

Bringing diversity to nature: Politicizing gender, race and class in environmental organizations?

Seema Arora-Jonsson  and Mia Ågren

Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Sweden

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Abstract

Environmental organizations play an important role in mainstream debates on nature and in shaping our environments. At a time when environmental NGOs are turning to questions of gender-equality and ethnic diversity, we analyze their possibilities to do so. We argue that attempts at ethnic and cultural diversity in environmental organizations cannot be understood without insight into the conceptualizations of nature and the environment that underpin thinking within the organization. Serious attempts at diversity entail confronting some of the core values on nature-cultures driving the organization as well as understanding the dimensions of power such as class, gender, and race that structure its practices. We study what nature means for one such organization, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation, and the ways in which thinking about nature dictates organizational practice and sets the boundaries of their work with diversity in their projects on outdoor recreation. We base our analysis on official documents and interviews, analyze how “diversity” and “gender-equality” are represented in the material and reflect on the interconnections as well as the different trajectories taken by the two issues. Our study shows that the organization’s understanding of nature is a central and yet undiscussed determinant of their work with diversity that closes down as much as it opens up the space for greater inclusion of minorities. We argue that for environmental organizations wanting to diversity membership, a discussion of what nature means for people and their relationships to each other and nature is vital to any such efforts.

Keywords

Diversity, gender, class, environmental organizations, whiteness, environmental justice

Western or European environmentalism has been said to be driven by the urban middle-class (Guha and Martinez-Alier, 1998). This claim has been contested in Sweden by those who bring attention to people’s relations in maintaining their environments in rural contexts (Arora-Jonsson, 2013) and especially in relation to Sami indigenous groups (Hilder, 2015).

Corresponding author:

Seema Arora-Jonsson, Department of Urban and Rural Development, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, Box 7012, 750 07 Uppsala, Sweden.
Email: seema.arora.jonsson@slu.se

While different groups' relations to the environment span a wide spectrum, for environmental organizations, overarching discourses on people's relations to the environment, and especially in relation to outdoor recreation, continue to be exemplified by urban, middle-class, and white concerns. Recognizing this discrepancy in a society that is increasingly multicultural, the Swedish Society for Nature Conservation (SNF in Swedish), the largest member-based environmental organization in Sweden, initiated various attempts to bring diversity both within the structure of their organization and in their work with members. In this paper, we examine SNF's work with promoting gender-equality and ethnic diversity in their membership as well as among the staff. We argue that attempts at ethnic and cultural diversity in environmental organizations cannot be understood without insight into the conceptualizations of nature and the environment that underpin thinking within the organization. Serious attempts at diversity entail confronting some of the core values on nature-cultures driving the organization as well as understanding the dimensions of power such as class, gender, and race that structure its practices.

Environmental organizations in the West have had an important role in mainstream debates on nature and in shaping the environment. Large environmental organizations such as SNF play an important part in advising and lobbying institutions on environmental matters. Past research has demonstrated how the separation of nature and culture has characterized the work of environmental organizations (Mels, 2002). This separation has at times circumvented possibilities for a more democratic governance of environments in relation to rural populations or indigenous groups (Arora-Jonsson, 2018). There is little research or understanding, however, on how this conception of nature and culture as separate has a direct bearing on organizations' attempts to broaden their base and diversify their organization.

In order to understand how this works in practice, we scrutinize what nature means in one such organization, especially one where a "democratic ethos" (Annual Report, 2015: 23) is an important part of its make-up. We examine the ways in which nature and space are thought of in SNF's plans and activities, especially in outdoor recreation—the context of their flagship projects on diversity. In doing so, we address not only questions of equity within organizations but also how questions of equity within the organization are linked inextricably to the work that the organizations do outside in relation to the environment. While gender-equality has been the main thrust of action around equity within organizations in the past, the language of gender has increasingly included the notion of ethnic diversity. We examine how the two issues follow from one another but also take somewhat different trajectories within SNF and in its work. Our research has important implications not only for thinking on environmental action and governance but also for theorizing on diversity in organizations.

In order to address how environmental organizations are hard pressed to address diversity without simultaneously addressing conceptions of nature central to their work, in the next section, we turn to two very different bodies of literature. Critical literature from within organizational theory deals with diversity in organizations, power relations within organizations, and the role of the organization in perpetuating wider power inequalities. There is less within this body of literature on how the organization works with diversity in the content of their work itself, an aspect extremely important in the case of environmental organizations. Thus, to address questions of diversity in the content of the work done by environmental organizations, we turn to literature (from philosophy and history of science studies, political ecology, post/decolonial studies, as well as critical race studies) on how dimensions of power such as gender, class, and race are embedded in conceptions of nature and in its materiality. We examine this specifically in their work with outdoor recreation. We use these two different entry points to address the practice and theory of environmental

organizations. We show how they are inextricably linked and that they need to be addressed simultaneously in order to understand environmental organizations.

This is followed by a section on methods and material where we outline how we analyze discourses on diversity within the organization through an examination of SNF documents complemented by three interviews and attendance at a workshop on diversity for an indication of its practice. We go on to situate SNF in the wider context of Swedish environmentalism, followed by a description of the organization and its work with gender-equality and diversity. We discuss how SNF's aim to save the world and nature is at the heart of its work with diversity and how that might just come in the way of saving the world together.

Diversity in environmental organizations

Policies and projects on “diversity” have become increasingly important for organizations today. Many organizations seek competitive advantage by incorporating diversity through their corporate social responsibility and equality and inclusion programs. Diversity policies often stress the importance of visible and non-visible differences such as sex, race, ethnic, sexual orientation, disability or personality and work styles.

There has been little research on environmental organizations and questions of diversity within the organizations or in their work. Some exceptions include studies on environmental NGOs in Turkey and in the U.K. (Külcür, 2012) and a range of environmental organizations in the U.S. (Taylor, 2015) that show that while women populated these organizations, decision-making and higher positions tended to be dominated by men. The study in the U.S. also found that although women had been able to find a way into the organizations, minorities were underrepresented in all ranks of the staff and leadership of environmental organizations (Taylor, 2015). Shrader-Frechette (2002) shows how environmental organizations such as the Sierra Club in the U.S. have failed to support environmental justice campaigns because their own structures mirror those in society at large. This picture also holds in relation to civil society in Sweden (Arora-Jonsson, 2017a; Stark and Hamré, 2000) of which SNF is a part.

Research on community organizations working with forests in Sweden shows this pattern replicated at the grassroots with certain men dominating the agenda as women were considered not interested in forestry. In addition, the pervasive discourse of gender-equality in society precluded attention to gendered inequalities in the insistence that all organizations were gender-neutral and that everyone was free to join and make themselves heard (Arora-Jonsson, 2009). We show how the recourse to gender-neutrality recurs in the case of SNF, but interestingly, in a different way.

In critical organizational theory more broadly, scholars write that despite ongoing advances in research, theory, and some strategies for change, evidence of emancipation and equity in organizations and society remains disappointing (see Benschop, 2001). They criticize that relations of power determine which “diversity issues” or “minority subjects” are examined in the first place and that the “business case” for diversity has tended to displace the question of historical disadvantage carried by some social groups (Pringle and Strachen, 2015; Zanoni et al., 2010). Swan (2017: 557) writes of the need to explore how the category of diversity and its associated practices operate as a means to further ignorance of racism. According to Ahmed and Swan (2006: 96), the term “diversity” is problematic because it individuates difference, conceals inequalities, and neutralizes histories of antagonism and struggle—in other words, relationships of power are sought to be erased in order to present a depoliticized inclusion of minorities.

This critique calls attention to intersecting dimensions of power, and in particular “whiteness” and privilege, that are largely absent from work and organization studies (Holvino, 2010; Pullen et al., 2017). Frankenberg (1993) uses the term “whiteness” to describe the “set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed” and achieve the status of truth in a way that shape both white and non-white peoples’ lives. However, as Ahmed (2004:§1) points out, “of course whiteness is only invisible for those who inhabit it. For those who don’t, it is hard not to see whiteness; it even seems everywhere”. Criticizing the systemic ignorance of racism in diversity and organizational management studies, Swan (2017) writes of a “collective white production of ignorance” that disregards white complicity in racism and colonialism. The notion of complicity has been a recurrent theme in critical theories of race and racism, as well as in feminist theory. According to Applebaum (2010: 3), recognizing that one is complicit, “is a necessary (albeit not sufficient) condition of challenging systemic racial oppression”. A failure to acknowledge complicity will “thwart whites in their efforts to dismantle unjust racial systems and, more specifically, will contribute to the perpetuation of racial injustice” (Applebaum, 2010: 3). “The white complicity claim calls for a specific type of vigilance that recognizes the dangers of presuming that one can transcend racist systems when one attempts to work to challenge racist systems” (Applebaum, 2010: 20). Instead of giving in to an urgency to act without acknowledging one’s own complicity in the system, scholars (e.g. Ahmed, 2004; Applebaum, 2010; Swan, 2017) advocate the importance of recognizing this complicity. Following Ahmed (2004) who argues that urgency blocks understanding, Swan (2017) proposes “listening” as a form of white praxis in order to acknowledge white complicity and move toward anti-racist practices.

Most significantly, since the white complicity claim presumes that racism is often perpetuated by well-intentioned white people, being morally good may not facilitate and may even frustrate the recognition of such responsibility (Applebaum, 2010: 3). Whiteness is inflected by class, with white middle-class femininity associated with being and doing good, dating back to colonial Christian femininities (Applebaum, 2010), an aspect that Mindry (2001) calls “a transnational politics of virtue” in relation to the work of some NGOs today.

This also calls for attention to the importance of recognizing how underlying dimensions of power such as class, ethnicity, gender, race, and age remain the invisible assumptions on which organizations are built and dictate practice (Acker, 1999; Pullen et al., 2017: 454) and, as we show, influence how issues are taken up. Collinson and Hearn (1996) show, for example, how management and leadership ideals depend heavily on prevailing norms around masculinity. Conceptions of gender and diversity are institutionalized within organizations and salient and tacit until they are challenged (Ahmed, 2012).

We examine these aspects in the context of SNF where a sense of moral responsibility is strong within the organization at the same time as the question of race or color are not something that can easily be named and gender-equality is institutionalized in particular ways. While the number of Swedes from other ethnic backgrounds has risen exponentially in the past decades,¹ giving rise to a maelstrom of new relations, researchers show how words such as race and racism are often met with feelings of unease and a fear of reinforcing racist trends in society (de los Reyes et al., 2005: 297). Further, while Swedish law makes it mandatory for all public sector organizations to have gender and diversity plans, it does not permit organizations to collect statistics on the national or ethnic backgrounds of its staff or members.²

In the history painted by some scholars in the aftermath of Second World War, it was deemed to be unimaginable that the idea of race would exist in a welfare state more than as

an exception (Fur, 2013). Behind this fear of “race” hides a dangerous unawareness that racism is not just a historical parenthesis and did not automatically disappear as peace was declared (de los Reyes et al., 2005). This denial also hides from view how racism underpins institutionalized discourses on gender-equality in Sweden (Liinason, 2010; Mulinari and Neergard, 2004). Researchers show the gender-equality norm in Sweden is strongly performative and produces naturalized nationalistic, racialized, hetero, and cis-normative positions (Martinsson et al., 2017). Aberrations that contradict the vision of a Swedish gender-equality are relegated to others, most often immigrant women, understood as not gender-equal (de los Reyes et al., 2005: 24) or those from “other” nations in the global South (Arora-Jonsson, 2009). Another layer is that of geography and age as women in rural Sweden, especially the older generations, are considered backward and not gender-equal like city-women. Rural areas that have gone through considerable depopulation in past years³ are regarded by mainstream urban populations, partly, as idylls for tourism and outdoor recreation but also more generally as backward areas of the country, far from centers of change and modernity (Arora-Jonsson, 2013).

Class and race intersect in the segregation of the Swedish work and housing markets. “There is extensive welfare state support for the poor in Sweden and therefore nothing like an ‘underclass’ has yet emerged” (Szulkin and Jonsson, 2002). However, large-scale housing development since the 1950s has spurred both ethnic segregation and mixing through its overall affordability making many areas second secondary option for middle-income households but first hand option for newly arrived migrants with relatively low incomes (Andersson et al., 2018). The word for suburb, *förort* has, in public debates, come to mean an area inhabited predominantly by people of color⁴ and associated with the social housing programs of the 1960s coded as different and dangerous (Molina, 2005: 106). At SNF, *förort* is used specifically in relation to the project *Schysst Sommar* where the hope is to reach out to immigrant youth to enhance diversity in the organization.

Much of the critical diversity literature has focused on inequalities within organizations—in other words—on the practices of the organization. A corresponding literature on the thinking on gender in the content of the work of the organization are fewer. Increasingly, scholars are beginning to discuss the gendering of texts (Calás et al., 2014) as well as the gendered ways in which the organization is performed (Hancock and Tyler, 2007). While the depoliticized mainstreaming of gender in organizations has been criticized extensively, in some cases, the language of gender mainstreaming has also opened up the space to be able to discuss other dimensions of power in the work of environmental organizations (Arora-Jonsson and Sijapati Basnett, 2018). We examine the nexus of gender and diversity within SNF and track the similar ways in which they arose as issues within the organization and yet were addressed differently in practice. We look not only to the practices of gender and diversity but also examine how these practices are embedded in the thinking guiding the organization, to which we now turn.

Nature-cultures and the politics of difference

In recent decades, scholars over a spectrum of disciplines have challenged the separation of the natural world with the human and the belief that the natural world is endowed with a set of capacities and dispositions prior to its relation with humans (e.g. Descola and Pálsson, 1996; Latour, 1994; Whatmore, 2002: 61). Tracing the history of this separation, Merchant (1980) shows how with enlightenment, the idea of nature as a benevolent, somewhat wild mother was replaced by a model where humans rationalized and dissected nature to show all her secrets. It was in the revelation of her secrets that nature could be controlled.

This anthropocentric thinking had important consequences. By separating humans from nature, modern scientific knowledge contributed to hiding from view the politics of difference, obscuring how gender, age, race, or ethnicity are vital in constituting natures. Moore et al. (2003: 4) show, for instance, how racialized notions of nature rework the materiality of nature itself. In Sweden, this may be seen in the colonization of Sami reindeer herding lands that from the early 1900s were transformed into agricultural land or for large infrastructural projects such as dams and forestry (Lundmark, 2006). An awareness of context and history shows how naturalized notions of race and nature are articulations specific to a certain part of history rather than “foundational truths” about nature and race. We go on to study in the case of SNF how “some ideas about nature and race achieve the authority of truth and inform political subjectivities and cultural identities while culture itself is a site of political struggle expressed in power, process and practice” (Moore et al., 2003: 4).

Environmental organizations play an important role in this politics of nature. Work in Sweden indicates that attention to culture in nature and nature as a site of political struggle finds little place in the work of environmental bureaucracies within the country. This is in contrast to projects supported by Swedish development aid in countries in the global South where the inextricability of culture in nature has been impossible to acknowledge in the programs undertaken. This paradoxical approach has its basis in the emphasis on the natural sciences in domestic environmental policy-making and an understanding within the organizations that questions such as gender or people’s involvement are the remit of other organizations tasked with these “social problems.” As a result, socio-political and cultural aspects of environmental decision-making and conflicts over environmental governance are displaced as not relevant to “nature” (Arora-Jonsson, 2018).

However, as Mels (2002) shows, considerable work is involved in this separation of nature and culture. Analyzing images, documents, and maps by the Swedish environmental agency on national parks, he shows how natural spaces were presented as untouched by downplaying their social histories and conflicts, erasing Sami indigenous rights, and mediation of natural spaces.⁵ These efforts and national park plans went toward making these spaces into a coherent cultural politics of nationhood that emphasized an “untouched nature” that signaled the historical roots of Swedishness and a collective origin with an organic oneness of nature.

Conceptions of national identity and ethnicity are reinforced by references to nature as may be seen in the dramatic pronouncement by the founder of Sweden’s tourist association in 1886, “If the holy fire of love for the homeland is not awakened in the one who is able look around in our wonderful ancestral land, then nothing can awaken it, then that man or woman is not worthy of being called a Swede” (cited in Emmelin et al., 2005: 12).⁶ This “cultural construction” of outdoor recreation (Emmelin et al., 2005: 16) has strains of “ethno-nationalism” (Jazeel, 2013) described in other places. Jazeel (2013) describes how nature in a national park in Sri Lanka was scripted by mapping subjects’ bodies with historical, religious, and territorial discourses that configured some as “interlopers” in national space while others became associated with what was now constructed as a primordial and premodern antiquity.

In a similar vein, Crang and Tolia-Kelly (2010) show how the official curating of natural spaces in England as part of a project at the British Museum privileged one form of affective response underwritten by white sensibilities as universal and naturalized their social values over others, hiding the ethnic coding of the making of heritage sites. Studies in rural Sweden show how official discourses have been instrumental in coding rural culture and nature as that which was connected to male, white, land ownership excluding other ways of being.

These interventions inadvertently embodied racial undertones that excluded newcomers to rural areas, despite the authorities' aspirations for integration (Arora-Jonsson, 2017b). This has implications for projects on outdoor recreation at the center of SNF's work with diversity and the literature on outdoor recreation and diversity warrants consideration.

The constitution of outdoor recreation

Findings from a range of contexts, including Sweden, have shown that having minority or immigrant status, belonging to a minority religion, and speaking a non-official language has a negative influence on the rate of participation in outdoor recreation (Aizlewood et al., 2006: 86; Fredman et al., 2013). As a response, leisure research has studied different recreational styles of different groups. This tendency to look for "typical" recreational styles of different ethnic group has been criticized for essentializing ethnic or cultural difference in outdoor recreational behavior and ignoring differences in environmental relations as a result of discrimination and other aspects of social inclusion. A key hypothesis propounded in the U.S. to explain the lack of minority association with outdoor recreation is the marginality hypothesis (Washburne, 1978). The marginality hypothesis explains "underrepresentation" in ethnic and minority recreation due to limited economic resources. Floyd et al. (1994) demonstrate that economic inequality in the U.S. intersects with race as ethnic/racial minorities have had limited access to the major institutions and that, in turn, has led to less participation in leisure. In a similar vein, the opportunity hypothesis posits that as costs increase, opportunities for marginalized groups declined (Aizlewood et al., 2006; Fredman and Heberlein, 2003).

In Sweden, the white middle-class dominates both outdoor recreational activities and the media. The big newspapers that write on outdoor recreation target the middle-class (Fredman et al., 2013: 85–87). The current association of leisure activities, such as adventure sports, with men, tend to emphasize some leisure activities as a male domain (Sandell, 2000). A survey with men and women in 2007 indicated that women tended to have more "social," rather than individual leisure and were more often accompanied by children and engaged in activities not conventionally categorized as leisure (Haraldson, 2012). Further, young people between the ages of 15 and 20 have been shown to be least involved in relation to nature, and this is true of many urban areas in Sweden (Emmelin et al., 2005).

Class and race also intersect with gender. Older women in Sweden and women as well as African American groups in the U.S. have been shown to be constrained by feelings of personal safety (Sjögren and Stjernberg, 2010) or violence (Weseley and Gaarder, 2004) when it comes to leisure. Studies from Los Angeles (Byrne, 2012) and in rural U.K. (Askins, 2009) reveal that the absence of minority ethnic groups from national parks was based on a fear that a majority of the park users would be white, wealthy, and xenophobic. Their absence was shaped by emotional barriers in the fear of facing racism when being non-white in a predominately white area. Scholars have criticized the literature on leisure studies for paying little attention to the heterogeneity of minority communities and their very diverse relationships to nature (Askins, 2009; Gentin, 2011). Askins (2009: 366) suggests that the complexities that constitute representations of the natural world and its embedded cultural connotations can be studied by paying close attention to how in outdoor recreation, nature is not merely something that is out there but one that comes into being in relation to people and their experiences. In much the same way, nature's materiality creates people and society.

We go on to examine SNF projects on diversity at the cross-section of the literature on critical diversity within organizational studies and the literature on how the separation of nature-cultures is embedded in dimensions of difference. We study the different ways in which questions of gender and ethnicity are addressed in the organization and in the content of their work and how dimensions of difference such as class, age, gender, and race (and, in particular, whiteness) structure both these attempts. We analyze how these dimensions of difference shape organizational practices as well as what nature is taken to be and how it is meant to be experienced. Analyses of attempts at diversity in environmental organizations will remain fragmentary without an understanding of how organizational practices constitute natures in the course of their work as much as how understandings of nature dictate organizational practice.

Methods and material

In order to study the work on diversity at SNF as well as the ideas that drive their work on the environment, we examine SNF official documents published between 2008 and 2016. Statutes, Operational Plans, Activity Reports, Annual Reports, policy papers such as that on mining and forestry and project documents on *Schysst Sommar*, their project on diversity in outdoor recreation, are scrutinized to understand the goals and activities of the organization, organizational strategies, and official standpoint on diversity and gender-equality. We also use evaluations of SNF by the *Swedish International Development Agency* (Svensson, 2004; Waern et al., 2011) and blogposts from their official websites for information not found in the documents, such as current statistics, background stories, and updates on the diversity project. To ascertain personal experiences as well as for an understanding of practice, the textual material was complemented with attendance at a workshop on diversity at the Stockholm headquarters (13 March 2015), telephone interviews with two officers in charge of Human Resources at different periods between 2006 and 2018 (15 and 18 May 2018), and an interview with a diversity project manager (13 March 2015).

We analyze how “diversity” and “gender-equality” are represented in the material and how these have changed over the years as well as what issues are addressed in relation to gender and diversity. We examine documents for descriptions of “gender” (references to women, men, gender, or gender-equality), “race” (references to target groups and their ethnicity or culture, to “immigrants” or “New Swedes”), and “nature” (descriptions of what SNF thinks nature “is” or “should be” in, for example, environmental policies or blogposts) as well as ways of representing people’s relations to “nature.” In the texts, we analyze what issues were taken up, what were absent, and who was often seen as speaking and from what perspective.

SNF and outdoor recreation in its national context

SNF is considered to be Sweden’s most influential environmental organization (Svensson, 2004). Since its foundation, SNF has been an important actor in nature conservation and outdoor recreation and has influenced both formal policy formulations and the implementation of environmental policy (Hysing and Olsson, 2008). SNF is often a part of bringing about changes in laws concerning the environment and very much a part of drawing out the contours of what does, and does not, constitute environmentally sound practice in the country and in its work abroad.

SNF was founded in 1909 by the Swedish Academy of Sciences’ nature protection committee when Sweden’s first law on nature conservation was passed. Describing this

history, in the SNF newsletter, *Natur*, the journalist, Friström criticizes the establishment of national parks on economically insignificant land. He writes that once the founders realized that one of the national parks, *Stora Sjöfallet* was economically important, they abandoned plans for the national park in order to build a dam despite protests by the organization's editor and the Permanent Secretary of this being a “a grievous mockery of all that nature protection and laws for nature protection signified” (W1).

Friström describes SNF's long struggle that followed to save other rivers from being dammed and their demand for modern water laws. Since then, the image of protectors of nature has characterized the organization, both in their own representations as well as in public understanding. Their statutes (2012: §2) state that the SNF shall work

to awaken and sustain within humans a feeling for nature and its values, to work towards adapting human society and work to the needs of nature; to promote debates and influence decisions on nature conservation protection and environmental protection of valuable nature through among things acquiring land and other means.

It was at about this time at the close of 1800s and beginning of 1900 that “Leisure and outdoor recreation as a way of relating to nature and the landscape ‘exploded’ in Swedish life” (Emmelin et al., 2005: 11). Outdoor recreation became an important bulwark of SNF's work with the environment and in reaching out to its members. The movement for outdoor recreation was propelled by the establishment of other associations such as the Swedish Tourist Association in 1885 and the Scouts association in 1912. *The Right of Public Access*, a law that ensures everyone has access to nature is a distinguishing feature of Nordic leisure activities.

Outdoor recreation, developed and run mainly by upper class men, went through an extensive period of democratization from the 1930s. New legislation advocating vacations and an improved material standard after the Second World War contributed to an increase in outdoor recreation. The Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA) established in 1967 took up outdoor recreation as one of its main responsibilities and focused its work on removing “obstacles” such as lack of information or accessibility (Emmelin et al., 2005; Sandell, 2009; Sandell and Svenning, 2011).

In 2006, just short of celebrating 100 years of nature conservation since the first national park was established in 1909, the SEPA published a report where they rued that people's close relationship to nature in Sweden was changing. Urbanization was seen to have distanced many among the younger generation from the countryside. The report went on to state that Swedes born outside of the country, that is, immigrants, often had a different relation to nature and it was time that the government stressed the importance of nature conservation for outdoor recreation and public health (SEPA, 2006: 5). Outdoor recreation began increasingly to be associated with environmental education prompted by debates on the environment, climate, and sustainable development (Emmelin et al., 2005). SNF had an important role to play in opening outdoor recreation to new people.

Swedish SNF: A movement and an organization

SNF presents itself as a non-profit, non-political democratic association, a people's movement, and an environmental organization that for more than a hundred years has been working with nature conservation and environmental protection (W2). It sees as it is mandate to “spread knowledge, chart environmental threats, and propose solutions. SNF educates the public and influences politicians and authorities, both nationally and

internationally" (Annual Report, 2015: 34). They work mainly in five areas—agriculture and food security, climate change, marine ecosystems and fishery, environmental toxins in society and nature, and forest—and promote their own ecolabel, a certification of ecofriendly products. SNF is an association with 24 county branches and 270 community branches (W3). The association consists of paying members who populate the boards of the organization at the national, regional, and local level. It is headquartered in the two main cities of Stockholm and Gothenburg.

Except on the national level where members have salaries or emoluments, board members receive little or no monetary compensation. Currently, the member base consists of 226,000 members of whom 55% are women and 45% are men. Only 28% live in rural areas (W2). It appears that the particular kind of environmentalism that we go on to discuss ahead is very much an urban movement (cf. Guha and Martinez-Alier, 1998). In rural areas, antipathy to nature-loving do-gooders (*naturmuppar*) from cities has often characterized urban–rural relations and has caused a great deal of debate over issues such as the protection of forest areas or wolves (Arora-Jonsson, 2013). The sense of a movement comes from their members organized as associations or branches all over the country, but SNF is also an organization with employees to carry forward the tasks of the movement.

The organization

Staff is employed for administration, funding, campaigning and networking at the headquarters and branches. The number of employees is approximately 140 (Annual Report, 2017), of which 13 are employed in regional offices and the rest in either Stockholm or Gothenburg (W4). The leadership group consists of 11 people and includes the heads of departments at the Stockholm office (e.g. marketing, administration, and communication), the General Secretary, and the head of the Stockholm office (W4). The National Chair, the General Secretary, and the Head of the Stockholm office make up the top management.

The staff also works internationally, partnering with organizations in countries in the global South and participates in global networks and EU think tanks. SNF communicates its messages through its newsletter, books and reports and organizes seminars, debates, and conferences to influence public opinion. Through these, they produce their ideas about nature and society's responsibility for them. Funding for the organization comes from donations (28%), member fees (14%), and from sales of their ecolabel (16%) (Annual Report, 2016: 3). The rest (about 40%) comes from SIDA and other state agencies such as the SEPA (Annual Report, 2016: 60).

Class, gender, and diversity at SNF

From being an organization started by and run by upper class, older white men for a number of years, the numbers turned as the environmental movement gained ground. Interviews, documents, and the discussions at the diversity workshop indicate that the staff and the membership base are composed largely of white, middle-class people, and few with non-European backgrounds. One participant at the workshop attributed this to a recruitment strategy in the 1970s to maximize membership from an economic perspective. The recruitment-drive targeted people who had income level above 400,000 SEK per year and owned two cars. It was clear that these members were white, urban, fairly wealthy, and middle-class.

In 2013, SNF hired a marketing agency to help with reaching a membership base of 200,000. The strategy consisted of targeting members who showed both loyalty and a disposition to contribute to the organization, encapsulating the “twin attributes” of “loyal and profitable” members. These attributes were classified according to the Mosaic™ lifestyle classification, which meant that SNF could then target other such potential members from the population (W5). Once again, the members that they were approached were urban, middle-class, and highly educated and as the consultants point out in their report, the strategy was extremely successful.

Over the years, there has also been a clear shift in the number of women in the organization, both in the membership as well as the employees. Work with gender-plans in the organization also opened up efforts toward diversity in the organization. These took slightly different routes for staff and members.

Staff

An evaluation of SNF commissioned by the *Swedish International Development Agency* in 2004 pointed out several shortcomings in the organization that needed to be dealt with at the Stockholm head office. The report pointed out that the gender division among the employees with an increasing number of women was not reflected in the leadership group that was dominated by men, and that the organization’s gender-equality plan was largely a paper product—employees were unaware of it and the plan had not been followed up (Svensson, 2004: 60). A 2011 evaluation stated that SNF was “in the process of establishing a gender policy and that developing a stronger gender policy framework for their international work was of high priority” (Waern et al., 2011: 18).

In 1991, the number of women in the staff exceeded the number of men, and in 2010, for the first time, an equal number of women as men took their place in the leadership group (as may be seen when comparing the different annual reports). Currently, the preponderance of women in the highest leadership has caused some consternation. An official told us,

We need to work now to get in more men...we have...there are three women in the top management at the moment. The management group is even. Among the staff at the headquarters, we are over 60% women now. So, we are trying to work on it, we are trying to get in more men so that it doesn't get too dominated by women...The head of the national board is also a woman now. This is the first woman we have ever had. As Chair.

In answer to whether she thought that it was important to get more men in because men were being discriminated against, an argument for gender-equality for women, she answered in the negative. She believed it was important to have a mixed working place. The 2016 *Equality and Diversity Plan*, for example, emphasizes the need to work for increased diversity and inclusion as well as an equal number of men and women in the organization. Having a preponderance of women in the organization appeared to have become especially unsettling when in 2016, women took over all three positions in the top management that had been dominated by men so far. This challenged the norm, and the officer expressed concerns about needing a balance for a mixed working place.⁸ In contrast to the increasing feminist critique of a singular focus on numbers, numbers appeared to be changing the balance of power, and this seems to have a disquieting effect on the organization. It may have disturbed the masculine norms of management in place so far (cf. Collinson and Hearn). It also points to the deep-rooted belief in maintaining neutrality

that characterizes a Swedish culture of gender-equality (Arora-Jonsson, 2009) where neutrality is understood as needing to have an equal number of men and women.

One of the officers attributed the change in numbers to an expansion of issues that the organization worked with. The shift of organizational attention to questions of eco-labeling and needing to reach out to people about consuming in environmentally friendly ways coincided with more women getting engaged in the organization from the 1970s onwards. The more scientific work and the core of organizational work on the environment was still associated with men.

According to an interviewee, the first Diversity Plan came into being in 2011 when officers (three women and a man) in the human resources and communications groups at the Stockholm office felt that their work with gender-equality needed to include a broader perspective. According to the Operational Plan (2011: 8–9), the term “diversity” had first been used for humans in 2006 where human diversity was defined as an organizational goal and needed to reflect multicultural Swedish society. This direction in their work coincided with the increasing number of immigrants in Sweden over the years and wider discussions where questions of racism began to gain attention in mainstream media.⁹ At SNF, it was not until 2011 that the discussion turned into a staff strategy.

The intention with the Diversity Plan was to widen SNF’s work to areas other than gender-equality and to eliminate discrimination based on ethnic belonging, religion, disability, sexuality, or age. In a sense, the Diversity Plan may be seen as moving away from the question of justice (gender-equality) that took up questions of collectives to one of eliminating discrimination of individuals (cf. Pringle and Strachan, 2015). However, as in another study of an international environmental organization (Arora-Jonsson and Sijapati Basnett, 2018), for these officers, gender-equality had opened the door to an understanding of discrimination based on other dimensions of power. For the champions of this approach in the *Human Resources Department*, the Diversity Plan was an attempt to bring in people and politics into the largely natural science work of the organization. According to an officer behind the initial plan, they had come to the insight that

people were experts within their areas such as sea-environments but they needed to think bigger. Experts did not always know very much about society around their issues and how that was changing or what was happening. We needed people who could fight our corner, communicate issues...not be encyclopedias.

For this, they felt they needed to reach out to a larger cross-section of society.

SNF worked to revise recruitment texts and re-think their usual communication channels. Another officer told us,

The union looked at our ads so that we did not exclude people and such things...for example, when must you require that someone speak Swedish well and when must you not, you know.

This diversity recruitment strategy was something that “all who recruited had to get in line with. That was how it was.” However, she also acknowledged that these measures were no quick fixes.

The imperatives of increasing membership as well as appealing to a wider audience led to a change from gender to “diversity” at the organization as it was felt that a diverse staff would be able to communicate issues to the public in a much more effective way. The assumption was that social aspects of their work that were being hidden by the natural science language might be able to overcome in this way.

It was significant that those who chose to work with diversity were mostly women. At the workshop on diversity in Stockholm, there were eight women around the ages of 25–50 years

and one man who had retired from a senior position at SNF. Four women were from the Stockholm head office, one a trainee who had organized the workshop, and three women were board members, one at the national level and two from branches in the country. The participants took up a discussion on how it was mainly women who worked with gender-equality and diversity within the organization and how this division of labor was also apparent in other activities. Women were engaged in projects related to consumption while the “old conservation geezers” did the biological planning.

The lack of men’s engagement in questions of diversity was considered “natural.” As one woman put it, since women have had to work for their equal rights as women in the organization and outside of it, it was not so surprising that they would be concerned with questions of social justice rather than men. One woman, however, broached the subject of gendered roles as a problem when participants were asked to visualize the organization 10 years into the future. She retracted her position when confronted by another woman about it being a “problem,” “Well, that is up to the person to decide... of course... it should be possible for everyone to do what they want. Even if it is a traditional choice or not.”

There are two issues at play here—one of who works with diversity and care and second, of what issues characterize their work and in which context. First, “traditional choices” are quite obviously not only about individual choice but also determined by what lays the boundaries of what is normally acceptable for different groups to do. Women were often in charge of the “caring” activities and the men with what is considered the core of the organization, the biophysical problems. This also appears to have a correlate to ethnicity as far more non-native Swedes worked with the diversity projects than in other parts of the organization. Second, as regards the content of their work, SNF’s policy documents relating to their five key areas (agriculture, climate change, oceans, environmental toxins, and forest) do not discuss gender-equality in Sweden or the question of diversity to any great extent except in relation to indigenous communities or in relation to their work in the global South where women were seen as being discriminated. The question of gender in the content of their work was displaced to women in the global South much like other research has shown (Arora-Jonsson, 2009, 2018). Nature or the environment in Sweden was regarded as biophysical and outside of societal and cultural concerns such as that of gender-equality or ethnic diversity.

There was thus a hierarchy in activities in who (men or women) did what but also where (Sweden or global South) they worked with it. The gendering of activities was also a question of power relations that may be seen as an undercurrent in the discussion but not acknowledged. If the norm was indeed having an equal number of men and women in the organization and of increasing diversity, it is somewhat incongruous that only half the staff would work with making the organization more inclusive.

Members

In terms of current membership, slightly more than half of the members are women (W2). Self-assessments of their organizational structure (Annual Report, 2015: 37) show, however, that boards are dominated by men, despite women outnumbering men in the organization, also a recurring feature of civil society organizations in Sweden. The solution has been to work explicitly toward assuring an equal number of women and men on both national and local boards (W6). Although there are no statistics on this, an officer felt that the picture seemed to be improving.

It is through their projects on outdoor recreation that SNF has tried to lay the basis of a new and ethnically diverse membership. The Stockholm office has held training programs for their branches on methodologies to promote diversity in outdoor recreation. As an officer

pointed out, this was not something they could force on the branches but it was rather an invitation from them to take the courses, to tell them, “this is what we do, would you like to learn more about what we do?”

There have also been attempts to work with immigrant associations. An important step was seen to be taken when the Somalian circle (*krets*) was established as SNF’s first national interest group (Operational Plan, 2011: 8–9) though the current staff (2018) knew little about what had happened to those initiatives. Currently, some branches carry out activities with immigrant associations in their areas to guide and teach newcomers about Swedish nature in the county of Dalarna (W7) on the island of Öland (W8) and in a project in Örebro where “newly arrived and new Swedes meet other municipal inhabitants to practice Swedish” (W9). According to the branch handbook (W10), funding for such local projects is sought primarily through internal calls for funding. As noted by one of the project administrators during the workshop on diversity, it is common that project applications contain ideas about diversity and nature. People’s relations to nature are thus at the heart of SNF and to its efforts at diversity as we go on to show below.

Protecting and shaping nature: The idea driving the organization

The website for the organization states, “The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation is a charitable environmental organization with the power to bring about change and shape the Swedish landscape” (W3). They describe three tools in their work to save the planet—*influencing policy-making, inculcating a “feeling for nature” among people and consumer power*. To awaken positive feelings and respect for nature that is needed, SNF’s strategy is to arrange nature experiences through nature tours and education (W11).

The Statutes (2012: §2) reinforce this responsibility of “protecting and creating a feeling for nature and its values.” The understanding of nature as something that is given and that needs protection echoes the separation of nature and culture regarded as problematic by scholars (see lit-review). For instance, the policy on Hunting and Wildlife Management (2014: 4) reminds us that

there are innate values in nature that are completely independent of humans and their valuing of nature and its richness. Humanity needs to respect these values even if they can never be fully described—there must be limits for human impact on the rest of nature.

References to these innate values recur in other policies, such as Ocean Policy (2013), Policy Marina ecosystem, Climate Change Policy (2013), Agriculture Policy (2013) and Environmental Toxins Policy (2011). The Mineral Policy (2015: 2) and the Forest Policy (2011: 1) both call for preserving and respecting nature’s own vital processes, cycles, and diversity. “Natural” forests are described as having existed “before human impact” although as the document also states that since the last ice-age 10,000 years ago, forests have been managed by humans for pastures or building material (Forest Policy, 2011: 5). The language of ecosystem services provided by nature reinforces convictions of a nature independent of humans that serves and that we need to respect and restore.

While it is evident from the policies, and especially in the climate policy, that the separation of nature and culture is untenable, nature as inherently independent of society remains a given. This holds despite SNF documents that acknowledge their own role in shaping nature,

If we had not existed, Sweden would have actually looked different. When the organization turned 100 years, we could count 243 big and small areas in Sweden that have been protected and saved because of efforts by SNF—centrally, regionally or locally. (W2)

The Mineral Policy (2015: 1) points to how extraction can come in the way of outdoor recreation and indigenous Sami lifestyles and in the Hunting Policy (2014: 5) on how hunting practices need to take account of cultural and socioeconomic aspects such as outdoor recreation. Neither reflect, however, on how Sami or hunting practices may be a part of maintaining nature as it looks. Although there are some references to the exercise of power by some in relation to nature in some policy documents, the overall thrust is a clear idea of what is natural.

Thus while on the one hand, the documents acknowledge their role in shaping nature, they simultaneously enact the separation of nature and culture by wanting to restore nature to what they take to be its real and natural state. There is an increasing acknowledgment of humans in nature, what they do, their different ways of shaping nature but what is “natural” for the organization is never in doubt. It is in this context that we examine efforts toward diversity and of bringing in different groups into the fold of the organization.

The organization is also driven by its zeal for justice. An officer said, “people here are driven by their engagement. If those working here weren’t working with environmental issues as they are, they would be working with human rights or questions of equality.” What then is “natural” and just? Questions of gender-equality and diversity, even where depoliticized (cf. Ahmed, 2012) are nevertheless about human differences and relations of power and sit uneasily with the organization’s work with a nature that is given. We show how this becomes apparent in projects that aim for diversity.

Diversity in outdoor recreation

Under the rubric of “A people’s movement for all,” an Operational Plan (2015: 8–9) states,

SNF is a people’s movement for all people who want to be engaged in the activities and issues with which the association works. During the following four years we will therefore work towards breaking structures, patterns and norms that hinder people’s participation in the organization. In particular, we need to stimulate young people to get engaged, and to achieve broad mobilization needed to create the sustainable society which we are all striving towards, where humans and nature are central. As a people’s movement, the association will also stand up for openness, accessibility, solidarity and everyone’s equal value. Intolerance and xenophobia belong as little in a society as in a people’s movement, where all people are equally welcome.

To give shape to this aspiration, SNF put in place their project called *Schysst Sommar och Vinter* for young people in the suburbs (*förorter*) of big cities. Translated literally, *Schysst Sommar och Vinter* means “cool” or “fun” summer and winter. But *Schysst* can also mean “nice” or “fair” and the pun on the word “fair” makes it especially appropriate for a program that hopes to reach out to people outside the mainstream of SNF’s members. The program was started in 2009 and continues today and is described as SNF’s “biggest effort for human diversity” as they try and connect with youth in urban areas with high proportion of rental apartments and low mean income (Activity Report, 2010: 32). With *Schysst Sommar*, SNF “works towards breaking down segregation within the association and achieving the goal of being a people’s movement that reflects Swedish society today” (Activity Report, 2010). All activities are for free to include those who may not have the financial means.

The project started in the suburbs or *förorter* of Stockholm, Uppsala, and Malmö and later expanded to other areas in Sweden. A large proportion of the inhabitants in these *förorter* are from or have parents born in countries outside of the West—in other words, young people of color—a group underrepresented at SNF. This aspect of wanting to reach

out especially to non-white young Swedes is understood but not stated since whiteness or color are not considered appropriate to name and associated with right-wing racist rhetoric.

Schysst Sommar is funded by the Postcode lottery (Annual report, 2014: 26). This is a lottery company that supports civil society organizations with their surplus with the motto, “Making good citizenship fun” (W12). Since 2010, funding from the Postcode lottery has amounted to a total of 28 million SEK for “special projects” (W13) but also for other “overarching environmental work” related to forestry or marine ecosystems. (Annual Report, 2013: 13). In SNF’s application to Svenskt Friluftsliv¹⁰ for additional funding for *Schysst Sommar*, the aims of the project are described as getting newly arrived youth and unaccompanied refugee children to become environmentally aware and use the outdoors (W14).

Schysst Sommar is meant to encourage the “willingness to be out in nature through subjects that young people can relate to” (Handbook, 2012: 9). Local project managers work as a link between SNF and the youth. “Every year the branches arrange thousands of excursions that give people unique experiences of everything from orchids to owls and meadows” (Annual Report, 2016: 4). Through the project, SNF has reached out to “thousands of young people between the ages of 13–18, both newly arrived and young who have lived in the country for long.” A challenge for the project is establishing it in the local groups, and not just as something the head office manages (Annual Report, 2016: 3).

As was stated by a national board member during the workshop on diversity, “This is one of our absolute focal issues...human diversity...to broaden who we are to include the whole society. We can’t save the world if just have with us the white middle-class and no-one else.” The prerogative of saving nature where biophysical processes are seen mainly outside of human activity and best left alone had the “authority of truth” (cf. Moore et al., 2003) within the organization. More people were needed to make it a reality,

this is an attempt to reach, for us, an important target group – young urban people who perhaps not yet have been in concrete contact with nature and environmental issues and who would soon need to decide upon lifestyle changes and take decisions in the political process that will affect all our common future. (Handbook, 2012: 8)

The implicit assumption was that the target group lacked interest in environmental issues. By promoting outdoor activities, the organization intended to save the world by bringing into their fold, immigrant groups who they saw as not yet support this saving of nature. Statements such as “we need diversity in our membership” imply not only the need for people with non-European backgrounds but also take for granted what nature meant for people, how they should relate to nature or feel responsible for it, and as something that needs human protection. It is assumed that environmental consciousness is hampered by the immigrants’ lack of “concrete contact” with nature in Sweden (Handbook, 2012: 8), that is, being out in the forests or rural areas. This is of course equally true of white Swedish youth in cities. But they are not necessarily out of place as we discuss below.

Being out of place?

The participants at the workshop on diversity discussed the difficulty of knowing how diverse they really were since ethnicities could not be named or counted. One participant pointed out, “if you can’t name it, how can you measure it?” Alluding to residential segregation in the cities, another suggested that by counting the number of people in different city areas and comparing that over time, they could get a hint about the number of members that can be assumed to have non-Nordic or European backgrounds, “One can

also, voluntarily, ask, like, ‘could you share what housing area are you from?’ And then one can perhaps compare with previous participants and see if it has developed.”

Diversity became a question of numbers and of including people from certain areas, the suburbs or *förorter* where the majority of the immigrants lived. Geography came to signify places that were not white. One effect of this inability or reluctance to name color or background resulted in sidestepping the question of people’s experiences and their disadvantages of race but also of class. This was a question taken up by an officer at the workshop who felt that instead of “teaching” people, they should be focusing on doing things together,

Not that we take a bus to a Swedish for Immigrants class and say, come now and we will teach you about Swedish nature. But that we are there. We want to know how these young people think, what they want to do, that we are there if they want to come to us.

The officer said that she felt herself as different due to the many little discussions and pointers within the environmental organization that made her feel different and regarded as non-Swedish, unlike at other organizations where she had worked previously. She remarked,

Very often, I get comments from different associations and organizations at the various branches when I’m out working on SNF work, “oh, you don’t really look like someone that . . . you know the typical person who would work at SNF.”

She gave a little laugh. She was asked by a participant if she experienced this negatively and replied,

Yes, yes absolutely. But then when I say, I’m working with *Schysst Sommar och Vinter* . . . then it’s, oh yes then I understand.

But that is racializing!

umm, yes.”

She was regarded as a non-typical SNF employee since she was not white (the only one at the meeting for instance), but once it was clear that she worked with an “immigrant project,” it was considered understandable. Conversely, as she also pointed out when she read some parts of the article draft, that everyone assumed this to be an integration project because most of those involved in it were non-whites. In this “racialization,” she was assigned characteristics based on an understanding of her appearance (cf. Miles and Brown, 2003) although in all other ways, for example, in her language skills or the way she dressed she was like any other white employee. Whiteness was a norm against which difference was fashioned and its connection to nature was established. This was an unacknowledged norm still in tact despite increasing the heterogeneity of the past years.

This also reflected the division of labor at the organization, where women worked with diversity and women of color could be expected to work with nature if it entailed working with people of color. As may be seen on the website (W4), people working with *Schysst Sommar* are more likely than others to have non-traditional Swedish names. The person observed further, “. . . it is the attitude that one has towards people that may not look ethnically Swedish. You are reminded.” She also pointed out that the “non-Swedish” youth and *Schysst Sommar* managers felt extremely uncomfortable when they visited the main office in Stockholm as they were so obviously out of place. They had been greeted with great enthusiasm by the people at the office as an example of diversity but felt a bit like animals at the zoo.

This participant’s interventions on attitude and experiences of inclusion or exclusion notwithstanding, the larger discussion reverted to (the more easily solved) problem of counting how many people they had with different backgrounds as a measure of

inclusion, despite the obvious consensus that the movement was mainly white. Not addressing these experiences entails ignoring the politics of the organization—that beyond numbers, there might be other factors that make certain groups uncomfortable. It brings to light the association between being white and Swedish nature that is often taken for granted.

However, as was clear in the work of the staff working on diversity and from interventions at the workshop, everyday practices and ideas about relations to nature were being increasingly challenged as exemplified by the “non-ethnic” Swedish woman at the diversity workshop. For her, the close relationship of whiteness and the organization was evident at SNF much more than in other Swedish organizations where she had worked. This may be seen as a result of the overarching discourses of who is expected to be in nature and how to relate to it within the organization, but it is also reflective of dominant discourses on nature within society at large. This makes newcomers and non-whites stand out as different, and the theme of mainly teaching them about nature rather than experiencing it with them prevails. Such an approach tends to treat each society as a specific homeostatic device tightly adapted to a specific environment (cf. Descola and Pálsson, 1996) where certain ideas about nature and race achieve the authority of truth and inform political subjectivities and cultural identities (Moore et al., 2003: 3–4).

Conclusion

In this paper, we show that the question of diversity is not just about how environmental movements can include a diverse group of people into their organizations but also how their conceptions of nature are central for them being able to do so. Drawing on this insight from our study of SNF, we reflect on what comes in the way of working toward justice and diversity within the organization and what might bring about change.

Environmental organizations play an important role in challenging or reproducing nature-culture divides in society. Their conceptions of nature have a direct bearing on efforts toward diversity and on the need for problematizing ethnic and gender diversity in these organizations. Constraining the move “beyond a safe space for diversity” (cf. Pullen et al., 2017) in environmental organizations are bounded understandings of nature. On reading SNF’s history, it is clear the organization has been instrumental in Sweden looking the way it does today. Yet, despite this understanding that they have played an important part in shaping nature in Sweden over the years, their assumptions of what “nature” is, reveal a depolitized understanding of nature, shorn of people and power rather than as political spaces created through their interactions with society. Despite their references to social relations in some documents, as for example to Sami livelihoods and to new relations being created in their diversity projects, their policies tend to relate to nature as an abstract space, as ahistorical ecosystems that are being destroyed and need to be protected through natural scientific knowledge—a pure nature which they would restore and in relation to outdoor recreation, live with in specific ways. As we show, this nature is bound inextricably with a particular understanding of (white) Swedishness.

The material that we studied projected a unitary ethos of outdoor recreation and nature and is grounded in a particular history where nationalism was closely linked to ideas about Swedish nature (see Emmelin et al., 2005). Our analysis shows how outdoor recreation has racial undertones just as it is clearly gendered (Haraldson, 2012) and its history restricted to a select group of people (Mels, 2002: 143). It was clear that being out in nature is not something that is assumed that people of color would do. Although there are many urban, white residents, both young and old, outside the fold of outdoor recreation, it was being non-white in nature that disrupted mainstream ideas. These ideas or norms about “nature”

came from a discursive history that shifted from loving the nature of “ancestral lands” (cf. Emmelin et al., 2005: 12) to needing to protect them. These have also come to signify a dominant middle-class, white, urban, and natural science understanding within the organization.

SNF related to a xenophobia in society and saw themselves as standing up to it. And yet, the organization is an overwhelmingly white organization, both in staff and membership, reflecting hierarchies in society (cf. Shrader-Frechette, 2002). In that sense, the admission itself becomes seen as good practice rather than a starting point for change (Ahmed, 2004: §11). Efforts toward gender-equality and ethnic diversity differed in that sense. The discussion on gender-equality focused on the structure of the organization with discussions on gender in the content of their work only when it came to projects in the global South. The culture of gender-equality in Sweden grounded in a sense of gender-neutrality made gender invisible in SNF projects in Sweden but entirely legitimate in their projects in the global South (cf. Arora-Jonsson, 2009). In contrast, cultural diversity was intensely visible as being out of the ordinary. This justified action on it in the form of projects in their work with members outside. Yet, this action did not necessarily entail increasing diversity within the organization itself, where its whiteness was largely invisible to the majority.

This disjuncture within the organization was compounded as efforts at cultural diversity are based on ethnic or racial differences that one cannot really talk about, a problem that is wider in Sweden than only within SNF. While the *Schysst Sommar* participants felt uncomfortable in a place dominated by white, richer people, the white people were made uncomfortable by interventions such as that by the person at the diversity workshop who sought to bring questions of experience and difference on to the agenda. Differences of class, color, or ethnicity are thus elided. The difficulty of talking about it and naming difference precludes discussions of feelings of exclusion or the emotional barriers (cf. Askins, 2009) that might keep people away from outdoor spaces.

Avoiding difference makes invisible the ways in which dominant discourses on what constitutes culture and nature might privilege one form of affective response underwritten by white, middle-class, and largely male sensibilities as universal (cf. Crang and Tolia-Kelly, 2010). This of course applies to the organization and not for all, for as Ahmed (2004: §14) points out, this whiteness is invisible to those who inhabit it, not to those who do not. The invisibility within the organization makes it difficult to bring in new and different people. The focus on the safe space of increasing numbers then becomes one of a depoliticized inclusion (Ahmed and Swan, 2006) where relations of power determine what diversity issues are examined in the first place (Zanoni et al., 2010).

And yet, there were also spaces for change. Numbers did matter. As we can see, the increasing numbers of women and their growing importance can become disturbing as it challenged the norms of what being gender-balanced meant. Being balanced in power was not considered possible by having more women in an organization where decision-making had been dominated by men until very recently. It was not men’s lack of power that evoked this response but rather the notion of needing to balance the numbers among the leadership even in an organization where the number of women members outnumbers that of men. The number of men does matter, but the question of why more men or if the gendering of activities is significant needs to be discussed if justice is to be taken seriously.

SNF’s work with diversity, as acknowledged by an officer, was also a response to the need to think beyond the organization’s natural science focus and situate nature in its culture. The efforts to bring in new groups in the fold are also making space for change. The challenge is to acknowledge the politics that will bring the change. Both in relation to gender-equality and ethnic diversity, it was the inclusion of minorities that was considered important rather

than their views and experiences. Here, Swan's (2017) admonishment of "listening" rather than giving in to the urgency of action is vital. The need to discuss "nature" itself as a site of struggle and politics goes hand and hand with bringing diversity to organizations working on nature. As Phelan (1994: 59) points out, "the questions that need to be asked are not what should we do or not do to nature to save nature, but instead how do we understand ourselves and our world and how should we negotiate our relationships with ourselves?" and we might add, with each other in nature.

Highlights

- (1) Environmental organizations' conceptions of nature are a central and yet undiscussed determinant in work with human diversity that closes down as much as it opens up space for inclusion of minorities.
- (2) Dimensions of power such as class, gender, and race structure not only organizational practices but are embedded in conceptualizations of nature and environments as may be seen in programs for outdoor recreation.
- (3) Serious attempts at broadening ethnic diversity within environmental organizations demand confronting some of the core values on nature-cultures driving the organization.

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ORCID iD

Seema Arora-Jonsson  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3841-0027>

Notes

1. Immigrants born outside of Sweden from countries in East Europe, Africa, Asia, and South America have grown since the 1950s when they accounted for 0.08% of the population to today's 12.12%. <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/statistik-efter-amne/befolning/befolknings-sammansattning/befolkningsstatistik/>.
2. Statistics at a national level show, however, that women tend to be slightly more educated than men but have lower incomes and, eventually, lower pensions. The job market is also segregated with women more often than men doing part time work and working within lower paying jobs such as health or children care. This segregation integrates with ethnicity, as for Swedish-born women, the employment rate is significantly higher (87%) than for foreign-born women (67%). Women do the major share of care work. Men generally perceive themselves to have better health than women do. <https://www.scb.se/en/finding-statistics/statistics-by-subject-area/living-conditions/gender-statistics/gender-statistics/pong/statistical-news/women-and-men-in-sweden-facts-and-figures-2018/>.
3. Eighty-five percent of the Swedish population live in urban areas and the rest in rural areas. <https://www.scb.se/hitta-statistik/artiklar/2015/Urbanisering-fran-land-till-stad/>. The lack of

- employment and service in rural areas as well as the movement of talent to the cities has led to growing levels of inequality between urban and rural areas (Keuschnigg et al., 2019).
4. The term “people of color” is inadequate and has an American connotation and not generally used in Sweden. We choose to do so here instead of using non-white that signifies an absence. Color is not meant to matter in Sweden and thus avoided and yet as we discuss ahead it does. Swedish scholars often use the word “immigrants” in scare quotes.
 5. The history of the Swedish north is also a history of Swedish colonialization of the territory of the Sami groups. The increased pressure on raw materials and natural resources from the 18th century onwards resulted in a transformation of Sami property rights and livelihoods accompanied by the migration of an increasing number of Swedes from the South to the North (see Lennart Lundmark, 2006).
 6. All translations are our own.
 7. W1–W14 are websites referenced in the reference list.
 8. On reading a draft of this paragraph before publication, the officer wanted to clarify that s/he did not regard this as unsettling but that it was important to have an equal number of women and men.
 9. A governmental inquiry (SOU2006: 73) was commissioned in 2004 to identify the mechanisms behind the structural and institutional discrimination of people based on ethnicity and religion. The inquiry was commissioned as a realization of the failure of the current integration policy. The authors who came from a spectrum of social sciences and humanities insisted that the focus needed to shift from the “others” to the structures and mechanisms that produce the ethnic divides and segregation in Swedish society.
 10. Swedish umbrella organization for Swedish outdoor organization.

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