear to the different interest groups that their participation was completely voluntary, and I also explicitly asked them to get back to me if they were interested in participating in the study and, if so, whom from their organization they found most appropriate for acting as informant/expert on their behalf in a potential interview. Moreover, the respondents were also informed both before and during the actual interviews about the recording of their answers, including how I planned to handle these recordings after the research process was over so as to protect the respondents' personal integrity.

However, regarding the issue of privacy for the respondents, given that this study is built around inputs from informant/expert interviews with representatives on formal positions from some of the most well-known forest owner associations and environmental NGOs in Sweden, it is not unlikely that it will be possible for a third party to, one way or another, identify the identity of one or several respondents via their formal positions. Hence, the issue of anonymity cannot be fully guaranteed for the respondents in this kind of study. This was also something that I informed the respondents about prior to the interviews and that they were ok with. Still, since they were interviewed in their role as representatives for the organizations, I do not disclose their names.

5.6. Validity and reliability

There are a number of factors surrounding this study that provide it and its data with, above all, a great amount of internal validity. As stated in the methodology literature, whether the findings of a study hold sufficient internal validity is often a matter of judgement from case to case

depending on what definition for internal validity one uses, but one way of defining internal validity is by looking at how suitable the operationalization of a study and the choice of methods has been with respect to the data collected (Bryman, 2016; Halperin and Heath, 2017). If the operationalization and methods have provided the researcher with the kinds of answers/data relevant for answering the outlined research questions, this gives the study a strong internal validity. For this thesis, the usage of semi-structured (online) interviews with experts from the participating interest groups has indeed been beneficial for me to be able to collect the kinds of answers/data that I set out to find with respect to the specified research questions. In addition, the thematic structure of the interviews did not affect the respondent's way of answering the set-out questions or deviating from the topic too much, meaning that the validity of their outcome/answers was good and did not allow for any real alternative explanations, thus further contributing to the internal validity of this study's results.

Still, concerning what external validity this study holds in terms of whether its findings can be generalized to other similar studies/cases in different settings (Bryman, 2016; Halperin and Heath, 2017) this kind of validity is not very strong when it comes to qualitative research in general, and perhaps even more so when doing semi-structured interviews as is the case with this study. Although the results and observations from this study on the different positions among Swedish forest owner groups and environmental interest groups toward a more harmonized EU forest policy agenda are likely to be very similar if a study like this was conducted on other forest stakeholders in Sweden, each interest group/stakeholder will still have their own unique experiences and opinions toward the issue of forest policy and the EU, and so it is not possible to generalize the findings of this study to, for instance, the entire forest owner community, nor to the entire environmental movement in Sweden, as there may be a significant degree of variation among other forest owner and environmental interest groups depending on their specific profile.

However, since several of the most influential and well-established forest owner interest organizations/companies and environmental NGOs in Sweden were included in this study, it is nonetheless possible to provide a broad and empirically robust overview of how some of most significant actors within the Swedish forest community approach the issue of how to formulate a more harmonized EU agenda on forests, and what practical means should be used to create this agenda. Also, in terms of the generalizability of these findings on the most significant actors within Swedish forest community for understanding forest policy opinions in other similar cases

(i.e. other EU-countries and their forest community), I would argue that Sweden with its very rich forest resources and strong forest community is an interesting case of its own within a Europan context, from which the findings can only be transferred adequately if the other case/country has a similar community structure and possession of forest resources as Sweden. In this way, Finland would perhaps be the best country/case to apply the findings of this study onto, as it shares many of these qualities with Sweden.

Regarding the issue of reliability, this concept is very much about the ability of a study´s findings to repeat themselves if other researchers were to test your design and do the same study (Halperin and Heath, 2017). Given that many of the answers from the respondents from the respective interest spectrum (e.g., forest owners vs environmental NGOs) participating in this study were either consistent with each other, or at least very similar (as will be explained in greater detail in the analysis chapter), this indicates that a significant deal of repeatability can be seen from this study. Hence, it is natural to assume that this high level of repeatability will be the case also if some other researcher were to conduct the exact same study. From this perspective, this study possesses a high level of reliability, albeit perhaps not an ideal study to make big generalizations from as mentioned earlier. Lastly, all interviews conducted for this thesis were recorded and transcribed to increase the reliability, as reliability is also about ensuring that the results from one's study have been gathered in an organized and reliable manner (i.e. the process and handling of data) (Halperin and Heath, 2017).

6. Result/ Analysis

This chapter presents the result of the data gathered from the 7 online interviews conducted for this thesis, divided according to research question and type of interest group.
However, before discussing the different results and findings that came out of the actual interviews, the first part of this chapter will summarize the content of the supporting material (e.g. sustainability reports and positions papers) that were analysed ahead of the interviews and whose content have significance for the understanding of the results of this study. After this section, the chapter will continue by presenting the answers and findings to research question 1 from the interviews with, first, the forest owner interest groups (SCA, LRF Mellanskog, LRF Södra, and Sveaskog), followed by a presentation of the answers and findings from the interviews with the environmental interest groups (Greenpeace Sweden, Naturskyddsföreningen and WWF Sweden) to the same research question. Then, an analytical assessment will be carried out to critically compare and discuss the most important observations from both sides to this first research question and how these observations matched the theoretical expectations outlined for this thesis. Similarly, the same structure will be applied when presenting the answers and findings from the two sides of interest groups to research question 2, starting once again with the interviews with the forest owner groups.

Supplementary material-analysis

When looking in more detail into the content of the different sustainability reports/position papers analyzed ahead of the interviews for this thesis, beginning with the forest owner side, I noticed that the large interests SCA and Sveaskog in their sustainability reports emphasized the necessity to find a good balance between logging measures and nature preservation measures so that the forestry can both utilize timber and at the same time contribute to the protection of forest resources, as well as summarizing how they work today to comply with environmental targets set at the national policy level in Sweden (SCA, 2021; Sveaskog, 2021). Moving over to the smaller forest owner interests, LRF Mellanskog and LRF Södra, here the focus was instead more on highlighting the historical significance that the creation of their association has had for the common forest owner in Sweden both socially and economically to this day (LRF Mellanskog, 2021), and how their members' forest practices are to be carried out in accordance

with the different international policy objectives on sustainable forestry that have been set out by the United Nations, not least those found in Agenda 2030 (LRF Södra, 2021).

In general, when mentioned by the different forest owner interest groups, conflicts on forest policy issues in Sweden and the EU were addressed in the form of interactive processes requiring further dialogue with other relevant stakeholders, especially the environmental organizations (SCA, 2021; Sveaskog; 2021; LRF Södra; 2021). Finally, when analyzing similar forest reports and/or position papers published by the environmental interest side, a more common narrative could be seen where focus was on describing how, according to them, the current Swedish model for forestry is harming the natural resources and biodiversity of the Swedish forest, with subsequent policy suggestions on how this model should become more ecologically sustainable (Greenpeace Sweden, 2021; Naturskyddsföreningen, 2021; WWF Sweden, 2020). A clear conflict detected in two of these documents was the above-mentioned critique against the forest practices of government-owned Sveaskog raised by Greenpeace (2021) and Naturskyddsföreningen (2021). We now move on to the findings of the interviews conducted for this study.

6.1. Findings Q1- How to formulate a more harmonized European forest agenda:

6.1.1. Forest owner interest groups

Starting with the interviews with the Swedish forest owner interests, a variety of topics were brought up in their respective answers to research question 1. For structural clarity, each such topic mentioned will be presented under a separate headline.

A more active Commission than ever before

A common thread that was visible early on in the interviews with the forest owner interest groups was their relationship towards the EU and the European Commission's active role in the formulation of a more centralized, European forest agenda in recent years. Many of the forest owners pointed to what they considered to be a clear shift in direction and ambitions on the forest policy arena since the new Commission under Ursula Von Der Leyen took office in 2019, largely due to increasing influence from Green MPs in the European Parliament. As the representative for the large private forest company, SCA, puts it:

"There we have a significant shift compared to the previous EU Commission. This Commission is much more political than the previous Commission and preceding EU Commissions. When Ursula von der Leyen was to be elected President of the Commission, she presented her political platform. That platform was intended for her to be elected, and in it there were therefore a lot of, so to speak, sweets for various party groups in the European Parliament. This is because the European Parliament had to approve her as President of the Commission" (R2, SCA)

This argument was also raised by the representative for one of the forest interest groups representing small and medium-scale forest owners, Mellanskog:

"The new one (Commission) was not approved because the Green MPs in Parliament demanded a different policy. And it was the Green Deal that Von der Leyen presented shortly after she was approved. She reacted to these proposals that they did not intend to approve her as President of her Commission unless she did more on, well, as the Greens in Parliament wanted her then. They gave an ultimatum there, you could say. Then she came up with the Green Deal, and it went quite a lot against Juncker's ideas and that Commission's ideas regarding forests" (R4, Mellanskog)

Moreover, the representative R7 from the large public forest company, Sveaskog, shared this perspective that a visible shift in the forest agenda occurred after Von Der Leyen's Commission took office:

"The climate issue, and environmental issues, with biodiversity in particular, have become major issues for the Commission's work. So, it has become a very important part of what is called the Green Deal. Which of course consists of a climate package with different parts and it is a new approach and a new way of working with these issues that has come through the new Commission under Ursula Von der Leyen when she arrived, with those around her, that differs quite a lot from the previous one. And a basic view that exists being that the climate issue is very much connected with other issues and not least for example, biodiversity" (R7, Sveaskog)

In addition, according to most of the forest owner interest groups interviewed, the entry of the new Commission under Von Der Leyen did not just represent a clear shift of forest policy ambitions towards more of climate action, but the change in political direction under the new Commission has also affected the view on how forest resources in Europe should best be used. For example, many of the respondents expressed a critique against various soft policy documents and proposals for environmental legislation that have been proposed by the EU

recently for not considering enough the many advantages for sustainability and climate action that come with the substitution effect when replacing fossil fuel material with forest-based products:

"We argue that the felling of forests and planting of new forests is also a good weapon against climate change. Wood products from the forest can be used to replace building materials such as concrete, for example, with wood in building structures. You can replace plastic with paper packaging. You can also make bioplastic from cellulose and use it in packaging instead of fossil plastic. We often talk about the climate benefits created by companies in the forest industry (…) SCA's climate benefit amounts to approximately 10.5 million tons per year. This roughly corresponds to the emissions from all of Sweden's passenger cars" (R2, SCA)

This view that there is a considerable substitution effect that the forest industry can bring to the climate was supported by respondent R5 from the one of the two forest interest groups representing small and medium-scale forest owners in this study, Södra:

"But what is missing is that substitution, the climate benefit that forest products can create in a market, it is a renewable raw material, it happens as if with a cycle. It can replace plastic, oil, coal and there you get a considerable binding of CO2" (R5, Södra).

Similarly, respondent R4 from the second of the two forest interest groups representing small and medium-scale forest owners in this study, Mellanskog, pointed to a lacking inclusion of this substitution effect as well, but more explicitly so from a bioeconomic perspective:

"What is missing today is the bioeconomy perspective. How a shift from fossil fuels to renewable forest products can reduce climate change, create jobs and welfare and make Europe more self-sufficient in energy and materials from the natural resources available in the EU. The most important climate measure is to replace, (substitute) fossil energy and materials with renewables" (R4, Mellanskog)

Furthermore, also Sveaskog's respondent problematized the little attention that they felt the EU payed to the substitution effect arising from forest products:

"In some of the proposals, it sometimes feels like they do not see the whole climate benefit with the forest, but they are very focused on the part that is about the forest binding carbon dioxide if it

remains in the ground, each forest separately, so to speak. And I think the climate benefit is built up by the forest's binding with long-lasting wood products and then replacing the fossil and thus reduce fossil emissions. That is the overall climate benefit, and for me it is important to constantly consider all these parts and see: how can we use the forest wisely for this?" (R7, Sveaskog).

Evidently, in the eyes of the forest owners, the current approach in Brussels to forest policy is too much focused on the preservation of forests and using the trees as carbon sinks to cut CO2 emissions, while at the same time overlooking the great potential for cutting CO2 emissions that the forest and its resources can provide in the everyday consumption and production. In this way, the forest owner interest groups managed to illustrate a seemingly significant discrepancy that exists between themselves and the EU on how to sustainably use forest resources when formulating and defining forest policy.

What to include under a European agenda

Besides the shared call for the EU to pay greater policy consideration to the climate benefits that come with the increased usage of wood products when formulating its forest policy ambitions, most of the forest owner interest groups did not get into much detail about what exact policies they felt could or should be included under a more harmonized forest agenda at the EU-level. However, two of them, the large forest owner, SCA, and the forest interest association for small and medium-scale forest owners, Södra, argued for a greater social understanding to be included when discussing forest policy in Europe, using Sweden and the Swedish forestry model as an example:

"It is also about social sustainability, rural economy not least in Sweden. If you compare Sweden with many other European countries, you may wonder what is it that distinguishes Sweden, what is it that distinguishes Swedish countryside from French, for example? We do not have rural poverty in Sweden. The forest has had the significance that it has created capital locally, in the form of jobs locally, and that goes back into the business, and with the scattered ownership that we have in Sweden it has created conditions for people to live and work in the countryside in a completely different way than what exists in many other places in Europe (R5, Södra)

Continuing on this topic, SCA's respondent highlighted the issue of rural economy and welfare in the northern part of Sweden to be especially considered when discussing the social sustainability aspect of forest policy:

"There are also social parts that must not be forgotten. For example, that the industry creates 114,000 jobs in Sweden and that the forest industry is Sweden's largest net exporter, in fact larger than the automotive industry. (…) Many of these jobs are created in sparsely populated areas and in rural areas. It's not just our industries that lie along the coast, but this is about people who work in the forest, who work in hauliers, who drive timber, who work with the harvests and forwarders in the forest, and so on. It is a fairly significant part of the inhabitants of the four Norrland counties who work in some way with the forestry industry, and have their income from there" (R2, SCA)

What is interesting from these quotes above is the emphasis on how essential forestry is as a source of income and livelihood for many people in rural parts of Sweden, hence implying that the Swedish forest industry is a unique case within the EU that needs to be carefully considered by policymakers in Brussels when formulating forest policy. Furthermore, going back to the theoretical expectations outlined in the theory chapter of this thesis, where it was expected that at least large forest owners would prioritize economic values over ecological ones in their approach to the creation of a more European forest agenda, it is interesting to see that this expectation was confirmed from the arguments presented by SCA and Sveaskog. Economic arguments emphasizing the climate benefit of wood products, as well as the issue of social sustainability for rural areas in Sweden achieved as a result of the forest industry, dominated. Still, what is perhaps even more interesting is the fact that also the small and medium-sized forest owner interests (Mellanskog and Södra) expressed a very similar narrative in their answers as the large forest owner interests. Hence, this is a valuable finding given that the initial expectations on the positions of these smaller forest owners were less clear in the theory part.

National contexts prevent a "One size fit all"-framework on forests

One of the biggest problems with formulating and defining a more collective European forest agenda that concerned many of the forest owners was the issue of balancing the national contextual setting with policy decisions or objectives set up at the European level. Many of the respondents made the argument that the big differences across Europe between different Member States in terms of how much forest areal they have, what types of forests, and traditions for conducting forestry are simply too big to enable a strictly centralized policy agenda for the whole Union on how to manage forests. Instead, they urged for a European forest agenda that allows for a large degree of continued national flexibility and nationally developed policy measures in response to goals set at the EU level:

"When it comes to the forest issue, it is the case that nature or biology and the economy and structures of forests look completely different in Europe, and therefore we do not think there is a "one-size fits all" solution. That is why we must have a fairly large national competence, and it must mean something here, and we want the path to the EU's goals to be shaped nationally. So, the fewer detailed regulations the better" (R5, Södra)

Here, a consensus could be seen between the two interest groups representing small and medium-scale forest owners in Sweden, as the respondent R4 from Mellanskog also expressed the same view as Södra's:

"The biggest problem is that the Commission has taken on this role of trying to centralize and plan from the outside for a model to apply throughout the EU. And it does not work and it has never worked, and will not work because the forests look so very different, and you use them in different ways. It has a different industrial structure and so on that is related to how you use the forest, where we in the Nordics, Sweden and Finland, have a forest industry that is very important for both countries and that supplies Europe with products from fresh fiber and which is then used in Europe" (R4, Mellanskog)

Moreover, R4 continued by describing the difference in style between the forestry in Sweden and Finland with that of countries further south in Europe:

"Then you have forestry on the continent where you have more people. In addition to producing wood, it is also more about recreation and hunting and experiences, where it is sometimes also about preventing avalanches and things like that, so you have other ways of managing the forest. And then you come down to Spain, Portugal where there are more cork oaks and you have cows or sheep that graze between those cork oaks, what is usually called agroforestry. And it goes without saying that it is not possible to have a model to handle all this variation" (R4, Mellanskog).

Interestingly, it was not just the representatives from the smaller forest owner interest side that shared this view that the varying conditions and methods for forestry between different countries in Europe is a problem for harmonizing forest policy at an EU-level, but also the two representatives from the large forest owner interest side, Sveaskog and SCA, pointed to this dilemma:

"Forestry is very different from country to country. Forestry in Malta is not the same as forestry in northern Norrland, or in Cyprus or the Greek archipelago. There are completely different conditions. It looks very different and this is not taken into account in the proposals coming from Brussels" (R2, SCA).

"For instance, what is an old forest in Sweden, in Norrbotten or in Western Europe somewhere? There is a tendency, even though it is said that you should avoid solutions like this that one size fits everything, there is a tendency to, or if you say so, it is a challenge not to go too far in templates that should fit everywhere" (R7, Sveaskog)

Clearly, the fear of being subjected to a European "one size fits all"-model for forest policy is something that unites the different forest owner interests interviewed. In addition, as has been mentioned already, two of the forest owner groups (Södra and SCA) suggested that social aspects such as jobs and rural economic development should be better included in the discussions around what factors to consider when shaping and formulating a European forest policy agenda.

6.1.2. Environmental interest groups

Looking then at the answers from the environmental interest groups participating in this study, both some interesting similarities as well as important differences from the forest owner interest groups can be detected in terms of what topics they referred to in their answers to research question 1. For structural clarity, each such topic will be presented under a separate headline.

The EU's role in shaping the agenda

Beginning with a similarity observed, like the representatives of the forest owner groups interviewed, the role of the EU in initiating and formulating the European agenda on forest issues was mentioned repeatedly also in the interviews with the representatives of the environmental interest groups, albeit with a significantly more positive approach to this development from their side than that of the forest owners. Common for all three environmental NGOs interviewed was their view that, in lack of concrete action from the Member States on the forest policy area, it is both good and important that the EU takes charge and leads the way forward in outlining a more common direction for forest policy matters within the Union.
As the respondent R1 from Greenpeace demonstrates:

"I think the EU tries to get a more universal policy and a more universal way of treating forests, since there are so big differences between the European countries and by really stressing the fact that it's all connected. So, we can't just look at the national perspective. I think that is what they are trying to do: to make sure that every country is aware of their own responsibility when it comes to forests and to find like a unified way of treating them" (R1, Greenpeace).

Similarly, the respondents R3 from WWF and R6 from Naturskyddsföreningen also expressed a positive attitude toward a more active EU in the formulation of forest policies:

"We think it is positive that the EU recognizes that it is not possible to discuss biodiversity and climate issues at EU level and have it as common policy issues and then ignore that it is also highly relevant in the forest. In that perspective, it becomes a bit strange to question, on the basis of national competence, that the EU handles sustainability issues concerning the forest. One cannot exclude the forest within the policy discussion "(R3, WWF).

"They interact with the issue with very many different policy areas, which is right and reasonable given that the forest affects as well as not only forest policy but also other policy areas. And there we see here with all the different proposals and bills and directives and things that are currently lying from the Commission that there is a holistic thinking about this, that it is not like "the forest is an individual thing that can be broken out". (R6, Naturskyddsföreningen)

An interesting observation from the quotations above is that all three respondents emphasized the importance of raising the perspective on forest policy from the national level to the European level as they argue that forests affect not only forestry but also a variety of other policy areas on a bigger scale and that, due to this interconnection of forest-related policy areas that exists, it is appropriate that the EU formulates some sort of holistic European agenda forward on forests. Nevertheless, this more favourable attitude among the environmental interest groups towards the EU and the Commission taking on a bigger role in shaping forest policy can and should, to some degree, also be understood in light of the hard critique against Sweden and its domestic forestry practices that several of the respondents raised during the interviews, beginning with that of WWF:

"What we have in Sweden is an extreme form of, what to say, factual denial combined with an over-belief in volunteering. With property rights and freedom, everything will be for the best. Only forest

owners are given free rein. But the development and research does not really show that, so to speak. Then there has been a positive development from the 90s to some extent (…) But the negative consequences of the historical use and also the current intensification and felling of forests with high conservation value continue to overshadow the positive efforts that are made." (R3, WWF)

The respondent R1 from Greenpeace brought up a very similar critique:

"I think in Sweden we have created a system that it's very stuck on clear cutting and it's going to take a lot of effort to change it, and the forestry industry knows it as well. They're just buying time at the moment" (R1, Greenpeace)

Lastly, the respondent R6 from Naturskyddsföreningen pointed to the more political side of the issue and argued that there has been a continuous reluctance from Swedish politicians and forest industry over the years to accept proposed EU-policies on forests:

"*Sweden opposes with tooth and nail every single bill or strategy proposal that comes from the EU, whatever area it is about as soon as it can affect Swedish forests. So the very opposition that is taking place at all these levels is the biggest challenge for the EU, to land a forest strategy, or the deforestation law, or LULUCF. Yes, you name it " (R6, Naturskyddsföreningen)*

From these answers, it is clear that the environmental interest groups consider both Sweden as a Member State and its domestic forestry to be an active obstacle to change when it comes to forest policy in the EU, as well as that the forest management model currently applied by the Swedish forestry industry contribute to negative consequences for the well-being of the forests in Sweden. Regarding the latter, both Naturskyddsföreningen and WWF pointed to the issue of biodiversity as an especially important policy issue that they felt is not being considered properly under the current national forest policy agenda in Sweden. As illustrated by R6 from Naturskyddsföreningen:

"They are still looking at this old, outdated system with three sustainability bubbles where you have economic, social and environmental. And then when they are put together somewhere it becomes sustainable. But it is an outdated way of looking at it, for all the resource utilization and land use must take place within the limitations set by nature. Forestry does not do that today. We see that nature conservation research shows that things are not going very well for the biological diversity in the forest. "(R6, Naturskyddsföreningen).

Also R3 from WWF referred to recent research on the state of forests in Sweden when discussing biodiversity:

"But more and more new research shows that this is not the case, but it is a fairly hard and intensive forestry that risks both degrading biodiversity but also the functionality of the forest." (R3, WWF)

Evidently, this hard critique from the environmental movement against Sweden and its national forestry is in many ways a core conflict stemming from the domestic forest policy debate in Sweden and that spills over onto the discussion around forest policy in the EU, where one can detect a clear difference between the mindset of the environmental interest groups and that of the forest owners. Unlike the perspective of the forest owners, the environmentalists argue that the current way of conducting forestry is in fact not ecologically sustainable, and therefore must be changed in its design, particularly with respect to the protection of biodiversity in the forests, which in turn inevitably affects the respective approaches that the two types of interests have on how to develop forest policy at the national level. Still, the emphasis on prioritizing biodiversity in forestry from the environmentalists' perspective is something that was expected in the theory part of this thesis, and can thus be seen as confirmed from the answers above.

What to include under a European forest agenda

Going back to the main question of interest, how to then actually formulate and define a more harmonized forest policy agenda at the EU-level, it was generally quite difficult for the environmental interest groups to explicitly say how such a European agenda could or should be constructed in terms of concrete policies and decisions. As previously illustrated, most of the respondents discussed more broadly within a national context what problematic elements they see with the Swedish approach to recent initiatives on forest policy by the EU and the way forestry is conducted in Sweden today. Instead, the perhaps clearest answer or suggestion on what policy or aspect could be included under a more harmonized EU-agenda on forests came from Greenpeace:

"I think what I would like to see is more, including more the question of democracy in forestry, because in the end, yes, it is natural resources. But forests have a lot of different value. You have the economic values, the producing of wood, but also other products from the forest, like mushrooms, like

berries or whatever. You have the environmental values, the habitats, the climate value, the ecosystem services they offer, but also social values like recreation and culture. And I think what we don't do enough in the Western countries, in Europe, is to actually think about: OK, what is a public forest, who owns it actually and who should be allowed to have a say in how we treat them?"
(R1, Greenpeace)

Adding to this argument, the respondent R1 followed up by using the example of Sveaskog:

"When it comes to Sveaskog in Sweden as a state-owned company, that actually means that the forest at Sveaskog, well they don't own them, they manage them, we own them as people, and I think that aspect is not taken seriously enough that actually people own them and forestry policies and forestry visions should be more democratic. We should actually ask people what we want from forests, and if we then come to the conclusion that we actually prefer biodiversity and recreational values over economics, then that's the decision" (R1, Greenpeace)

In other words, according to R1, an important component when formulating and defining a more collective approach to forest policy in Europe could be to include more inputs from citizens and the public on which policy priorities should guide the design of a European agenda on forests, at least when it comes to the publicly owned forest resources. Moreover, as can be seen in the two quotes, examples of what such policy priorities could entail were also explicitly mentioned, including for instance the issue of biodiversity, but also social aspects such as recreation and culture. Thus, the Greenpeace perspective suggests an interesting alternative way of thinking about how forest resources could be managed, and how a subsequent forest policy framework could be developed from this.

Another indication of what policies or aspects could be included under a more harmonized forest policy framework/agenda at the EU-level could be seen in the argumentation by WWF's respondent:

"Politics creates, as it were, with its policies, expectations of what is to be delivered and not delivered and there are expectations that, for example, we shall have a favourable conservation status of naturally occurring species. This means that we must protect habitats to protect the species. But we also have other policies with expectations, such as the EU's water directive and that we must have good water quality in our watercourses. There are many different directives and strategies at EU level

that can affect forests. Then it's all about tying this together to create a unity. And in this there is a challenge in itself "(R3, WWF)

Although not being as explicit as Greenpeace when it comes to proposing actual policy content, this quote by R3 still illustrates quite well the complexity related to the formulation of a harmonized and coordinated forest agenda at the EU-level. That forest policy is not only about developing policies connected to the forestry part, but it is as important to make sure that existing directives and ambitions in other, forest-related areas (e.g., the water directive, or policies on habitats) are considered under a collective European forest agenda. Regarding Naturskyddsföreningen and their respondent, R6, no straightforward suggestion was presented on what to specifically include under a European forest agenda, but instead the discussion was on a more general level about the need for a "transition" in forest management practices in Sweden and in Europe, and how other policy areas over which the EU has competence should be better connected to forest policy:

"We want to see a transition. The forest industries want to continue "business as usual". Or maybe they can screw a little on a button here or there so that you continue as we do today and nothing else. If you look at policy areas, it's about biodiversity. It's about climate and trade policy with the taxonomy also of course, environmental policy. And in several of these, the EU has a mandate to legislate as well" (R6, Naturskyddsföreningen)

European definitions with respect for national settings

Finally, rather surprisingly, from the interviews with the environmental interest groups, one could also observe another interesting similarity between their answers and those of the forest owners, that the vast differences between Member States in terms of types of forests and forestry traditions was mentioned as an important factor to consider. Like the forest owner interests, the environmental interest groups argued that any European forest agenda established must at the same time be able to provide an opportunity for the Member States to make different interpretations based on their unique national conditions/contextual setting. In facilitating this process, all three respondents also called for better and clearer definitions of various concepts within the existing EU forest policy agenda. Starting with Greenpeace's respondent:

"*I think the thing is when it comes to forestry specifically, all of these different ways of conducting forestry, they are always meant to be adapted to the local conditions of the ecosystem. So of course, if you say we want close to nature forestry, it's going to look different when you do it in Central Europe,*

where you have big beech forests compared to the boreal forests. That does not mean that we cannot say we want "close to nature"-forestry. So I think what we should do is to have the general terms defined by the EU, and then have like national translations on what does it mean" (R1, Greenpeace)

A very similar answer came from WWF's respondent, as can be seen below:

"Some kind of clarification as to what should be included in this framework and then also how Member States should be able to show how to meet this. There is, of course, a risk of getting caught up in a discussion about details and how one or the other should be defined or specified. But the EU must try to clarify expectations at a certain level of detail, and this includes, for example, developing definitions for "old-growth forest" and "closer to nature forest" that are relevant. General principles and criteria can be developed at EU level, but then there should be some room for a scientific contextual adaptation at regional or national level "(R3, WWF)

Lastly, also Naturskyddsföreningen's respondent talked about the need for a more collectively integrated framework on forests at the EU level:

"It is important to find ways where the EU has some form of overall framing of forests, forestry and how we are to meet the major challenges we have when it comes to climate and biodiversity. And these are no two different processes that can be handled separately, but it must be handled integrated and it is a big challenge. We have such different conditions in the EU. The EU is large and there are very different types of forest and forestry and so on" (R6, Naturskyddsföreningen).

From the quotes above, concepts such as "old-growth forests" and "closer to nature"-forestry stand out and appear to be particularly difficult even for the environmental groups themselves to know how to properly define within the EU's current forest policy agenda. Together with the argument that much of the forest policy measures at the EU-level should preferably, to a certain degree, be adapted to the national context of different Member States with different types of forests, and the lack of consistency in the answers between the respondents in their ideas for what policies or aspects could be included under a European agenda on forests, it is clear that the environmentalists struggle to find common ground between themselves in presenting a shared response to what should really be done to formulate and define a more harmonized approach to forests in Europe. However, as mentioned, two of the organizations, Greenpeace and WWF, did hint at a variety of potential aspects or policy areas that could be included under such an agenda. Moreover, biodiversity is a recurring policy area mentioned in the different

answers from the environmentalist groups, which indicates that it is a top priority for them to include in the shaping of a more collective European forest agenda and where a consensus in argumentation can be seen between the different environmental interest groups.

6.1.3. Analysis of results-Q1

Among the forest owner interest groups, there is an overall dissatisfaction with how the EU is handling forest policy issues today and the more climate action-based priorities that this agenda is based upon. Instead, they would have preferred to see a broader definition of "sustainability" to be included under a European forest policy agenda that focuses more on freedom from fossil sources of production and energy (in which fossil material is replaced with wood products) than on binding carbon through the letting of trees stay in the ground. This is the recurring argument that comes back repeatedly in their answers, and can be seen as something that unites the forest owner community, regardless of their size or level of influence. Another such uniting position among the forest owners is the view that the various social aspects that the Swedish forestry contributes with in the form of jobs and welfare to people in rural areas in Sweden must also be better considered in Brussels when formulating forest policy.

With respect to the theoretical expectations on this question, these findings are in line with the theoretical expectations, as it was anticipated that at least the large forest interests SCA and Sveaskog would argue for some kind of socio-economic values to be included under a European forest agenda. However, what was more surprising to observe was the fact that such a great level of consensus in policy positions appeared to exist between both the large forest owner interests (SCA and Sveaskog) and also the associations representing small and medium-sized forest owners (Mellanskog and Södra) on these socio-economic issues. For instance, all of the four forest owner interest groups interviewed talked about the important role of wood products in replacing fossil materials in the fight against climate change. Moreover, regarding the issue of social sustainability created by the Swedish forestry's presence in different regions, both Södra and SCA used very similar arguments. This indicates that there is a certain level of agreement and coordination within the forest owner community on how to view forest policy within a Swedish and European perspective. From a theoretical perspective, this is an especially interesting finding that was not expected in the analytical framework of this thesis.

Concerning the environmental interest groups, the view of the EU's handling of forest policy issues is more positive. They see the new policy initiatives and ambitions by the Commission

as necessary for making sure that forests and forestry are not being handled separately from other relevant issues such, for instance, biodiversity and climate. In general, and quite similar to the forest owners, the environmentalists had a hard time fully concretizing what policies or aspects should be a part of a more collective European agenda on forests, although some of them provided interesting suggestions. For instance, Greenpeace suggested the inclusion of social aspects such as democracy, recreation and culture, while WWF indicated that it is perhaps best to start by trying to connect existing, binding directives on forest-related policy areas such as water and habitats to more effectively create a common framework/agenda for forest policy at the EU-level. In addition, Naturskyddsföreningen discussed the possibility of a stronger linkage between forest policy and interrelated areas that are already under EU jurisdiction today, such as climate policy and trade policy, as a potential way to create a more harmonized European framework around forests.

However, what perhaps stood out the most from these interviews with the environmental interest groups was their discussion around the importance of making sure that any European forest agenda formulated is able to allow for a certain degree of national flexibility and separate solutions depending on each Member State's unique contextual setting and conditions. On this point, the environmental interest groups seem to agree with the perspective of the forest owners that the national context matters when developing policies on forest at the EU level, albeit that the two sides disagree on the work of the EU and the Commission in shaping these polices. Still, what is probably the most important argument from the perspective of the environmental interest groups is for the EU to start properly defining and explaining what it means with the different concepts and objectives for the preservation of forests and biodiversity within the Forest Strategy for 2030 and other related policy documents. Concepts such as, for instance, "old growth forests" and "closer to nature-forestry" seemed to baffle the respondents from the environmental interest groups, which inevitably suggests that these concepts have not been sufficiently defined or made understandable under the existing forest policy agenda by the EU.

Connecting these findings/results on the environmental interest groups back then to the theoretical expectations outlined in the analytical framework, the issue of biodiversity was emphasized by all three respondents from the environmental interest groups to a varying degree as an important policy priority on the topic of formulating a more harmonized European agenda on forests. In other words, a clear consensus could be seen here on this issue in the argumentation from Greenpeace, Naturskyddsföreningen and WWF, and so this expectation

was confirmed. Nevertheless, the issue of recreation was mentioned explicitly only by Greenpeace as an important aspect to include in the creation of a more harmonized European forest agenda. Hence, this policy area was not as prominent in the overall argumentation by the environmental interest groups as initially expected.

6.2. Findings Q2- Attitudes and positions toward soft and/or hard policy instruments to achieve a more harmonized European forest agenda

6.2.1. Forest owner interest groups

Moving over to the answers collected from the forest owners for research question 2, regarding how to practically create a more collective approach to forest policy in the EU and whether to go with soft policy instruments, hard policy instruments, or a mixture of both as preferred means, some interesting observations can be seen in the answers from the forest owners. Firstly, a clear preference for softer (voluntary) policy documents and mechanisms at the national level could be detected from almost all participating respondents, as illustrated first by respondent R5 from Södra:

"The forest owner movement in Sweden has worked for 100 years to build trust and show that we can. So, we feel committed to the idea of letting us do this on our own. Let us show that we can do it, but we do not want detailed rules on exactly how to do it. It's the tradition that we come from. It's a balancing act. We live in a thoroughly regulated society where there is no business that has no strict rules. But it must be reasonable. It must not take the edge off my enthusiasm, my commitment, my willingness to pass on something that is better to future generations. That is like the starting point, and if you take away that, you feel too controlled as a forest owner. Then maybe you do what is required, but you do not do anything more" (R5, Södra)

Adding to Södra's argument about the value in trusting the individual forest owner and not regulating policies in too much detail when developing policy instruments on forests, Mellanskog's respondent R4 expressed an even clearer distaste for policy instruments that are too regulated in details:

"What needs to be removed are proposals and regulations that try to control in detail how the forests are to be used based on a centrally planned template and rules that try to control how different parts of the tree are to be used for different purposes, the so-called cascade principle. Forestry and forestry

are national competences, so the attempts to control details go against this and against the principle of subsidiarity." (R4, Mellanskog).

Instead, as an alternative, R4 pointed to a series of already existing processes based on voluntary participation that have long been in place between Member States on forest issues:

"There are today robust processes, broader than the EU, where member states have voluntarily and in dialogue with various actors within the framework of Forest Europe, since the early 1990s, developed principles and criteria for sustainable forestry, SFM (Sustainable Forest Management). These processes should continue to evolve. Compulsory legislation where a model must be printed on the varying conditions for forestry that exists within the EU is the wrong way to go" (R4, Mellanskog).

Similarly, SCA's respondent R2 also emphasized the importance of respecting the national competence over forest policy:

"First and foremost, I think it is important to remember that it is national competence and that the forest industry should be regulated in Sweden by Swedish legislators based on Swedish conditions and by Swedish politicians who all participate and vote. It provides a much better, so to speak, local and national anchoring around the decisions made in forest issues."

More concretely, R2 justified this clear position against any hard policy instruments on forests coming from the EU by relating it to the common market within the Union:

"The issue of mandatory legislation should be at national level if it does not affect the internal market, because then it must be at EU level in order for there to be equal rules of the game for companies that place their products on the internal market. It is important to remember the internal market perspective here, but otherwise this is a national competence and should be taken nationally." (R2, SCA)

As can be seen, a development toward more of regulations and hard policy instruments is not something that the Swedish forest owners are particularly interested in, regardless of their size (small/medium-sized or large). Hence, no difference in position between different types of forest owner interests could be seen, which in itself is an important finding that was not expected in the theory part of this thesis. While SCA and Mellanskog emphasizes the national

competence on forest policy decisions as their primary reason, Södra instead highlight the knowledge and personal motivation of the individual forest owner as the reason why a European forest policy agenda should be constructed around soft policy and voluntary participation. However, when moving over to Sveaskog's respondent R7 on what policy instruments on forest policy they prefer, a rather different answer emerges:

"I actually think I end up in some kind of mix, even though when it comes to forest issues I lean more towards soft steering instruments. To use volunteering as a tool and create incentives as much as possible to bring about change. That's probably still a win, I think. Because we have to, I think we must have fairly clear binding requirements, in terms of, among other things, emissions, and how forestry should contribute when it comes to climate change. But at the same time, there are changes and development in forestry, and to work with developing diversity and biodiversity, I think it feels best to try to go as much as possible with having the forest owner with you in this work" (R7, Sveaskog)

Although acknowledging the leaning towards soft policy instruments primarily, this answer from Sveaskog's respondent still presents an interesting difference in position between them and the other forest owner groups interviewed. Unlike the other forest owners, where the national authority and knowledge over forest management was the decisive factor for promoting simply soft policy documents on forest in the EU, Sveaskog here displays a more positive and open approach to a potential combination of binding policy instruments and voluntary, incentive-driven instruments or mechanisms in the formulation of a more harmonized forest policy agenda at the EU level. With respect to the theoretical expectations on question 2, this finding on Sveaskog confirms the initial expectation that the large forest owner interest would prefer soft policy instruments but at the same time be open to some sort of binding policy instruments/documents too. However, this expectation was not confirmed when it comes to SCA and their respondent given their answer to this research question.

6.2.2. Environmental interest groups

Lastly, moving over to the environmentalist perspective and their approach to what practical means should be used when creating a more harmonized agenda on forests in Europe, all three respondents stated that they preferred a mixture of soft and hard policy instruments as the best way to move forward on formulating such an agenda, although at the same time implying in that the direction needed right now on forest policy is mostly towards harder policy in order to

"even out" the differences between Member States. As illustrated below, both Greenpeace and Naturskyddsföreningen's respondents applied this kind of argument:

"I think that (a mixture of soft and hard policy instruments) would be good to also even out the big differences that we see at the moment between different countries, so that we have strong definitions, like when we talk, for example, about what is sustainable forestry. Having these definitions straight and on an EU-level I think, would be a huge advantage." (R1, Greenpeace)

"Definitely a mixture of both of course, because there are too many countries and too many different political orientations and things like that, I think it is important that there are comprehensive frameworks such as the Nature Directives, for instance." (R6, Naturskyddsföreningen).

Moreover, WWF's respondent pointed to the issue of the poor implementation of existing hard policy mechanisms within the current EU forest agenda as a dilemma that needs to be handled first, but also expressed support for the idea of having a mixture of soft and hard policy instruments when formulating and defining a more harmonized EU forest agenda:

"No, but I think I implied earlier that it should probably be a mix of both binding and softer instruments so to speak. We already have binding today that have flaws, like the Species and Habitats Directive, so already there we have problems and challenges." (R3, WWF).

Elaborating on this topic of insufficient implementation within the EU today, R3 from WWF also emphasized the importance of offering positive incentives for improving compliance with a new forest agenda and its documents, but with the exception of Sweden and its forestry:

"It can be difficult to control certain parts of the EU's forest strategy with binding policies, but here positive incentives must also be developed (…) But for the Swedish part, we actually need to regulate more because volunteering is not enough. For example, it may be necessary to limit clear-cutting and increase the proportion of other more close-to-nature forestry methods that consider the forest's different habitat types. This is also about regulating and limiting harmful forestry measures. It's about working with nature instead of against nature. "(R3, WWF)

From these quotes, according to the environmental interest groups, using a mixture of soft and hard policies on forests is motivated by the need for improved coordination (R1 and R6), as well as to ensure more effective national compliance with already existing binding policies (R3). Furthermore, R3 mentioned the importance of also offering softer, positive incentives

when developing the practical means for a more harmonized European agenda on forests. However, from this respondent's perspective, in the case of Sweden, more regulation and hard policy is in fact needed as voluntary participation there has not been enough. In this way, one can see that WWF's respondent is once again discussing forest policy in the EU from a basis of critique against the national forest practices and policies in Sweden, something which was illustrated earlier under question 1 with the other environmental interest groups as well.
Still, all in all, it must be stated that it was a quite surprising finding to see that all three respondents from the environmentalist side preferred a mixture of soft and hard policy instruments, as this was not a theoretical expectation.

6.2.3. Analysis of results-Q2:

On the issue of what practical means or instruments should best be used in order to create a more harmonized agenda on forests in the EU, the answers from the forest owner spectrum were almost unanimous, with a strong preference for soft policy instruments built on commitment from local forest owners or forest companies within the national context. This view was shared by both small-scale and medium-sized interests (represented by Mellanskog and Södra) as well by the large private forest interest represented by SCA. In other words, no real difference in attitude and position could be seen between these types of forest owners. This result suggests that the size of the forest owner interest does not affect its position to what kinds of policy documents it prefers on forests at the European level.

Instead, what stood out in the result on this research question was the more open-minded attitude within the government owned forest company Sveaskog towards a mixture of policy instruments (both hard and soft ones) as potential means at the EU level to create a more harmonized agenda on forests. This was a quite surprising and unexpected observation given the theoretical expectations on large forest owners outlined earlier in this thesis, where it was anticipated that all large forest owners, regardless of who owns them, would share a similar and slightly positive approach to a mix of both hard and soft policy instruments. In this way, SCA's approach differed from that of Sveaskog, even though both companies represented the large forest owner interest side in this study. Apart from this, my theoretical expectation that small and medium-sized forest owners would prefer soft instruments was accurate and confirmed. However, whether these softer instruments should be developed from a more local "bottom up"

perspective was not something that any of the small and medium-sized forest owner interests discussed or referred to, meaning that this theoretical expectation was not confirmed.

Finally, looking at the environmental interest groups, all three respondents preferred a mixture of soft and hard policy as the way forward for creating a more harmonized EU agenda on forests. Nevertheless, as much as they stated this preference for a combination of both soft and hard policy instruments to be used, their answers also implied that what they most of all wanted to see going ahead is a development towards more of harder policy instruments and regulatory coordination of forest policy matters in Europe. Comparing this finding then to the theoretical expectation on this type of interest for question 2 outlined in the analytical framework, although the preference for a "mixture of both" is an interesting and rather surprising observation from these interviews, it is still clear that the environmentalists are more positive toward the use of hard policy instruments than what the forest owners are. Hence, this indeed confirms my initial theoretical expectation. Furthermore, the fact that a mixture of soft and hard instruments was preferred rather than strictly hard, regulatory instruments indicates that the environmental interest groups do attach some kind of importance to the usage of soft policy as well, despite the fact that they often see soft policy as a hurdle for more effective action on forest preservation and climate policy at the European level.

From the answers on this second research question, albeit being a more concrete and direct question in its nature, one can still detect a potential for both sides of the Swedish forest community to unite on some sort of compromise regarding what kinds of means/instruments should be used for developing a more collective approach to forest policy within the EU. Although most of the forest owners interviewed (SCA, Mellanskog and Södra) argued strongly in favor of soft policy instruments at the EU level and nothing else, the fact that government owned Sveaskog displayed a more positive approach towards at least considering an agenda consisting of both soft and some hard, binding policy requirements implies that it would perhaps not be impossible for them and the environmental interest groups to find a path forward on how to combine the needs of both the forest industry and the climate, since Sveaskog and the three environmental interest groups interviewed in this study (e.g., Greenpeace, Naturskyddsföreningen, and WWF) all evidently share the position that a mix of soft and hard policy instruments would be the ideal solution going forward on forest policy in Europe.

7. Conclusions

The aim of this study was to investigate what policies and practical means different interest groups within the Swedish forest community (i.e., both forest owners of varying size as well as environmental interest groups) believe should be considered by EU policymakers in order to create a more collective approach to forest policy matters at the European level. More specifically, the research questions that this study set out to answer concerned how a more harmonized forest policy agenda could be defined and formulated within the EU, as well as what practical means/instruments should then be promoted for effectively achieving such an agenda. In terms of results, the analysis of this thesis has been able to point to several interesting observations in the answers of the different respondents within this forest community.

First, beginning with the perspectives of the forest owner representatives on the question of how a more harmonized forest policy agenda could be defined and formulated in the EU, they expressed a clear disappointment over the fact that the current policy agenda on forests from the Commission does not pay enough attention to the important role that the forestry has in binding carbon emissions through the increased substitution of fossil materials with wood products in the economy. Hence, they called for a more comprehensive view on what is meant by "sustainability" when formulating forest policy at the EU level. Second, several of the forest owner interest groups also mentioned social aspects such as jobs and welfare for sparsely populated areas in not least Sweden as important to consider when trying to create a more harmonized EU agenda on forests. Another recurring position among the forest owners was their opinion that such an agenda must then still allow for a large degree of flexibility and national interpretation of relevant policy solutions in each Member State, since there are such vast differences in forest resources and practices within Europe today.

Moving over to the perspectives of the environmental interest groups to the same question, the results of this study show that there was often a lack of consistency between them in their answers on how to formulate and define a more harmonized EU agenda on forests, yet some interesting suggestions were discussed. Apart from biodiversity, which was the issue where most consensus between the environmentalists could be seen, policy areas such as democratic ownership of forests, clean water, habitats and recreation were mentioned by the different respondents. Furthermore, an important similarity could also be seen between them and the forest owners in their position that a more harmonized EU agenda on forests must provide some room for national contexts and separate solutions adapted to the conditions of each Member

State. In addition, the respondents from the environmental side also emphasized the importance of clearer definitions by the EU on different key concepts visible in the existing documents and policy proposals on forests, using the examples of "old growth forests" and "closer to nature-forestry" to illustrate this problem.

Lastly, on the question of what practical means/instruments should be used to create a more harmonized forest policy agenda, from the forest owners' point of view, a strong preference and defense for soft policy instruments based on voluntary participation could be seen in almost all of their answers. The surprising exception here was government owned Sveaskog, who instead displayed a more positive attitude toward a potential mix of both softer instruments and harder, binding policy. Regarding the answers of the environmental interest groups to this question, all three environmental interest groups stated that they preferred a mixture of both soft policy instruments and hard policy instruments, although implying that more of the latter is what needs to be prioritized in forest policy matters right now, both in Sweden and in Europe.

From these results, several conclusions can be drawn. One such conclusion is the fact that there appears to be a clear discrepancy in positions on what role forests should have between, on the one hand, the forest owners, and environmental interest groups on the other. The forest owners feel that ecological benefits of replacing fossil materials with wood products is the way forward in this discussion, while the environmental movement instead feel that forest policy must be more focused around areas such as the protection of biodiversity and and the values that citizens attach to forests. Moreover, both the forest owner representatives and representatives from the environmental interest groups generally had a quite difficult time concretizing what exact policies should be included under a more harmonized European forest agenda, which says a lot about the complexity surrounding the issue of forest policy in the EU. To bridge this gap and to better formulate a more coherent policy agenda, I believe it is essential that both sides feel that the EU includes their perspectives evenly in the forest policymaking process in Brussels, which, as of now, appears to not be the case. This could be done by for instance providing better platforms for policy dialogue and coordination between these actors at the EU level.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from the results of this study is that the size and level of influence of different forest owners does not seem to affect their position towards EU policies on forests, nor to the kinds of instruments that should be use, at least not in the way as one could expect. All four respondents from the forest owner interest groups mentioned the substitution

effect that they felt was missing in the current agenda, and three of them (including Mellanskog and Södra representing small and medium-scale forest owners, and the large forest owner SCA) displayed a clear preference for simply soft policy instruments as means for shaping the agenda. As stated earlier, this indicates that there are certain holistic values in common between all types of forest owners, at least from a Swedish perspective, and that a more united and coordinated approach to forest policy in the EU can be seen from the forest owner side. However, the fact that the large, government owned forest company Sveaskog showcased a more open mind toward the possibility of combining soft policy instruments with some degree of harder policy instruments than the other large forest owner SCA stands out as a rather surprising result, and something which, in my view, has the potential to lead to a more effective coordination in the future between Sveaskog and the environmental interest groups Greenpeace, Naturskyddsföreningen and WWF. If this were to happen and these actors could lead the way, my estimation is that it would then be easier to also eventually get SCA and the other forest owners in Sweden on board the same dialogue and reach a collective compromise in the approach to forest policy in the EU.

Furthermore, it is interesting to see that both sides interviewed in this study recognized the importance of having some sort of need for national contextual policies to be allowed even if the forest policy agenda was to become more harmonized at a European level. Interestingly, they also used the same argument, namely the vast differences in forest resources and practices between different Member States, to motivate this stand. From the environmentalist side, a call for clearer and stronger definitions within the existing forest policy agenda was referred to as a pre-condition in order for such an adaption at the national level to become possible. This is a valuable point that I think must not be neglected by policymakers going forward. In addition, such clarified definitions could be constructed via either an environmental regulation (over which the EU has competence) adapted to different types of forests in the Member States, or through some sort of new soft policy document supplementing the existing ones and that have been developed more carefully together with the environmental movement and forest industry. Such a move would then also decrease the risk of too many different national interpretations and as a result implementation of the EU's forest policy ambitions could improve.

All in all, this study has been able to contribute to a more updated and detailed knowledge on what positions some of the most significant interest groups within the Swedish forest

community have toward forest policy in the EU. In doing so, this study has also provided valuable insights into the positions of less influential forest interest groups in Sweden, on which there has not been much previous knowledge about (i.e. small and medium-scale forest owners). Hence, this new knowledge can then help contribute to the lines of scholarship most affected by the content of this study, namely the research on Swedish forest policy and European forest policy. Still, it is important to note that this study was carried out on a limited number of high-profiled interest groups from the forest owner side as well as from the environmental movement in Sweden. There are of course many more interest groups whose opinions towards the creation of a more harmonized EU agenda on forests would be of interest to explore further. Future studies on this topic could be done in a more extensive manner and include other relevant interest groups affected by forest policy decisions. Examples of such groups could be energy companies, logistical suppliers to the forest industry, forest-based fishermen etc. Given also that the design of this study was based on interviews with experts/informants representing different levels of forest owner interest, and not directly with individual forest owners at the local level for instance, it could be valuable for future research to include this perspective as well.

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Appendix I

Interview guide (English version)

THEME 1 (RQ1)- Conditions and challenges for formulating a more harmonized forest agenda in the EU.

- Can you tell me a little bit about how your organization works with EU forest policy matters today?
- Bonus: In what ways do you interact with decision-makers in Brussels?
- Generally, how would you describe the way in which the EU is handling forest-related issues today?
- What are the biggest challenges to creating a more harmonized and common European forest policy agenda?
- Which policy areas related to the forest issue (could be energy, logging, biodiversity, preservation, transportation etc.) are more or less difficult for the Union and the Member States to agree upon, in your opinion?
- What should be the scope of a European forest policy agenda, according to your organization?
- Are there policies or issues that you think should be better included in the EU's forest policy framework, or are there policies or issues already included in this framework that should be removed instead?
- Bonus for LRF Mellanskog and Södra only: Do you feel that there is a difference in perceptions among your members, depending on whether they are small or medium-sized forest owners?)

THEME 2 (RQ2)- Practical means, instruments and documents for creating a more harmonized forest agenda in the EU.

- How much have your organization been involved with earlier documents on forests produced by the EU, such as for instance the Forest Action Plan, the Forest Strategy for 2030, the Biodiversity strategy etc?
- What is your organization's general approach to how these documents have been formulated? What have been the strengths and/or weaknesses with them?
- What kinds of policy instruments would your organization prefer be used to develop a more common European forest policy agenda? Should such an agenda be based on more of soft policy instruments with voluntary participation by Member States and local stakeholders, or more of hard policy/legislation by force, or a mixture of both?
- What advantages and disadvantages do you see with soft policy instruments contra hard policy instruments in forest policymaking?

Appendix II

Interview guide (Swedish version)

TEMA 1 (RQ1) - Hur man skapar en mer harmoniserad och gemensam skogspolitisk agenda i EU: möjligheter, utmaningar och problem:

- Kan du berätta lite om hur din organisation arbetar med skogspolitiska frågor inom EU idag?
- Bonus: På vilka sätt interagerar ni med beslutsfattare i Bryssel?
- Hur skulle du generellt sett beskriva det sätt på vilket EU hanterar skogsrelaterade frågor idag?
- Vilka är de största utmaningarna för att skapa en mer harmoniserad och gemensam europeisk skogspolitisk agenda?
- Vilka politikområden relaterade till skogsfrågan (kan vara energi, avverkning, biologisk mångfald, bevarande, transporter etc.) är enligt din åsikt mer eller mindre svåra att komma överens om för unionen och medlemsstaterna?
- Hur stor bör omfattningen av en europeisk skogspolitisk agenda vara, enligt din organisation?
- Finns det policys eller frågor som du tycker borde inkluderas bättre i EU:s skogspolitiska ramverk, eller finns det policyer eller frågor som redan ingår i detta ramverk som snarare borde tas bort istället?
- Bonus för LRF Mellanskog och Södra enbart: Upplever ni att det finns en skillnad i uppfattningar bland era medlemmar, beroende på om de är små eller medelstora skogsägare?)

TEMA 2 (RQ2) - Praktiska medel, instrument och dokument för att skapa en mer harmoniserad skogsagenda i EU

- Hur mycket har ni som organisation varit involverade i tidigare dokument om skogen som tagits fram av EU, som till exempel EUs Forest Action Plan från 2006, skogsstrategin för 2013 och nu senast 2030 m.m.?
- Vad är er allmänna syn på hur dessa dokument har formulerats? Vilka har varit styrkorna och/eller svagheterna med dem?
- Vilka typer av policyinstrument skulle din organisation föredra används för att utveckla en mer gemensam europeisk skogspolitisk agenda? Bör en sådan agenda baseras på mer av mjuka politiska instrument med frivilligt deltagande från medlemsstaterna och lokala intressenter, eller mer på hård policy/tvingande lagstiftning, eller en blandning av båda?
- Vilka fördelar och nackdelar ser du med mjuka styrmedel kontra hårda styrmedel i skogspolitiken?