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Participate for women's sake? - A gender analysis of a Swedish collaborative environmental management project

Introduction

Over the last decades, in Sweden and other European countries collaborative and participatory approaches have gained prominence in directives, policy documents and regulations governing the management of natural resources (cf. EU Water Framework Directive 2000; Swedish Government 2001). Such approaches are considered to be able to foster more holistic and learning oriented management, as they strive to include and coordinate multiple interests and different types of knowledge in their management processes (Berkes 2009; Cortner and Mote 1999; Parkers et al. 2010; Wondolleck and Yaffee 2000). Despite the increasing recognition of the importance of collaborative and participatory approaches expressed in policy documents and directives, realizing the directives has encountered problems and only enjoyed limited traction within environmental management agencies responsible for their implementation. This has been explained for example by arguing that such organizations are hierarchical and sectorial and not suited to dealing with inclusive and holistic approaches (Allan and Curtis 2005; Capitini et al. 2004; Lockwood et al. 2010). Other explanations emphasize the lack of competence among environmental professionals when it comes to initiating and facilitating collaborative processes with unknown outcomes, and reconciling tensions between conflicting interests and encouraging negotiation of shared meanings (Dillard 2013; Margerum and Whitall 2004; Westberg et al. 2010). The lack of appropriate structures supporting collaborative approaches and failure to develop relevant competencies among

responsible agencies may mean that initiatives with the explicit aim of going beyond traditional top-down management result in pseudo-involvement, impermeable power relations and consensus approaches that reject incompatible interests (Cooke and Kothari 2001).

In this paper we apply gender theory to examine the difficulties associated with implementing collaborative approaches which are stated in environmental directives and regulations. In a previous study based on a Swedish project called *Co-management plans of coastal and marine areas* we found that the collaborative approach seemed to have weak support among the responsible agencies, and that a large number of the appointed project leaders were women (Norrby et al. 2011). This led us to address the question of how collaborative environmental governance approaches relate to the norms prevailing within the Swedish County Administrative Boards (CABs), the regional agencies responsible for implementation of nationally established environmental policy. We asked if the competencies connected to such approaches are, in addition to being gendered, also undervalued because they are gendered? In this article we present a deeper exploration of this question. By attending to existing norms of masculinity and femininity within the CABs, we aim to understand how different competences and tasks are gendered and what implications that might have for collaborative and participatory environmental management.

Gender research and environmental governance

We define environmental governance and natural resource management (NRM) following Lockwood et al. (2010). By governance we mean the interaction among processes and traditions that determine how power and responsibilities are exercised

and decisions taken. NRM concerns concrete activities such as watershed, catchment and landscape management strategies.

We have found very little research into how gender relations interact and influence the way environmental management is organized in the industrialized West. One reason, particularly when it comes to the Nordic countries, might be what recent feminist researchers have called the de-politicization of gender equality in Nordic politics. It has been suggested that the de-politicization has arisen in these countries because their institutions and organizations already are assumed to be gender equal, and that gender therefore is not a relevant political category (Magnusson and Rönnblom 2008). On the other hand, gender seems to be a more recognized category of analysis in what are labeled non-industrialized countries or developing countries, than in the industrialized West (Arora-Jonsson 2011). Recent literature confirms how gender in relation to environmental dilemmas mainly draws from research in developing countries (cf. Carr 2008; Coleman and Mwangi 2013; Østergaard Nielsen and Reenberg 2010). The North-South divide and the stigmatized roles for women in environmental governance prevail in UN documents and in Climate Change discussions (see Arora-Jonsson 2012; MacGregor 2010; Resurrección 2013).

Research discussing gender in environmental governance contexts in Western countries often takes a very instrumental approach. For example, some studies suggest that women use less resources than men; that women leave a smaller ecological footprint than men, and that women are different in the way that they approach environmental and wildlife management (European Institute for Gender Equality 2012; Davidson and Black 2001; Johnsson-Latham 2007). Agrawal (1997) argues that these studies disregard complexities and dissimilarities between and

among women and men in their relationship to the environment and neglect gendered division of labor, property and power which impacts men's and women's relationship to the environment.

Only a few studies refer to research on if/how gendering of tasks influences the way environmental agencies like the Swedish CABs are organizing their daily environmental management. These CABs are state organizations with a heavy bureaucratic apparatus. In the US and Australia, comparable organizations are dominated by men, in terms of both overall number of employees and the leadership positions they hold (Davidson and Black 2001). Apple (1996) argues that a consequence of the US environmental agencies traditionally employing white males is the development of a masculine normative culture in these organizations. Davidson and Black (2001) studied women and men in Australian National Park and Wildlife agencies, and showed a typecasting (what roles are assumed to suit women and men) where women were encouraged to engage in interpretative roles, rather than in more senior or risk-taking positions which were assumed to suit men better. Women were found in lower ranked positions within the agencies, and thus prevented from gaining access to decision making positions. The authors argue, from a social justice perspective, that this will lead to a construction of a new feminized job type: the interpretative and community liaison officer which is defined in terms of stereotyped female behavior. The risk is that women are channeled into these positions and thereby prevented from taking roles with a higher status and more decision making power (ibid: 653).

These findings support the relevance of gender theory as a critical lens for the interpretation of previous NRM research and to provide additional explanation of the

challenges associated with incorporating collaborative approaches into contemporary environmental governance.

Theoretical approach

The theoretical framework for our study relies on gender theory. Gender studies include a broad spectrum of theoretical perspectives and approaches but here we are especially interested in scholarship which focuses on how femininity and masculinity are created, providing a critical analysis of the production and reproduction of gendered norms in bureaucratic organizations like the Swedish CABs.

Following West and Zimmerman (1987) we understand gender as 'done' in everyday life, gender is therefore: "*...not the property of an individual but an emergent feature of social situations*" (ibid: 126). Doing gender refers to the social production of the categories of women and men and the restrictive implications and privileges that comes along with it. Different forms of masculinity and femininity are produced and reproduced in rules of action, interaction or organization of routine practices (Bacchi and Eveline 2005). What are considered typical female and male behaviors, attitudes and tasks vary between cultures and social and historical contexts. As Keller (1985/95:xv) puts it, gender: "*... refers to the shared beliefs of a particular culture about what constitutes masculinity and femininity*". In Western cultures, concepts of knowledge and expertise carry typical masculine connotations (Harding 1991), and qualities such as being competitive, executive and objective have traditionally been seen as representing masculinity, while qualities such as being inclusive, caring or intuitive have constituted the typically feminine (cf. Alvesson 1997; Lindgren 1999; Ressler 1985). In addition to the above, gender interacts with

other categories, such as class, ethnicity, age etcetera, which requires an intersectional approach to avoid categorizing women and men as homogenous groups (Crenshaw 1991).

Public organizations, such as the Swedish CABs, employ many women. Public organizations are, according to Alvesson (1997), regarded as protected and weak (feminine) while private businesses are considered virile, strong and adventurous (masculine). Parts of the public sector, for example the export sector or the military sector which are dominated by men, are however coded masculine due to its focus, gender composition and activities, even if they lack the competitiveness of private business. These sectors reproduce dominant masculine identities (challenging, competition oriented etc.) implying that elements which are not perceived as masculine are devalued and labeled unimportant since they are not coherent with the dominant culture (Alvesson 1997). According to Alvesson (1997), even if the proportion of the underrepresented sex increased within these sectors, the change would only slowly and moderately modify their gendered construction. Wahl's (1992/2003) feminist analysis of organizations makes transparent that even if a man and woman have the same title in an organization, their tasks are likely to differ. Wahl et al. (2011) claim that discrimination is an integral part of the structures of organizations, which can be partially explained by women and men being treated differently. In addition, other studies show that the status of a task is influenced by the status of the person completing it. Men's tasks are often valued higher than women's tasks, regardless of what the task is (Abrahamsson 2002; Sundin 1997).

As gender refers to socially constructed processes, this becomes our basis for analyzing the Swedish CABs. We do this to understand the difficulties connected with

the implementation of more collaborative environmental management approaches.

We have formulated two questions to guide this analysis:

1. What are the prevailing gender norms at the Swedish CAB divisions dealing with environmental management? What competencies and tasks are regarded as more important, less important, and why?
2. What implications does this have for the altered mission of the CABs to work collaboratively, as in the example we are analyzing here: *Co-management plans for coastal and marine areas?*

It was the Swedish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), the overriding environmental authority in Sweden, which gave five CABs the mission to develop management plans for parts of their coastal areas by using a participatory and collaborative approach. Here we explore how the CABs perceived and acted upon this mission by analysing the production and reproduction of gender norms in the routine practices of the CABs.

We understand the connections between organizations that are formally included in a given hierarchy (such as the SEPA and the CABs) as nonlinear and complex. Therefore it cannot be expected that the SEPA's mission to the CABs (a mission which asked them to depart from their traditional management approaches) to be understood and implemented precisely the way SEPA intended. The administrators at the CABs' environmental divisions are creating their own practice in relation to the meaning they give to their overall mandate. As this meaning not only depends on the resources at their disposal, but is also guided by existing norms of

what are regarded as more and less important, it will affect what value (status) is given to a mission and who (what competence) is considered appropriate to complete it (Wenger 1998). By looking at what status the co-management project was given within the CABs involved, and who were appointed responsible for completing it and why, we explore how the project, including the specific demands (collaboration) connected to it, fits into the existing norms of the CABs. Further, by analyzing the way the experiences of the project were treated and utilised within the CABs after it was completed, we gain understanding of how competences required to lead the collaborative project are valued. This contributes to our discussion of whether and how existing gender norms of the CABs effect more collaborative and participatory management that, according to policy documents and regulations, are expected of them.

4. Methodology

This article draws on data from two different projects: a communicative skills development programme directed towards CAB administrators dealing with NRM (from now on referred to as the 'Skills development programme') (Westberg et al. 2010), and the project *Co-management plans of coastal and marine areas* (from now on referred to as the 'Co-management project') (Norrby et al. 2011).

To develop a reliable basis for answering our question about which gender norms guide the work of the CAB administrators and what kind of competences and tasks are regarded as important, we use material from the Skills development programme that aimed to develop the CAB administrators' skills to keep up with requirements on more inclusive management approaches inherent in existing policies on environmental governance. Within this programme, 20 courses were run between

2009 and 2011 for over 400 administrators from all 21 CABs in Sweden, which suggests that the data reflect dominant norms in the agencies' environmental management practice. The material from the programme is extensive and for this article we use data from the focus groups that constituted the initial step of the courses, where administrators discussed their overall duties and mandate, and why they wished to improve their communication skills.

To answer the second question regarding what implications gendered norms of the Swedish CAB organizations have for the new collaborative approach to environmental management, we draw on material from the Co-management project. This project was initiated and financed by the SEPA due to an identified need to develop new, collaborative ways of managing coastal areas. It consisted of five regional projects located in five coastal counties and was run by the CABs concerned between 2008 and 2010. Each of these regional projects had a project leader and a project group consisting of CAB staff, representatives of agencies of concerned municipalities and stakeholder groups. Data from the Co-management project were collected on two different occasions. The first time was in connection with the evaluation of the project in 2010-2011 (Norrby et al. 2011). This material includes:

- one focus group interview with all three officials responsible for the entire Co-management project at SEPA, and an individual phone interview with one of them.
- focus group interviews with the project groups of all five regional projects
- semi-structured interviews with all five project leaders
- phone interviews with the managers or other relevant persons at the CAB units with overall responsibility for the regional projects.

Data from the interviews listed above include information about what motivated the CAB to join the Co-management project; what status that the projects had within the CABs and what support was given to the project and project leaders.

The second set of data consists of new interviews with the former project leaders and with managers of the CAB divisions responsible for the Co-management project. They were conducted in January and February 2013 and the aim was to gather the interview participants' views on the project in retrospect. The interviews therefore focused on the role of the project leaders in the continuation of the Co-management project; if/how the experiences gained from the project are utilized by the CABs; and what kind of qualifications they think are needed to lead collaborative processes, and why.

All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. The researchers who were present in the focus groups together with the moderator took verbatim notes of the discussions. The material from the two projects was first analyzed separately and categorized in recurrent themes that emerged through several readings. In the next step the themes from the two projects were combined and underlying patterns were identified based on the theoretical perspective described above (Kvale 1999).

The Co-management project and the five cases

Sweden is divided into 21 counties and the CABs of these counties are responsible for the implementation of nationally established environmental policy under the supervision of the SEPA. Here we examine the five CABs that were selected by SEPA to be invited to the Co-management project. These were selected because

they, partly or entirely, are marine protected areas under the Helsinki or the Oslo-Paris Convention (SEPA/ Naturvårdsverket 2011). However, the biological values of these areas were to some extent insufficiently mapped out. In addition, the areas lacked overall long term management plans and were under a growing threat of exploitation from tourism, fishing and housing development. SEPA considered it important that the CABs developed plans for the areas which met the guidelines of the above-named conventions for management of marine protected areas.

Additionally the SEPA wanted to use the project to explore and learn from collaborative governance and management practices, hence the focus on co-management. Previous attempts had shown that despite stated ambitions to collaborate across sectors and work in a participatory manner in various NRM cases, they easily gravitated towards traditional 'top-down' modes of management, according to the SEPA. To avoid this and to ensure a collaborative approach from the very start of the project, the SEPA encouraged the CABs to establish high level reference groups, including representatives from top management of the counties and concerned municipalities to support the project.

The five CABs agreed to participate in the SEPA initiative, one important incentive being that, in the near future, they would have to set up plans for long term sustainable management of these areas anyway, as one of their commitments in the conventions mentioned above. This would require resources, and the invitation from the SEPA was therefore timely, although the collaborative approach that SEPA requested was unfamiliar to the CABs.

In the following section the five CABs and the projects are briefly presented. We start with the CABs where the project was considered to have the highest status and support according to the interview participants, and finish with the CABs where the

status of the project was considered lower and where the follow-up of the project was the weakest.

County A: About one year before the Co-management project was introduced, CAB A had started a prominent and pioneering collaborative process with the municipalities located in the coastal area of interest. The aim of this process was to gain control over the intense development of the area by directing the exploitation in a way consistent with the long term goals of nature conservation and community development. The Co-management project was designed to contribute to this already ongoing process. As project leader (PL) for the Co-management project, a woman of around 50 with a PhD in biology was appointed. She had worked for two years at the CAB and had previous experience working with complex collaborative processes. As part of the ongoing high-status collaborative process in the region, the Co-management project also received high status, according to our interviews. The PL said that she felt support both from high level officials and politicians at the municipalities involved and from a high level manager at the CAB. Today, this former PL works with other collaborative projects, on both national and international levels at the CAB. She takes part in a forum that has been established for exchanging experiences between project leaders in the CAB.

County B: The coastal area in County B was selected as a candidate for UNESCO's Man and Biosphere program one year before the Co-management project started and the aims of the Biosphere process fitted well with the intended outcomes of the Co-management project. This combination made the status of the Co-management project high and the participatory approach was seen as useful for involving and making the Biosphere candidature known to officials and politicians in the concerned

municipalities. The PL for the Co-management project was a 30 year old woman with a degree in marine biology, who had been working for two years at the CAB. She is presently working in another division at the CAB, as a coordinator for the national environmental objectives. Her experiences gained from the pilot project are not directly requested within the CAB but are, according to herself, useful in her new position.

County C: The area for the Co-management project in County C is an archipelago that the SEPA had previously considered protecting by making it a national park. The idea was never completed but resulted in a deep distrust among the residents of the archipelago towards both SEPA and the CAB, as they perceived the idea to infringe on their rights as landowners. The Co-management project, with its participatory approach, was seen by the CAB as an opportunity to start communicating and improving relations with the residents. A man who had recently retired from the CAB, but who was familiar with the archipelago, was hired as a consultant to lead the project because he was considered 'good at dealing with people'. He was supported by a project secretary and administrator (biologist, male, aged around 50) who had been employed at the CAB for 15 years. On the one hand, the status of the project was considered high by our interview participants, since the aim, to improve relationships with the residents of the archipelago, was encouraged by the County Governor in person. On the other hand the project was rather unknown among the coastal municipalities as well as within the CAB. The secretary returned to his old tasks after the project ended. He was referred to by his immediate superior as a "wise man", able to advise others within the CAB. Since the PL was hired as consultant, he is no longer working for the CAB.

County D: The site focused upon for the Co-management project in County D was classified as a UNESCO World Heritage area in 2000. An important motive for the CAB to join the project was that the area was poorly documented from a marine biological perspective and was lacking a management structure. The project leadership was given to the only administrator at the CAB with a background in marine biology (a woman, aged around 30) who had been employed at the CAB for two years. The status of the project was rather low according to our interviews and it proved difficult to engage the CAB management as well as the coastal municipalities in the project although the County Governor was actively involved in informing about the project at appropriate occasions. Today the PL is working in the same position and with the same duties (traditional management tasks) as before the project. She argued that there are no routines for learning from her experiences from the Co-management project within the organization, but that she personally has daily use of the preliminary management plans created by the Co-management project.

County E: The CAB of County E chose to join the Co-management project as it promised resources for the documentation of the marine values of the coastal area in focus. Also, the CAB expected the project to contribute to the establishment of a dialogue about the management of the area with landowners and other stakeholders in the archipelago. An administrator (a woman, aged around 30) with a background as an oceanographer, who was employed at the CAB one year earlier was selected as PL. She was temporarily moved from another division when she became responsible for the Co-management project. The project had a low status, and the CAB used a very small amount of its own resources to support it. Besides, the project

was not anchored at the highest county level, according to our interviews. Today the responsibility for managing the area is moved to another CAB division. The PL has moved to yet another division where her duties include taking records of polluted areas.

Results and discussion

In the discussion that follows we apply gender theory to the empirical material in order to answer the questions posed in the theory section.

What are the prevailing norms, prioritized tasks and competences in the CABs?

The Swedish CABs have a history of male dominance which is similar to the situation in the US and Australian NRM agencies described by Davidson and Black (2001) and Apple (1996). Today the number of women and men who are employed in the NRM divisions of the CABs at administrative level is approximately equal (Swedish County Administration, Annual Reports 2010). However, the representation of women and men working as NRM administrators in the CABs has changed rapidly over the last 30 years. For example, in 1986, the NRM division of one of the CABs involved in the Co-management project included 30 people. Of these, 22 were administrators and they were all men, while the rest, 8 women, worked as assistants (Länsstyrelsen Göteborg och Bohuslän, 1986). The Human Resource divisions at the other CABs confirm that this was the general picture. Furthermore, NRM administrators in general (as with the 400 who took part in the focus groups) are trained natural scientists. In natural science, objectivity, neutrality and expert knowledge become tools for management and power (Elling 2008). So even if the NRM divisions at the Swedish

CABs are no longer male dominated from a representative point of view, we argue, in line with Alvesson (1997), that the professional identity of the environmental administrators, their working methods and the norms attached to these methods, which were developed decades ago, are still being reproduced. Thus, the NRM divisions at the CABs can be described as bureaucratic state organizations where a certain type of masculinity connected to ideas of rationality and objectivity prevail (Alvesson 1997).

In the focus groups conducted in connection to the Skills development programme, the CAB administrators described their organization and its overall mandate as value neutral and objective, something which is reinforced as the tasks they are carrying out are mainly grounded in a positive realist epistemology. As authorities representing the state government and responsible for implementing the national environmental policy, the CAB administrators described their professional identity and overall mandate as 'experts in the name of nature protection'. Since communication and information takes up a vast amount of the administrators' work time, they said that they recognize the need to improve their communication skills. The skills they referred to, however, do not coincide with the approaches and competences generally considered necessary to lead co-management processes. Such tasks assume an approach which acknowledges that solutions to complex environmental problems cannot be handed down solely from natural science expertise but require skills to create conditions where stakeholders representing diverse experiences can come together to meaningfully collaborate (Daniels and Walker 2001; Westberg 2010; Wiek et al. 2011). Instead, the administrators saw a need to develop their skills in transferring their own expertise. They expressed a strong wish to learn how to make people listen and take interest in the information

they present, and to learn communicative 'tricks' to gain support and legitimacy for their perspective on nature conservation. For instance, when asking the administrators what skills they would like to improve, one said: *"I am here to learn about how to make people see that there are good things about nature, so we can avoid conflicts"*. The administrators did not seem to recognize their own social constructions to what is "good about nature", but described the decisions and measures they take as based on objective observations and considerations. By seeing their own knowledge as based on objective facts, they dismiss conflicting opinions regarding nature as biased and emotional. This illustrates Boschken's (1982:31) claim that, *"Bureaucracy in itself contains the assumption of neutrality and objectivity of the administration and administrative staff"*.

Moreover, the professional identity and the mandate of the NRM administrators, as expressed by those participating in the Skills development programme seem to contribute to an ambivalent attitude toward ideas of collaborative NRM. On the one hand, they argued for the democratic value of involving people in environmental management processes and decisions that affect them. On the other hand, they could not see how such approaches could be achieved if those who are supposed to be involved have interests that are contrary to the agency's. Participatory approaches were then seen as time and resource consuming compared to their more traditional working methods, something that is rarely questioned and therefore can continue to be the normative practice in the organization. Objectivity, expertise and neutrality are all concepts which are closely attached to science, bureaucracy and to masculinity (see for example, Harding 1991; Potter 2006). In our cases the administrators seem to be reproducing these norms in the routine actions and interactions of their practice. This reproduction of norms in turn renders alternative approaches, such as co-

management, less attractive. In a setting where expert knowledge is king, collaborative approaches are bound to have problems.

What are the implications of gender norms for the mission of the CABs to work collaboratively?

We argue that the norms of natural resource management at the CABs are based on prioritizing scientific knowledge and that bureaucratic management and attitudes are loaded with a certain type of masculine connotations. What are the implications when CABs are assigned to run projects explicitly promoting an alternative approach which is perceived to contrast with everyday practice? Based on how the CABs approached the Co-management project, we discuss this question from three angles; the status of the project in the CABs and the support it gained within the organization, on what grounds the project leaders were appointed and lastly if/how the experiences from the project have been utilized and incorporated in the CAB organizations to better meet the need of future collaborative projects. The results are compiled in Table 1 below.

What was the status of the Co-management project?

In two out of the five CABs (A and B) it appears that the Co-management project could easily be paired up and co-funded with resources from ongoing projects. Because the status of the ongoing activities was high, the status of the Co-management projects was also high and it was therefore supported by both the top management of the CABs and the involved municipalities. At the other three CABs, the status of the Co-management project was lower, the motives to join the project were more vague and there were no obvious connections to other activities. The

interview persons from these CABs mentioned that the external funding which was provided by SEPA for running the Co-management project gave them the opportunity to map out and develop management plans for biologically valuable areas. Another motivation was the possibility of improving the relationships between citizens and the CABs.

The project does not seem to have succeeded in involving middle managers at the CABs, other than in one case. All PLs, except the PL in CAB E, said that they did not feel supported by their closest managers. One PL (CAB D) said that the County Governor supported the project, but *“...it was not easy to get the management on board. I had wished for more support and understanding, not just that we needed to run the project because it provided funding. But, it is a new way of working. It takes time before people understand...”*

Another PL (CAB A) said: *“I am three levels down in the hierarchical system. At the same time I have a direct dialogue with the top management of the county. I risk getting into conflict with my closest superiors when I bypass them...”*

SEPA's ambitions to inform and invite the top management of the CABs to support the project seem to have had an impact, but the top management failed to create a supportive structure for the project at an operational level in their organizations. In only two of the CABs (A and B) the project seemed to have had adequate support, not because of the collaborative approach, but because it fitted well with other ongoing high status activities. As the collaborative approach is contrary to prevailing norms on how to establish management plans for coastal areas, the project seems to have been avoided by the operational staff at the CABs.

On what grounds were project leaders appointed?

Both the PLs and their unit managers justified the selection of PLs by referring to their formal training as biologists within the marine sector. In addition to the training in natural science, the interview persons spoke about personal characteristics being important such as being “*good at listening*”, “*empathetic*”, “*good at coordinating*” and “*more humble*” (characteristics often seen as feminine). In our material this is opposed to the way that the CAB administrators participating in the Skills development programme described their work as value neutral and objective. In line with Alvesson (1997), Lindgren (1999) and Ressler (1985) we argue that this carries connotations which can be interpreted as feminine and masculine norms revealing how competences are gendered in the CABs.

We cannot say for sure that there is causality between the appointments of PLs for these projects and that four out of five PLs were women. In recent years more women have been employed at the CABs and, being newly employed, they can more easily be moved between different projects. What we can say though is that in the only case (CAB C) where the project leader was a senior man, the reason behind the appointment was not his formal training as a natural scientist, according to his superior, but that: “... *he has experience of working in the area and is good at dealing with people*”. He was senior and had long service at the CAB, and he was also appointed a secretary (another senior man, also described as good at dealing with people in the archipelago). The secretary, the one still employed by the CAB, was described by his superior after the project was completed as a “*wise man, someone you go to for advice*”.

A complex picture emerges from our research, a picture which is also contradictory at times. Management of natural resources has a tradition of being based in natural science competence. This competence is based on an assumption

that: *“the routine planning characteristics of natural science, environmental problems are basically technical problems to be solved piecemeal using standard routines”* (Leskinen 1997:48). Even when recruiting project leaders for collaborative projects, such as the one looked at in this article, the main criterion for recruitment seems to be natural science training. The skills needed by a facilitator of complex processes are not considered skills achieved through training, but rather personal qualities, qualities that are assumed, according to our research, to mainly reside with women.

How has the experiences from the co-management project been utilized?

Only in one out of the five CABs (CAB A) there is a structure for supporting and sharing experiences of the collaborative process in the project. In CAB A, these types of approaches to environmental management are generally given relatively high status according to our interviews. The other CABs lacked a systematic way of making use of the experiences gained. For example, in CAB C an independent consultant was appointed project leader, something which made the integration of lessons learned difficult to administer. Some project leaders say that their experiences are useful in what they do today, but on an individual rather than organizational level.

The Co-management project provided an opportunity for the CABs to gain experiences and prepare for the implementation of collaborative approaches to environmental governance. Statements offered by focus group participants and interviewees indicate that they have not utilized this opportunity. This can be interpreted as the CABs showing no interest or responsibility for this new approach, but it can also be seen as a lack of knowledge about *how* to adopt it. It might be that the CABs lack a common understanding and vocabulary for describing the

competence needed to facilitate and lead complex, inclusive processes where conflicting interests need to collaborate. Since there is no vocabulary describing this competence it is not recognized and can therefore not be reproduced in the organization (Wenger 1998; Nicolini et al. 2003). Without a structure for learning from project experiences, and without language to express the skills needed to facilitate complex processes, there is a high risk that the next time it will be business as usual.

Conclusions

The aim of this article was to understand how different tasks and competences are gendered and valued within the CABs and what implications that might have for realizing collaborative environmental policies. The results show that collaborative approaches to environmental management are seen as something with less status than scientific, top-down approaches and expert solutions in the environmental organizations we studied. There is a danger that co-management and similar approaches to environmental governance will become women's tasks in the CABs because of the way the skills needed to facilitate participatory processes are feminized. The way the CABs appear to marginalize collaborative projects further reproduces normative structures and the view that these types of projects should be seen as exceptions to more traditional top-down management approaches valuing ideas of science and expertise. Based on the observation that it is mainly women leading these types of processes (regardless of the co-incidences that new appointees best suited to taking on these projects happen to be women, and that they are assumed to have the right, non-scientific skills), there is a risk of collaborative projects being labeled as women's tasks within the existing normative

structure. Since research shows that organizations structurally discriminate women and what is considered feminine in a particular setting (Wahl 1996) we argue that the feminization of participatory environmental management leads to that these approaches have less status and less influential power than do the traditional, masculine approaches in bureaucratic organizations.

Although the evidence drawn upon for this study is only derived from Swedish cases, the results are consistent with other studies indicating that dominating norms of organizations responsible for environmental administration obstruct the implementation of collaborative environmental policies (cf. Allan and Curtis 2005).

With this study we have shown the value of exploring environmental management through a gender theoretical perspective. We argue that a continuation and deepening of this research in the future can be an important key to understand more about obstacles and opportunities for changing norms and power structures in organizations responsible for implementing collaborative environmental policies.

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